

“Cast Away by the Seven Deadly Sins: ANGER”
Proverbs 29:8-11; James 1:19-21

First of all, I would like to welcome all of our guests this morning. We’re so glad that you could come and worship with us! We are very proud of our Bidy Basketball players, as I’m sure you are. We want to celebrate them this morning – celebrate what they’ve learned and how they’ve grown. That includes athletic skills, but it also includes their character – we celebrate our champions of character this morning.

The pillars of character that we have learned about over the past few months – virtues like Respect, Caring, Fairness – are in stark contrast to the vices we’ve been looking at in our series on the 7 Deadly Sins. This morning, we’ll be examining Anger.

As our children grow in character, and as we seek to grow as well, we need to do whatever we can to guard ourselves from the kind of anger that leads to sin. When we’re young, the court or the ballfield is often one of those places where we see anger surface. Whether it’s a player who feels they’ve been denied, or a coach who is irate over a call, anger can quickly arise in a place that is meant for play, for enjoyment.

If you’ve been coming out to watch our little ones play, maybe you can recall an instance where one of them was not happy – over never getting the ball, or when another player knocked them down by accident? If we think a little harder, and go back to our childhood playing days, we may recall when we reacted in anger. But I’m guessing most of us would not have to go back very far to find an instant when we were angry – we get cut off while driving on the Interstate or the drive-through gets our order wrong for the third time ... and we don’t particularly feel affection toward the other person; rather frustration, maybe venting it with sighs, raised voices, and thoughts that are not so nice.

Now you may be the kind of person who wouldn't be bothered by such "little things" – you may have developed a good bit of patience over the years – wonderful – but the truth of the matter is, we are all susceptible to anger. It can come in an instant.

So what are we dealing with? What exactly is anger and why is it potentially deadly? Anger, in essence, is a certain expression of our energy – it's a natural human response to situations where we feel threatened or wounded. On a basic level, it's our body's defense system kicking in – "fight or flight." Anger is not sinful in and of itself – in fact, it's a God-given emotion. *The danger comes when the energy of anger is repressed or expressed in destructive ways.*

The Danger of Anger Repressed ... "I'm not angry" – source of pride. This kind of anger is pent-up energy, causing stress on the body. But what we have to realize is that energy is going to express itself one way or another.

That leads us to our Gilligan's Island Moment – the Scourge of the Skipper ... The Skipper is portrayed as a very likeable character, yet he is constantly angry over Gilligan's clumsiness, despite the fact that they're good friends. In one episode, Gilligan gets glue all over the castaways, and with one mishap after another, the scourge of the Skipper could only be repressed for so long ... until it erupted!

Have you ever experienced someone who just "erupted" in anger? Maybe that person was us? Paul challenges us in Ephesians 4:26 – *"In your anger, do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.* We're warned of the danger of letting our anger simmer all day – of keeping it in instead of letting it go – that even when the day is over, we choose to let it fester, rather than seek the freedom of honesty and forgiveness. Repressed anger will work on us until we are

stubborn and sick on the inside – and if left unaddressed, it will eventually explode, hurting not only ourselves, but others as well, often those whom we care about the most.

The Danger of Anger Expressed ... Our Proverbs passage says: *Fools give full vent to their rage, but the wise bring calm in the end (29:11)*. Usually, people don't plan on being destructive. But, unfortunately, we cannot deny what can and does happen in the wake of wrath – the physical or emotional abuse of others – one's spouse, even one's children ... friends, this should never happen! When anger expresses itself destructively in our lives, it reveals the deeper problem that our anger has taken control – and we need to take it back – through the power that the Spirit of God provides!

Our James passage tells us to be **Slow to Anger**. That sounds good, but how do we do that? We first need to determine the Source of our anger. We need to start viewing our anger as the secondary emotion, that we feel something else first before we get angry. The first emotion could be any number of things – fear, frustration, pressure, disrespect. Being slow to anger means taking the time to Assess Our Anger – “Why am I angry?”

Psalm 4:4 – *“In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your heart and be silent.”* “Search your heart.” We must not allow our anger to go unchecked. James describes this as the devil's foothold – “Leave you anger alone, let it express itself, don't challenge it.” But being slow to anger means we must challenge it – it means taking the time to withdraw for quiet contemplation – “What's at the root of my anger?”

We'll want to consider what outside forces are feeding into our anger. How much of this is the result of someone else's actions: What did they do that was so hurtful ... so disappointing ... that felt pressuring? This side of the scenario is always easier – what they did. But what we must also consider is how much of this anger is my own doing?

