

“THE SIN OF ANGER”
Sinning Like a Christian #4
Esther 3:1-6, Psalm 137, John 2:13-17
September 25-26, 2021

“A man was driving home from his office somewhat earlier than usual. He stopped in a line of cars at a red traffic signal. A sign with large lettering designated the car in front of him as a ‘Driver Education’ vehicle. The traffic light changed to green but the ‘Drivers Ed’ car was slow in responding. It lurched forward a few feet, then stopped. Again it lurched, then stalled. The young woman driver appeared confused. The instructor, sitting next to her remained calm. But the man in the car behind became furious. He blasted the horn. He shook his head from side-to-side disapprovingly. His face revealed an attitude of scorn. His car window rolled down and he vocally registered his anger.

“What he didn’t realize was that the beleaguered driver in front of him was his own daughter, a high school senior. She, however recognized him clearly in her rear view mirror.

“Later, when she arrived home from school, she asked ‘Where’s Dad?’

“Is anything wrong?’ her mom replied.

“He seemed to be in a terrible rush earlier today.’ To which her mother replied, “Dad’s fine. He came home early, turned on the TV and fell asleep watching one of those silly ‘Game Shows.’”¹ His anger was spewed out, affecting the very one whom he stated that he loved, all for a stop light on a street corner!

Many of us might be able to relate to this account. And it’s not just at the stoplight, or on the road, but **Anger has gotten to be prevalent throughout our society today.** We have heard of many outbreaks of road rage, airport rage, grocery store rage, post office rage, and many other events of rage being spewed out, demonstrating powerfully this third sin of the Seven Deadly Sins – Anger. Much of the bad that happens today is directly related to Anger, when something ticks us off and we blow our cool.

C. Leslie Charles, author of *Why Is Everyone So Cranky?* Writes: “I’m describing a fuming,

¹ (James F. Colaianni, *Sunday Sermons Treasury of Illustrations*, [Pleasantville, NJ: Voicings Publications, 1982] pg. 17)

unrelenting, sense of anger, hostility, and alienation that simmers for months, even years, without relief. Eventually, all it takes is a triggering incident, usually minor, for the hostile person to go ballistic...”

Where might we be getting all this Anger from? Well, it's almost as if the media today gives us permission to lash out at each other, teaching those who watch that it's ok to become uncorked and unleash vehement vulgarity and blast anyone who trips your trigger for Anger. Movies, TV shows, news reports, and other programs feed out daily servings of aggression, disrespect, and vocalizations of Anger at someone or something. It's a breakdown of social conventions, of manners, and of social controls, starting at very young ages on into later adulthood. **And the uncontrolled nature of this anger fuels violence in so many places that we've gotten to believe that Anger is a natural part of being human.** We even hear a variety of people accommodating that behavior by saying “It's Ok to speak your mind.”

However, Proverbs 29:11 states it pretty well, “Stupid people express their anger openly, but sensible people are patient and hold it back.” **We are definitely at our worst when we are angry.** We tend not to think very clearly when influenced by Anger, so we can say and do the most horrible things to one another because we give ourselves permission to let Anger rule our hearts and lives.

We see that clearly in our lesson from the Old Testament book of Esther. When Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman as King Xerxes prime minister, Haman went ballistic. I'm sure there were more than words expressed at Mordecai at his staunch refusal to pay homage to Haman. With his position as second in the kingdom, Haman may have begun to abuse Mordecai before he hatched the plan to wipe him out.

But we have to see that there were other influences in action here, too. Pride filled Haman to the point that he expected royal treatment from everyone. And when Mordecai didn't obey the King's command to show respect and kneeling and bowing to him, well Haman lost it. It was all he could think about, and **so filled with Pride and Anger was he that he resorted to violence.** “...when he learned that Mordecai was a Jew, he decided to do more than punish Mordecai alone. He made plans to kill

every Jew in the whole Persian Empire” (Esther 3:5-6). It was the brain-child of the first holocaust.

“Haman told the king, ‘There is a certain race of people scattered all over your empire and found in every province. They observe customs that are not like those of any other people. Moreover, they do not obey the laws of the empire, so it is not in your best interests to tolerate them. If it please Your Majesty, issue a decree that they are to be put to death. If you do, I guarantee that I will be able to put 375 tons of silver into the royal treasury for the administration of the empire” (Esther 3:8-9).

Haman’s anger pushed the limit of relationship and leadership. But you have to remember that Haman was a descendant of Agag (3:1). Why is that significant? Agag was an Amalekite king, an enemy of Israel during the kingship of Saul, the first king of Israel. “Saul failed to destroy the Amalekites completely as God had ordered him to do, and consequently the kingdom was taken from him (I Samuel 15). The author [of Esther] may be informing the reader subtly that the ancient feud between the Amalekites and the Israelites has been inherited by Haman, a descendant of Agag, and Mordecai, a descendant of Saul.”²

Haman sought to totally destroy the people of Israel, just as Saul had tried to completely destroy the Amalekites, Haman’s ancestors. The tides had turned, and Haman used his position as prime minister of the Persian Empire to send out an extermination order against the Jews. His pent up anger turned against God’s people, seeking revenge, all because Mordecai would not bow or kneel before him.

When Anger consumes our hearts and souls, it becomes easy for us to retaliate against another, even ones that may not have anything to do with the hurt or pain we might have received. And so many people can become affected. Throughout history we see the affects that Anger has on people, often innocent bystanders, as individuals vent their anger.

