

James 1:19-27; Eph. 4:25-32 Understanding Anger I. Restraining Anger II. Releasing Anger III. Righteous Anger

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, today I had planned on preaching on the joy of worship and the delight we have in gathering as a congregation at church again. However, seeing the conflict and chaos around us it become necessary to change gears and focus on understanding the anger that is so pervasive in our communities. Understanding that anger grows in the soil of fear and perceived injustice helps us grasp why these riots and lootings continued throughout this past week. Every parent has seen this in their children- the temper tantrum that comes after a desire is not met. So today we are going to seek to understand anger as Jesus teaches us to respond to our own anger appropriately.

### **I. Restraining Anger**

In our first point we find that Jesus teaches us to restrain anger- to limit its growth and slow its spread.

As we read in James 1:19- be slow to anger. Being slow to anger literally means that your anger must be kept in proportion- its presence must be tested to see if it is proper and right. If you will become angry, make sure that your anger arises only in the correct way. Anger makes small things seem big! Anger puts things out of perspective! As we will see in our third point, there is a time and a place for righteous indignation and godly anger. However, in our first point we need to acknowledge that by the very nature of becoming angry, we tend to fly off the handle. The red flare of wrath tends to rise too fast- as it consumed your thoughts and dictates your words and actions. It is easy to become angry- to vent that anger- to become red hot with fury. So Jesus begins by saying- when you sense your anger is stirred- take a minute- slow down- reconsider- ponder for a moment. As I Cor. 13 says, love is not easily angered. So be slow- be long in patience and refrain from the easy fury. Don't jump quickly into conflict and combat mode. Do not engage in angry outburst- and do not give vent to every emotion that springs up within. Anger must be restrained- put in its proper place. Viewed as a dangerous substance- highly explosive. So we must learn to restrain our anger- like putting a leash on a wild dog- to keep your children safe! Or like

locking up your flammable and poisonous liquids- to avoid explosions and to keep others safe! Restrain it! Now this is completely contrary to what our society tells us. Psychologists tell us to vent our anger- let it out! Blow off some steam! Let your arrows fly! And as we see in our cities- those who are angry get right in the face of those with whom they are angry- to vent, shout and scream. Looting and riots is a prime example of the outworking of anger! But do not become easily angry- do not let this ramped up wickedness rule your heart. Or as Prov. 14:29 puts it, whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly. Now where does anger start? It starts in the heart as Jesus said in Mt. 5- when hatred lives in your heart you are actually committing murder. And from the heart springs forth these destructive words. Before actions comes angry speech. It is instructive that both of our readings- both James 1 and Eph. 4- focus on the tongue! That in the context of anger, both passages look at your speech! Words display the heart! So James 1:19 says- be slow to speak and slow to anger. Many Christians are quick- not only in speech- but in angry speech! The internet has opened a whole new avenue for our crooked tongues to play the fool! We let our fingers do the talking- and the poison of vipers fills the computer screens. We speak- and we type- in a fit of rage! How many words don't we see? Words that are harsh, racist, instigating and unkind! James says that these angry outbursts are no better than riots! In fact, we could call them riots of the tongue! Setting the world on fire just like the fires that burn down buildings. Rather, we need to bridle our tongue as James 1:26 says. Put a guard on your lips- a muzzle over your mouth. Why? Because these flare up- these fits of rage and outburst of anger- these do not produce righteousness as 1:20 says. A person ruled by anger- a tongue set free to spew sparks- does not do or perform righteously. You are not acting Christ like- their lives are not a reflection of God's law! It is the first step that leads to unjust actions and wicked behavior- destructive speech is only once removed from destructive actions. Quick, flare up anger is not right- they are not just- nor is their presence justifiable! It is unjust- contrary to God's truth- contrary to your nature as a forgiven child of God.

