

Anger (Part 2)

Explosive Anger and Depression

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In my last sermon, Anger (Part 1), we looked at the Apostle Paul's instruction on what to do about getting angry. We covered his first two main principles from Ephesians 4:26-27, 'Be angry and do not sin.' We also looked at righteous anger, and in contrast, that some people are past feeling.

We looked at the answers to the questions. Why do we get angry? How does anger grow? And, what are the wrong ways to deal with anger?

And, we looked at some basic, simple biblical solutions for this complex sin as well.

In this sermon, we will cover the last two main principles Paul gives, 'do not let the sun go down on your wrath,' and 'nor give place to the devil.' We will talk about the loss of control of the tongue; and that anger is a denial of God's way of life, and it is the absence of the fruit of the spirit, which is sown in peace.

I want to look at the problems of explosive anger and depression. No one wants to suffer the penalties of rampant, misdirected anger, but every human being must face this physical and spiritual killer. Unconcealed, explosive anger only tenses the atmosphere, polarizes the people involved, stifles any meaningful feedback, and leaves wounds that sometimes last a lifetime.

Also, everyone suffers from depression sometimes. But most people are unaware that depression, like anger, develops its own dynamic—primarily, because depression is often anger turned inward.

Finally, we will look at biblical strategies for handling anger.

I have an article that I would like to read to you. It was from the Humor Health News, by Humor MD, on September 10, 2008 titled, "Anger Bad, Laughter Good".

Do you think this is obvious? If so, then why do we tend to hold onto our anger? In a new study, anger of all types has been shown to be bad for our health. So, you know what we say. Laugh instead!

The adage that laughter is the best medicine has been backed by an unusual investigation which says that people who seethe with anger take longer to recover from injury.

Previous studies have linked ill-tempered behavior, whether brow-beating or road rage, with higher incidence of coronary heart disease, hypertension and stroke, especially among men.

But the new study, published on Wednesday in the British journal "Brain, Behaviour, Immunity," is the first controlled experiment that directly measures the impact of ire on the healing process.

Researchers at the University of Ohio inflicted minor burns on the forearms of 98 volunteers who were then monitored over eight days to see how quickly the skin repaired itself.

The subjects had each taken a battery of psychological tests beforehand to assess how easily and often they felt and expressed wrath, and were then ranked on an "anger scale."

Persons who took certain pharmaceutical drugs, smoked cigarettes or drank excessive quantities of caffeine-laden coffee were excluded, along with individuals who were extremely over- or under-weight.

The results were startlingly clear: Individuals who had trouble controlling expressions of anger were four times likelier to need more than four days for their wounds to heal, compared with counterparts who could master their anger.

I just wanted to give you that physical benefit to not being angry, and show that God has designed into the body certain things that can really do damage to us if we do not control them.

The number of health related symptoms that angry people create in themselves is really quite serious. The primary external manifestations can be: a reddening of the skin, bloodshot whites of eyes, bulging veins and more.

The primary internal manifestations are much more profound. Your blood immediately clots a whole lot quicker, and the muscles at the outlet of the stomach squeeze down so tightly that nothing leaves.

The entire digestive tract becomes spastic, triggering severe abdominal pains. The heart rate goes up noticeably, the coronary arteries squeeze down hard enough to produce angina or even a fatal coronary.

So once again, we find that the 3,000 year old instruction from God's inspired written word holds true.

Psalm 37:8 Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret—it only causes harm.

Proverbs 14:29 He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, but he who is impulsive exalts folly.

No one wants to suffer the penalties of rampant, misdirected anger, but every human being must face this physical and spiritual killer. Our bodies suffer loss in uncontrolled anger, but so do innocent bystanders who receive the emotional spill over.

The wisdom of Scripture warns us about the hateful words of an ungodly man who does not cover another's sin. This also refers to the sting of vengeful gossip and blackballing.

Proverbs 16:27 An ungodly man digs up evil, and it is on his lips like a burning fire.

The expression of anger is seen in the biblical image of fire. Both humans and God can "burn with anger." Anger might flare up like a flame, be stirred up like a fire or smolder. Anger's similarity to fire is seen in its spontaneity, in the difficulty to contain it and in its destructive power.

