

An Alternative to Sinful Anger

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James 1:19-21

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[19] Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; [20] for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. [21] Therefore, put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. (James 1:19–21)

Introduction

- Here in these verses, inspired by the Holy Spirit, James addresses a temptation that is common to man. No person is exempt from it. The temptation is to become sinfully angry when things in our lives don't go the way that we would like them to go.

Anger: “active displeasure toward something that’s important enough to care about....It’s the way we react when something we think important is not the way it is supposed to be.” - David Powlison

- Powlison’s definition gives room not only for sinful anger, but righteous anger as well.
- God’s anger is not like human anger. God is never out of control. He never emotes. He never flies into a “Fit of rage.” Furthermore, God’s anger is mingled with compassionate mercy such that it moved Him to send His Son into this world to die on the Cross, in our place, for our sins.
- In keeping with God’s own character, Powlison defines righteous anger as “the constructive displeasure of mercy.”
- So the righteously angry person, like God Himself sees evil, sees sin, sees injustice ...is displeased with what he or she sees...and in response to the displeasure he or she feels, that person moves towards the problem and the other person constructively and mercifully.
- Question: When you feel displeased with others or your situation--- do you always, in every case respond constructively and mercifully? OR do you at times respond in ways that fall somewhere along the unrighteous anger spectrum: Mild-irritation on one end.... and punching a hole in the wall, or worse on the other.
- >More often than we might like to admit, our anger is not like God’s.
- It is not entirely holy. It is not completely righteous. Instead, it is mixed with sin and in some cases, it is entirely sinful.
- This passage is a Word from God to you and to me to help us not walk down the path of sinful anger, but instead to walk a different path, a better path--a wise, a far more peaceable and God-glorifying path.

Summary of Text

- In verse 19, James exhorts his fellow Jewish believers scattered throughout the Roman Empire in this way: “Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.”
- This exhortation is connected to the theme James introduced in verse 5 of wisdom.
- Throughout this book, godly speech is directly tied to walking in accordance with the wisdom “that is from above (3:17).”
- In James, the wise man or woman is one who is able, by the grace of God, to tame the tongue. And the one who tames the tongue is considered wise.
- Verse 19 is similar to certain Proverbs.

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

Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly. -- Proverbs 14:29

A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention. -- Proverbs 15:18

- James was concerned that his first readers and all Christians, respond to whatever tempting circumstances they face and whatever difficult people they encounter-- not rashly, not with unrighteous anger, not foolishly, but wisely.
- One key reason he calls us to do this, is that vs.20, anger “does not produce the righteousness of God.”
- Sinful anger fails to produce good fruit. It just tends to provoke ungodly, sinful responses in other people.
- In verse 21 James goes on to lay out the divinely prescribed alternative to unrighteous anger.
- He says “don’t yield to unrighteous, anger, but rather... he says “put away” or lay aside (as the NASB has it)...lay aside all filthiness...lay aside “all that remains of wickedness”.
- James is saying, in essence-- “the alternative to yielding to emotions of anger that well up within you, that rise up within you, the alternative to folly is to put your sinful anger...and all sin...all that is filthy...all that is dirty and wicked...he says, “put it away.”
- Furthermore (verse 21), he says -- “receive with meekness, with humility, the implanted Word which is able to save your souls.”
- The word that has already been implanted in us is the word of the gospel.
- Instead of yielding to sinful anger, James tells us, we must put off anger and all sin AND receive with meekness, with humility the gospel.

Three Recommendations:

1. Seek daily to not tolerate sinful anger in your life
2. Seek daily to forsake all sin
3. Seek daily, to receive the Word of the Gospel again and again

Questions for Discussion/Application:

- Re-read the text, James 1:19-21. What initial insights and observations do you have from reading this passage?
- David Powlison, from his study of scripture, defines anger as “*active displeasure toward something that’s important enough to care about....It’s the way we react when something we think important is not the way it is supposed to be.*” What kinds of responses to difficult situations and people qualify as sinful anger?
- How is sinful anger different from righteous anger?
- How can "preaching the gospel to ourselves daily" help us to be less prone to sinful anger?
- In what ways can you personally be tempted towards anger?
- Consider taking time to pray, asking God to help us as group to grow in not yielding to sinful anger, and instead walking the pathway of wisdom set out for us in this passage.