James calls us to examine ourselves – “Human anger does not produce the righteous life that God desires. Therefore, get rid of the evil that is so prevalent ...” (vs. 20-21).

Like we said earlier, anger in itself is not sinful. Consider the instances in the gospels when Jesus was angry. We seldom see him angry, but when he was, he had good reason to be – overturning the tables; the self-righteousness of the Pharisees – but in each instance, Jesus never sinned. We might hear someone describe their emotion as *righteous indignation*. And while this may be true, we must be careful, because it’s extremely hard to live out. If we looked closely at our anger – at the reason behind it, or how we display it – we’ll probably discover that, in most cases, we are not “righteous” in our outrage.

Let’s consider some instances where our anger would *not* be justified. 1) I’m angry because of *my pride* (proved wrong; reject constructive criticism). 2) I’m angry because of my own *misunderstanding* (don’t know the whole story; jump to conclusions). 3) I’m angry because of *unfair expectations* (I expect more from you, but the same doesn’t apply to me). One celebrity once said: “It would be great if people never got angry at someone for doing what they’ve done themselves!” It’s easy to get angry at someone for what they’ve done – we see it plain as day – but we often fail to see the same behavior in our own life. These are just a few examples of unjustifiable anger ...

Now let’s consider how we can use the energy of our anger in a different way. If we want to act on our anger constructively, we have to step back and recognize our own role in it – to confess what we did wrong. The other option is to just focus our frustration on the other party – to put all the blame on them – “You treat me this way, we’ll I’ll show you!” But if we want to avoid this kind of attitude, we have to make the intentional choice to go another route – to take that energy and place it somewhere positive – to take

it on as a challenge to use it for good. “Well that *sounds* great, Chris, but how do we actually make that happen?”

We must realize what we have available to us. James tells us that the devil can take a foothold to channel our anger – guess what, *God’s grace can take a foothold too!* Jam. 1:21 – *“Humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.”* The word of grace is what saved us in the first place! As those who now follow after Christ, there was a time when we were first given the invitation to follow – when we discovered what Jesus did for us – his suffering and sacrifice, his death and resurrection – all because of his love for us, all because of his grace. And that grace didn’t stop the day we trusted in Him. His word of grace has been planted in us – *planted* – to grow, to flourish, to be nurtured, so that we can live the life He created us to live – to use every emotion He has given us in positive & edifying ways that bless others and bring glory to God – including our anger!

Why does reflecting on God’s grace help us channel our anger? [P] Because it leads to a humble recognition that we’re getting better than we deserve. Our God has every reason to be angry with us; but instead He continues to lavish His love upon us. Consider the character of God described in Exodus 34:6 – *“The LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness; who keeps loving-kindness for thousands and forgives rebellion and sin.”* [P]

Our *children’s character*, and *our character*, should ultimately reflect *God’s character*. And God’s character is slow to anger. [P] What we see first is His grace. And the greatest expression of that grace was the sacrifice of His Son – Jesus’ atoning death on the cross. [P] Strangely, so many have found it hard to receive the gift of His grace. The Pharisees rejected his grace ... rigid, angry men who preferred the Law over Life.

But for those who had eyes to see, the grace offered in Christ brought freedom ... and continues to do so! [**Video**]

As those who have experienced the freedom of God's grace, we are to offer that grace to others. And we do that most effectively when we show that it is not a cheap grace. We have to be honest with ourselves and with others by acknowledging our own woundedness – be it the woundedness of our sin or the woundedness inflicted by another.

If we are to offer God's grace – if we are to channel our energy constructively and effectively, we need to trust God for the healing of our heart. Anger that leads to retaliation or revenge will never heal a wounded heart. Instead, we need to remember what Jesus did ... He suffered the anger of many – and redeemed it!

Now it's our turn to live out His love – with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. We need to take all our energy and channel it *toward Christ* – so that it can be *used for Christ!* This is even true of our anger – for constructive anger will drive us deeper into the arms of our Savior. This is what we should do with the energy of anger – go to the Lord with it: “I've been hurt – heal my heart. I am feeling pressured – let me know your strength. I've been let down – remind me of your faithfulness. I've been humiliated – lift me up and don't let go.”

We can't avoid our anger – that energy will be expressed in one way or another. So let us take it to God and let Him use it for good – to show the kindness of patience; to work for the good of others; to forgive. We can't avoid our anger, but we can avoid the kind that leads to sin. And we do that by *giving Christ the foothold* ... to work His redeeming grace in and through us. May God continue to build within us *His* character, so that we may be a people not of wrath, but of grace. Let us pray.