Explosive anger is common in the world today. This uncontrolled outburst can come from any number of steady barrages of negative or threatening life experiences: teachers blow up at their students, parents get exasperated at their children, and husbands get upset with their wives and vice versa.

The wrong type of anger blocks sound thinking when it comes to finding the causes of friction and applying sound solutions. Anger is 'the easy way out,' the cheap, characterless way, the way that intimidates and bullies, but does not courageously and intelligently tackle the real problems. Basically, it is generally a lack of self control.

Unconcealed, explosive anger only tenses the atmosphere, polarizes the people involved, and leaves wounds that sometimes last a lifetime.

Ecclesiastes 9:17 Words of the wise, spoken quietly, should be heard rather than the shout of a ruler of fools.

Anger never really makes us feel better—either physically or spiritually. Physically, the over-stimulation of the blood stream produces toxins that course through the body, leaving the whole organism enervated and agitated. Worse, the problem still remains—it has not gone away.

Let us look at a case history of explosive anger. Explosive anger is usually short-term, extremely passionate and often deadly in its effects. People who indulge in this type of anger pay a price.

Proverbs 5:22 His own iniquities entrap the wicked man, and he is caught in the cords of his sin.

King Nebuchadnezzar of ancient Babylon was a classic exploder—he was like a bulldozer with a vengeance.

Daniel 3:19-22 Then Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury, and the expression on his face changed toward Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. He spoke and commanded that they heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated. And he commanded certain mighty men of valor who were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, and cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their coats, their trousers, their turbans, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Therefore, because the king's command was urgent, and the furnace exceedingly hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego.

You know how the story goes, they were protected by God, and not even their clothes smelled of smoke.

Nebuchadnezzar was a king who threw temper tantrums. Destructive, uncontrolled, unbridled anger is not indulged without a price, and he paid for it dearly. The mighty

men of valor were part of Nebuchadnezzar's general staff, and they were soldiers of proven worth and loyalty to the king, but they were killed in that fire. But who is safe before rampant rage? Not even the ones you love and admire. With a king with rage and ultimate power that Nebuchadnezzar had, nothing good can come of it, only utter destruction. Sadly, we are probably going to be seeing a ruler like this, or multiple rulers in the world, in our lifetime.

Some of our fights and conflicts are exacerbated by harsh words that stir up anger. When harsh words are spoken, everyone gets upset and nothing is solved. But God promises in Proverbs 15:1, "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."

Gentleness will often disarm furious people, where there is not confusion; one angry word will always cause another, because the temper of one spirit always causes its reflection in another: therefore, kindness produces kindness, and rage produces rage.

How does anger relate to depression? Everyone in human society suffers from depression sometimes. Usually we are unaware that depression, like anger, develops its own self-motivation, because depression is often anger turned inward.

There are times when we would like to vent our frustrations on someone, but often we do not dare. Instead, we fume inwardly—harboring the hostile, aggressive feelings deep down inside our human spirit.

The result is that the resentments and envying that we do not want to let slip out (especially against authority figures who can retaliate), are negative acidic emotions that eat away at us inside. Eventually they cause us to disintegrate from within. Emotional spite, unrepented of, eats away at us deep inside. The damage is of a physiological nature, a mental and spiritual one.

Christ lists some of the elements of anger and depression in His description of what defiles a person:

Matthew 15:18-20 But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.

These are the true sources of pollution in man. These are what corrupt and degrade. It is not the neglect of washing the body that defiles, but the deep, inward corruption of the heart.

James 4:4 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?

Anger is at the root of almost all depression; it can be visible or invisible, it can be conscious or unconscious. Concealed anger and resentment often rise to our consciousness as baffling waves of negativism, as depression.

Eventually, the depression becomes such a virulent force that it is diagnosed as the cause of the problem when, quite often, it is the effect. And this is not the happy, joyful way God intended for us to live. The depressed person is not usually aware of what is happening. Often it comes upon us gradually and builds up.

Jeremiah expressed the true nature of the heart this way:

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?