## II. Releasing Anger

Now that we see the need to restrain our anger- like putting a bit in the mouth of a rebellious horse- or putting a wild dog on a leash, in our next point we find the command to release anger. Not to release it by venting or blowing our top- not by getting our wrath off our chest- but rather we release it by forgiving! We must be quick to forgive- let go of it before the sun goes down as Eph. 4:26 says. When you are angry- do not let it become entrenched and further sinful. Rather seek to release it as soon as possible- before the sun sets- before the next day begins. Holding onto anger destroys relationships. The slow simmer and cool heat of irritation is just as bad as the outburst! The quiet, cold shoulder of scorn- is just as destructive as the flash of red-hot rage. Holding onto anger destroys the fabric of society, the church and the home. It severs the members of the body from one another. So seek to remove this burden- breaking down this wall of anger. Speak in truth and seek peace as v. 25 says. Forgive, because you have been forgiven. As Eph. 4:32 puts it, forgive one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Instead of holding on to this anger, forgive! Not only must we forgive for the sake of our relationships- we must forgive because we have been forgiven! Remember the parable told in Mt. 18 of the unforgiving servant? One who is forgiven much must forgive others- or else their own forgiveness is in danger! Failure to forgive proves that you do not understand the gospel. God had every right to be angry with us- to hold on to His wrath against us- and yet He chose to forgive us! To put His anger aside so that He might embrace us and bring us near. Being forgiven- we must and we will forgive. We must be willing to release- refusing to hold onto this anger. Our reading from Eph. 5 gives us another reason why we must release this anger- because holding on to anger gives the Evil One power over us. Why must we release this anger- because anger gives the Devil a foothold- as Eph. 4:27 puts it- give no opportunity to the devil. Anger opens our mind to a host of other sins- like hatred and envy- and anger clouds our judgement so we do something we would not normally do. Violent and wrathful people have murder in their hearts- and the devil is a murderer from the beginning! Unresolved anger festers- it pollutes- it is root sin- and it

opens the door to a host of others sins that the devil might tempt us with. The word “opportunity” here is a place or room given to the devil- a foothold. Like a beachhead during a war. As the old saying goes, if the camel gets its nose in the tent, the rest will soon follow. The devil uses anger to rouse us and lead us into greater sin. But forgiveness snuffs out anger- and the devil cannot get a hold on us when we let the offense go. The longer you hold on to your anger, the harder it is to forgive! Transformation is possible, because we have been forgiven! Peace is possible, because we are at peace with God! The Holy Spirit is living within us- transforming us! As Christians, we look at this world and injustice differently! Anger is rooted in fear and pain- it is fear and pain that motivates these riots that we see. But as Christians, we do not live in fear. We are not afraid of the things of this world- or what can happen to us in this world. Rather, we seek to love our enemies and we pray for those who persecute us. We leave room for the vengeance of God- knowing He will repay! God is just- and for that reason we can let go of our anger! Remember what happened to Esau and Cain- these men were overcome by anger and they gave the Devil a foothold in their lives- and they both missed out on the covenant blessings. Both men fell into grave sin because of unrestrained and unaddressed anger. So let go of your anger, before it consumes you! Rip out the root of this weed, lest it grow and enslave you.

### **III. Righteous Anger**

At the end of our first point we briefly considered that anger does not display the righteousness of God. Filthy and wrathful speech is contrary to God’s Law- it is unrighteous in its very nature. There is no place for that kind of talking. However, there is such a thing a righteous anger. Eph. 4:26 says- be angry- and do not sin. So it is possible to be angry- and not to sin! So what is this thing that we call righteous anger? Righteous anger has to meet specific requirements. Righteous indignation is that anger that comes when God’s Word is transgressed, His Law broken, and His Name trampled upon. The desire of this righteous anger is to uphold the Holy name and Glory of God! This kind of anger is not vindictive, not petty, and does not seek revenge. Righteous anger sees how sin offends God and how sin hurts others. It is not a

sin against me and my rights- but against God's commands that raise this kind of anger! Sometimes it would be wrong to not be angry! Sometimes anger is the only appropriate response. A measured, controlled response to this iniquity is called for. Getting back to our current situation, should we be rightly angry when an unarmed person is choked to death? Leave aside all the other possibilities and explanations about this particular situation and George Floyd. Would it be proper for a Christian to be sad-even angry- if a fellow man was killed for a minor offense? Should racism make us angry- because God's Law tells us to not commit murder! Should the holocaust during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War cause the church to speak out- to denounce this as evil and work to address it? Yes- as Christians who know God's Law- we should speak out against crime and injustice- even hating the sins we see in society- hating abortion and the evil laws of man because they are contrary to God's Word! There is a necessary hatred for evil that is the only proper response. The trouble is, sometimes we have righteous anger but we display is unrighteousness. Or we are justified in our indignation- but it grows into something else! So although there are times where we must be angry, we must constantly guard our hearts so that this anger over the sin of others does not grow into a sin within us. Being angry with sin does not give us an excuse to go out and sin ourselves.

To conclude, understanding the place of anger helps us deal with it properly when it arrives. As you may know, in Psalm 7:11 we read that God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day! Every day, God is angry because of the sin and injustice which permeates our world. Even Jesus terrifies kings in His wrath. But thanks be to God, because of Jesus' sacrifice, God is not angry with us! Praise God that we now have peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ! So let us learn how to see anger properly- and confess when your anger becomes sin.