Even the closest friends of the one suffering from concealed anger usually cannot spot it. Judas Iscariot, while seething with bitterness at Christ's style of ministry, was not suspected by the other disciples of such internal anger.

John 13:26-30 Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it." And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, "What you do, do quickly." But no one at the table knew for what reason He said this to him. For some thought, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus had said to him, "Buy those things we need for the feast," or that he should give something to the poor. Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night.

Here, we see the worst thing that can happen to someone with internal concealed anger—being possessed by Satan. Though Satan had earlier put the desire to betray

Christ into Judas's heart, Satan himself then entered into Judas, giving the devil a more dominant influence in Judas' actions that followed—the betrayal of and disloyalty against Christ. This is a major danger of allowing ourselves to become angry, because we open a window for Satan to enter in.

Let us look at a case history of depressive anger:

King Ahab of ancient Israel never did grow up emotionally. Notice his reaction when his neighbor would not accept Ahab's real estate offer —

I Kings 21:4-5 So Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers." And he lay down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no food. But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said to him, "Why is your spirit so sullen that you eat no food?"

This is a classic disappointment, dejection and depression stemming from frustration. But frustration is often 'thwarted self-will.' Ahab was so emotionally immature that he had no control over his self-will to the point that it destroyed his appetite.

We have all known people like that—people who sulk in anger at not getting their own way. They turn their anger inward; depression sets in, then misery and paralysis result. The more Ahab wallowed in self-pity, the more deeply embedded the anger and resentment became. It distorted his reasoning process until he was putty in devious Jezebel's hands.

I Kings 21:6-14 He said to her, "Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite, and said to him, 'Give me your vineyard for money; or else, if it pleases you, I will give you another vineyard for it.' And he answered, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'" Then Jezebel his wife said to him, "You now exercise authority over Israel! Arise, eat food, and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." And she wrote letters in Ahab's name, sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters to the elders and the nobles who were dwelling in the city with Naboth. She wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth with high honor among the people; and seat two men, scoundrels, before him to bear witness against him, saying, "You have blasphemed God and the king." Then take him out, and stone him, that he may die. So the men of his city, the elders and nobles

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who were inhabitants of his city, did as Jezebel had sent to them, as it was written in the letters which she had sent to them. They proclaimed a feast, and seated Naboth with high honor among the people. And two men, scoundrels, came in and sat before him; and the scoundrels witnessed against him, against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, "Naboth has blasphemed God and the king!" Then they took him outside the city and stoned him with stones, so that he died. Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, "Naboth has been stoned and is dead."

See how anger and depression are linked? They are virulent raging forces in their own right.

God has a way of putting this principle succinctly:

Proverbs 16:32 He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

Contrary to the many who would say that it is good to vent one's anger, Proverbs advocates being slow to anger. Only a forceful person who has great discipline is strong enough to take a city; that is the kind of personal strength that is capable of controlling one's anger. It takes a great deal of energy, strength and courage to overcome anger.

Ahab was a sniveling weak man who, driven with anger, cold-bloodedly murdered his neighbor. God was so angry He pronounced a curse on the dynasty.

I Kings 21:20-24 So Ahab said to Elijah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" And he answered, "I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the LORD: 'Behold, I will bring calamity on you. I will take away your posterity, and will cut off from Ahab every male in Israel, both bond and free. I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, because of the provocation with which you have provoked Me to anger, and made Israel sin.' "And concerning Jezebel the LORD also spoke, saying, 'The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.' "The dogs shall eat whoever belongs to Ahab and dies in the city, and the birds of the air shall eat whoever dies in the field."

Obviously God did not appreciate Ahab and Jezebel's anger, reaction to anger, and solution.

The way for us to overcome anger is to train ourselves, with God's help, to see the benefits in quickly forgiving offenses. We do not need to get involved in complicated "solutions" that solve nothing. We need to nip anger in the bud before it becomes offensive or out of control.

Instead, we have to be more willing to forgive offenses than the other person. We should try to soften the rhetoric and keep it unemotional. Follow Christ's advice of agreeing with the adversary quickly.

Matthew 5:25-26 Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there till you have paid the last penny.

The importance of reconciliation is illustrated here by the example of the person who is about to be judged in court. Not to be reconciled will have disastrous consequences on a human level, but much more so if we are not reconciled to God.

This is an illustration of the sixth commandment. To be hostile, to go to law, is a violation, on one side or the other, of the law requiring us to love our neighbor. Christ regards it as a violation of the sixth commandment (speaking of going to the courts against a brother in Christ).

While we are going to the court, before the trial has taken place, it is our duty, if possible, to come to an agreement. It is wrong to carry the contention to a court of law. The consequence of not being reconciled is expressed here in the language of courts.

We are told in principle here that those who harbor such angry feelings cannot be reconciled with their brethren.

To be reconciled as the result of being agreeable goes a long way in reducing conflict. It does a great deal to diffuse the spirit of murder that fumes and becomes bitter inside. So many of our conflicts are unintentional or accidental; and if we believe that people are lying awake at night trying to make our life difficult, then we definitely have problems, because people just are not doing that!

In most cases it just is not true; life is usually much less complicated than that. We have to learn to enjoy beneficial and healing discussions with a close friend once in awhile. Irritations or frustrations can be talked out in a non-threatening environment. The Bible encourages this kind of friendship.

Proverbs 17:17 A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.

Proverbs 18:24 A man who has friends must himself be friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

A wise man once said, "A friend is someone who knows all about you—but likes you anyway."

One great advantage of a happy marriage is the emotional release from unburdening oneself of frustrations. What a great blessing. Each spouse can act as trusted confidant, consoler and stabilizer.

At this point in the sermon, I want to continue with the last two main principles that form the whole doctrine of anger that the Apostle Paul emphasized in —

Ephesians 4:26-27 Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.

The first and second main principles were: Be angry, and do not sin. The third is—Do not let the sun go down on your wrath.

This third main principle answers this question—if this is the way that we are to deal with a false, sinful anger and wrath, when are we to do this?

'Do not let the sun go down on your wrath!'

Do not go to sleep with a bitter, hateful, angry thought in your heart. Do not let these things settle in long-term. If you have had some terrible provocation during the day and you really have felt a righteous anger and indignation, do not let it settle there to become bitter, malignant hatred.

Remember what Jesus Christ said in the Sermon on the Mount about 'having something

against someone else.' He is talking about a man going to the temple to take his offering to God. But He says, 'If you find yourself even at the very altar and suddenly you remember that a brother of yours has something against you'—then what?

Matthew 5:23-24 Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

That is a very strong reprimand. Think about that! Here you are, you are actually in the temple, you have actually approached the altar, you are going to put your gift on the altar, but you suddenly remember that there is something wrong in your life! Leave your gift there! Go away, settle it with your brother, and put matters right with him first. 'First be reconciled to your brother, and then,' and only then, are you fit to 'come and offer your gift' to God.

What is the practical application for today?

'Be reconciled' means to settle the difficulty—to solve the problem. We have to properly acknowledge or satisfy the injury to the wronged person. If we have wronged someone, we have to restore our relationship with him.

If we owe him a debt, we should pay him back. If we have injured his character, we have to admit it and ask for forgiveness from him. If he is under an erroneous impression, if our conduct leads him to suspect that we have injured him, we should explain. We have to do everything we can, and all we should do, to settle the matter. Probably the hardest part of dealing with anger is facing the person that we have wronged or that has considered or thought that we have wronged them.

There are specific lessons that we can learn from this:

1. In order to worship God acceptably, we must do justice to others.
2. Our worship will not be acceptable unless we do all we can to live peaceably with others.
3. It is our responsibility to reconcile with others when we have injured them.
4. We have to reconcile before we attempt to worship God.

5. Contention is often the reason why God does not accept our offerings, and we go away empty from our prayers. When we do not treat others the way we should, and we have negative attitudes or refuse to correct conflict, then our prayers seem ineffective.

So we must hate sin, always; hate sin in the sinner, always; but never hate the sinner. Both sides of the truth are absolutely essential. Sin must never be condoned. Sin must never be excused. Sin must always be condemned.

Today, there are people who are sinners who do not like to be called that! They want to receive grace, love, mercy and compassion. But the sinner should believe that he deserves all he is getting and infinitely more.

He should never defend himself; he should feel indignation against himself. He should be angry with himself. Sin should rouse a holy anger in us, every time it occurs, and in every form. But the sinner is to be forgiven; the sinner is to be loved. The sinner is to be helped to forsake his sin and to rise up.

This is the balance of Scripture: hatred of sin, but never hatred of the sinner; anger, but never in a sinful way.

We have to make sure that we do not put our head down on our pillow to rest and sleep for the night with any spirit of bitterness or hatred or lack of forgiveness in our heart or mind. Do not let the sun go down on your wrath.

We may struggle with ourselves, but we cannot allow ourselves to go to bed until we have settled it. We may have to realize that we have the love of God in Christ in us. We have to have a clear picture of Christ bleeding and dying on the stake so that we might be forgiven; and we have to meditate on it until Christ has softened our heart and broken us down and made us sorry for the one who has offended us, and until we forgive freely. We have to think about what we have received in the way of forgiveness, and that helps us along the way to forgiving others.

Then, go to bed and sleep the peaceful sleep of the just and the righteous; you will have acted in your life as God Himself has acted with respect to you. Do not let the sun go down on your wrath.

Rampant anger is a destructive force in its own right, regardless of the trigger, that can lead to tragedy. The Bible is very clear on that:

Cain lost control and in berserk, jealous rage at his brother became the first murderer (Genesis 4:1-8).

Moses lost the chance to enter the promised land for indulging in one temper outburst too many (Numbers 20:1-12).

David, a man after God's heart, got carried away in unbridled anger at times (II Samuel 8:1-2). It cost him the blessing of building the Temple (I Chronicles 22:8).

James and John were rebuked by Christ for a vindictive, hard-hearted attitude toward a despised group of people.

Luke 9:51-56 Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did? But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." And they went to another village.

James and John changed greatly later on, notice what John wrote later in his First Epistle.

I John 4:20-21 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

Moses, David, James and John had to overcome their natural tendency toward the wrong kind of anger, just as most, if not all of the other patriarchs and apostles have had to do.

Now let us move on to the fourth, and last main principle that forms the whole doctrine of anger that the Apostle Paul emphasized in Ephesians:

Ephesians 4:26-27 Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.

The first, second and third main principles were: Be angry, do not sin, and do not let the sun go down on your wrath.

Now, the Fourth is—'Nor give place to the Devil.' This is dealing with the loss of control of the tongue.

In the pages of the Scriptures, human anger is usually depicted as a loss of self-control that results in evil behavior. How are we to deal with this sinful anger, this sinful tendency to lose control of ourselves, and succumb to the wrong type of anger?

Along the line of the perverse mouth God hates, we find this fact of life:

Proverbs 21:23 Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles.

The first thing we are to do is to guard our mouth and tongue; that means self-control begins before anger has actually flared up. We must train our mouths not to speak whatever comes to mind, but to think things through. We should consider the end result of what we are about to say. We should be guided by the principle: 'When in doubt, do not say it.'

We are to believe and act on what Paul wrote. He reminds us that such loss of control over ourselves belongs to the old man, the old life, and we are to put that off.

Loss of control of the mouth and tongue always gives Satan his greatest opportunity. We must always guard against opening the door to the devil. When we lose our temper we open it wide; it probably could not be open any wider than when we are angry.

Anger opens the door wider than anything, because the moment we are controlled by our temper we are no longer able to reason, we are no longer able to think, we can no longer give a balanced judgment, because we are altogether biased on one side and against the other side. There is no way that we can think in a righteous way at that point.

In other words, the power to reason and to think and to equate and to evaluate—all that

makes people human—is gone; for the time being he is like a beast, the creature of his own passion and of an instinctive kind of power. And, of course, that is just the situation that Satan can capitalize on as his open door opportunity!

It was when Satan persuaded Adam and Eve to be angry against God that he very easily had them in the palm of his hand. He aroused in them bitterness and enmity against God, and made them believe that God was against them; and so immediately Satan could do as he liked in their minds.

Is there anything that leads to more trouble than anger?

Things said in anger, and in a bitter moment, make us feel like cutting our tongue out, if we could take back the manifestation of the anger. And sometimes, though forgiven, these expressions of anger leave permanent wounds and scars. Great havoc is produced in the world by sinful anger! We see it on a daily basis, in the form of wars, conflicts and racism, and many other forms.

James 1:26 If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless.

James 3:2-10 For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

A sinful anger leads to the nursing of grievances, and to a desire for revenge; it leads us to despise people and to treat them with contempt.

Sinful anger! The moment it has taken over, Satan tries to take over. He will keep it

going and insinuate thoughts and ideas and implant them. The whole of life can be ruined just because of anger.

Anger is always a cause of confusion. It not only causes confusion personally in the life of the individual, but also in the lives of all those who are involved in living with such an individual. It may be that nothing so constantly gives Satan an opportunity as much as loss of control in anger. I know that there are times in a family where there is anger between a husband and a wife, parents and children, but we must control these things, because it destroys peace, and peace must be maintained in the family if the fruit of the spirit is to be produced.

James 3:14-16 But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

Bitter envy or bitter jealousy and self-seeking or selfish ambition are the antithesis of true wisdom as characterized by "meekness" in verse 13.

They are also far different from the righteous character of a jealous God, who appropriately desires His own honor and the loyal devotion of his people, while the envious wrongly desire what does not belong to them.

"Self-seeking" is a divisive willingness to split the group in order to achieve personal power and prestige. The same original word for self-seeking is translated "rivalry" in Galatians 5:20, as a work of the flesh.

James 3:17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

"Peaceable" is the polar opposite of "self-seeking" and the discord that it produces. The legacy of those who bring peace rather than conflict is a harvest of righteousness. The fruit that comes from peacemaking in the Christian community will be the righteous conduct that God will bless, but this is not produced by anger.

Verse 15, tells us that what seems "wise" to the person with selfish ambition is in reality

demonic. Satan identifies with an angry spirit. If we become bitter, he can begin to manipulate us and stir up our anger. When he does, God's love cannot grow in us, and the fruit of the Spirit is impeded.

Anger is at the core of Satan's personality. He became angry millions of years ago when he felt he was so beautiful and talented that God should use him more. But it was not Satan's time to be promoted. So he became angry with God. His anger led to an outburst of hostility and rebellion in which he tried to overthrow the throne of God.

Satan tries to pump anger into our minds because he wants us to think like he does. With anger as a catalyst, Satan takes the opportunity to try to destroy God's character in us. Satan's obsession is to try to make us become less like God and more like him. He is there ready and willing to jump on the job.

Ephesians 4:29-31 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.

When the sun goes down on our anger, and we are filled with hostility and bad attitudes, we are grieving—that is, blocking and impeding—the work of the Spirit of God. This means we simply cannot grow spiritually in an angry state of mind.

God will not allow an angry mind to be placed within a glorified spiritual body in His coming Kingdom.

Matthew 5:21-22 You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.

Let us move on to another attitude. Vindictiveness, or the wrath that the Apostle Paul condemns, is a denial of the whole of God's way of life.

If we become vindictive, if we get this settled wrath, if we have a desire for vengeance in

us, we are denying the whole foundation of God's inspired written word. God forgives us in spite of what we are. We have been called to be Christians entirely and solely by the grace of God. It is all due to God's mercy. We all have to extend mercy to others, because we have received more mercy than we could ever show to others.

We have been given this opportunity in spite of our rebellious human nature, in spite of our being hateful and hating one another, in spite of our being ungrateful. God sent His own Son, and He took our sins upon Him. He died for us while we were still sinners, while we were enemies.

Our salvation is all because of the free grace of God. We can claim we love God, but if we are in a condition of settled wrath against another person, how can we reconcile it with being a Christian?

Remember the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant?

A servant owed a great sum of money to his master who was about to put him in prison; but the servant begged for mercy and his master had mercy—sadly the servant asked for something he himself was not willing to give.

Matthew 18:21-35 Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow

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servant, just as I had pity on you?' And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

If we cannot forgive our brother, we are not forgiven ourselves. We cannot get away with playing fast and furious with God's moral universe.

As Christians we have the Holy Spirit, and the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Therefore, to be unforgiving, in a rage, and out of control, shows an absence of the fruit of the Spirit.

Also, believers are members of the same body of Christ, and we need one another, and we are interdependent upon one another. Therefore, if we think about harming our brother, we are harming a part of ourselves, a part of our own life, and of the body to which we belong. We are one body, and any harm from any one of us harms the whole body.

The Apostle Paul tells us that the new man (created in righteousness and true holiness) is created in the image of God. Since we are truly created in the image of God, we must do to others what God has done to us. 'Put off the old man. Put on the new man.'

Sinful wrath and the seeking of vengeance is a usurpation of God's right of judgment.

Romans 12:19-21 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Therefore If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

So anger and wrath are called no less than evil. Leave the judgment up to God, is the principle here.

Rather than destructively lashing out, it would be far better for us all to learn the biblical strategies for handling anger. These are very practical principles that work!

The first principle, ask God to rebuke Satan and your wrong thoughts. If possible, drop to your knees the moment you see resentment, bitterness and anger welling up.

II Corinthians 10:3-5 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,

The second principle, keep the big picture of human experience in mind. Ask yourself. Will this really matter years from now in God's kingdom? Suppose your adversary died, and you still had a grudge on your conscience. How would you feel then? Anger is like taking poison and waiting for the other person to die.

The third principle, try sincerely to see the other person's point of view. What is he thinking? What is his perspective? Does he really understand where you are coming from, and is he offended by something that you have said? Put yourself in the other person's shoes, try to understand from his perspective.

The fourth principle, sow peace. Be a peacemaker.

Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

The fifth principle, seek wise counsel. Realize that anger is extremely non-productive. See it as a sheer waste of time. Anger is a distraction and clouds the mind. Satan is the author of anger, he is the epitome of anger, and he is the author of confusion. From anger comes confusion.

The sixth principle, stay calm and realize that God sees all. Meditate on Psalm 73.

Psalm 73:1-28 Truly God is good to Israel, To such as are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; My steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the boastful, When I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pangs in their death, But their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, Nor are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride serves as their necklace; Violence covers them like a garment. Their eyes bulge with abundance; They have more than heart could wish. They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; They speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, And their tongue walks through the earth. Therefore his people return here, And waters of a full cup are drained by

them. And they say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?" Behold, these are the ungodly, Who are always at ease; They increase in riches. Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, And washed my hands in innocence. For all day long I have been plagued, And chastened every morning. If I had said, "I will speak thus," Behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children. When I thought how to understand this, It was too painful for me—Until I went into the sanctuary of God; Then I understood their end. Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. Oh, how they are brought to desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awakes, So, Lord, when You awake, You shall despise their image. Thus my heart was grieved, And I was vexed in my mind. I was so foolish and ignorant; I was like a beast before You. Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel, And afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish; You have destroyed all those who desert You for harlotry. But it is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, That I may declare all Your works.

So there we see the deep contrast between the worldly person with anger, and the true Christian who is trying to overcome his own problems. We know that God is there to help us to overcome our problems of anger if they should be stirred up, or any other problem that we may have. It is such a very encouraging psalm. We have no reason to get angry at people in the world who do things against us because as we see there their day of judgment will come.

The seventh principle, pray for your adversary putting the problem in God's hands. At least then the problem will come up for review before the God of justice, and this will soften your approach. Your spiritual energies will be invested wisely and that can revitalize the relationship.

Matthew 5:43-44 You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

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Since God loves both the offender and the offended, His Holy Spirit gives us a more objective view of our persecutor or our adversary.

With God's help we can master anger. And what a blessing if we do. Life is too short to let anger distract us from the abundant life God wants us to have! Let us try the best that we can, with the help of God, to overcome that anger, and to have the right anger toward those things that are happening in the world, the sins in the world. We must detest it, not just be dull minded toward it, but to be righteously angry toward it. When it comes to our relationship with other individuals, whether in the church, or out of the church, we have to control that anger that so often flares up, and often on the spur of the moment.