But Anger, turned inward, produces depression. Psalm 137 tells of the people of Israel lamenting their going into exile at the hands of the Babylonians. They cried as they remembered their beautiful Zion. And egged on by their captors to “*Sing us a song about Zion*” (137:3), their depression

² (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Frank Gaebelin, editor, (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency/Zondervan, 1988) vol. 4, pg. 881)

grew deeper to the point that their Anger turned into the desire for retaliation. They cried out to the Lord, “*Babylon, you will be destroyed. Happy is the man who pays you back for what you have done to us – who takes your babies and smashes them against a rock*” (137:8-9).

The sin of Anger exposes the deep hurt and rage of the individual, but does very little to appease it. Anger wants to say or do something that will strike out at the other in an attempt to find peace and justice. However Anger never leads us to peace or justice. Rather, it gets the best of us, and usually it destroys those who harbor it within them. Bitterness comes from unresolved Anger, and that bitterness turns into rage, and that rage brings actions that most often harms those who are nearby.

Will Willimon states it this way: “Anger can be righteous indignation at injustice; on the other hand, Anger can be that blind rage in which we see nothing but ourselves, and our diminished sense of self, reacting with murderous rage. Anger is surely one of the most self-delusional and destructive, usually self-destructive and potentially violent, of the Seven [Deadly] Sins. Therefore we ought to be careful, very careful, in ascribing any positive significance to Anger. We must be cautions in urging anybody to ‘let it all out.’

“Maybe that’s why Scripture tells us, ‘Vengeance is mine,’ says the Lord, ‘I will repay’ (Deuteronomy 32:41, Romans 12:19). **Vengeance, one of the most popular motivations for indignation, righteous or otherwise, is not a gift that God gives to us.** Vengeance, the ultimate final righting of what’s wrong with the world, is God’s business, not ours. Because our Anger can be so self-deceptive and delusional, so very dangerous to ourselves and to others, the church has called Anger a sin, and a deadly one at that. We are to guard against it, fight it with all our might, repress it and stuff it in because, not being as wise or as loving as God, we are not to be trusted in our Anger.”³

But the argument might come that Jesus Christ got angry at those in the Temple. So if Jesus got angry, and it was not a sin, can’t we also get angry and not sin? First, listen to the account as it is found in John 2:13-17. (READ John 2:13-17).

³ (William Willimon, *Sinning Like a Christian*, [Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 20205] pg. 76)

There is a time when Anger is appropriate, but we must be careful. The situation in the Temple had turned away from the worship of God. The religious leaders had allowed it to become a marketplace. While they were trying to keep the Law of God for sacrifice and thanksgiving, it turned from focused on God to a profit making endeavor within the church.

The Jewish religion called upon the people to make a sacrifice of animals to atone for their sins. The animal became the vessel upon which the people were to lay their sins upon, and once killed, the sacrifice would pay for their sin. But it was not to be just any animal; it was to be a spotless, one-year-old lamb, of sheep or goats or of cattle. Realizing that not everyone could bring such a sacrifice to the altar because of their economic standing, pigeons could also be presented as a sacrifice. So in order to make sure that the animals were right for the people to sacrifice, the leaders of the temple began to provide animals to be purchased. And it turned into a business, where only the Temple animals could be used for the sacrifices for the people. This business quickly turned into a worthless racket, because the leaders of the Temple didn't want the money of all different regions, but only the money of the Temple.

So when the people came to Jerusalem to offer their sacrifices to the Lord, they could not use their own animals, but had to purchase the "temple approved" animals, AND they had to exchange the money from their country into the right denomination of coin. The exchange of one money for the temple coins was never fair, but was always in favor of those making the exchange. Do you begin to see what was taking place at the Temple of God when Jesus arrived into town? Instead of a place where one could worship God in peace with what they had, the people were forced to conform to the standards of the Temple, which was never fair, but always favored the treasuries of the Temple. Instead of a place of worship and praise and confession and prayer, the Temple had become a place of business, foul, corrupt and sinful.

This was not the intent of the Temple, so upon seeing the atrocities going on in the very place where they were to worship the Lord God Almighty, Jesus becomes angry with righteous indignation. *"Take them out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!"* He tells them. His anger

moved Him to clear the Temple of all of the filth that had accumulated there, much to the disapproval of the Jewish authorities. While they should have seen the condition themselves, if they were at all faithful to the Scriptures they espoused they would have, rather \$ signs were all that mattered to them at the time. No, they weren't using dollars, but you get the point. Jesus desired to bring them back into the worship of God, but the Temple authorities were Angry about the loss of income for the church. Their lucrative business was being challenged and disrupted.

In our own lives, there are times when we SHOULD become angry at what is happening around us. If we do not become angry, then something is wrong with us. What might that be that we could get angry about? **How about the meaningless killing of millions of unborn children?**

Abortion has become a multi-Billion dollar industry. The killing of our own children for the convenience of selfishness. The lives of children - who could become the scientists who find the cure for cancer, or statesmen bringing peace to the Middle East crisis, or musicians creating the next great worship songs, or farmers developing new varieties of fruits or vegetables that could feed the world, or great evangelists who take the Gospel to the whole world, or presidents who can bring order to the nations – the lives of children are just thrown away as worthless “blobs of cells,” and those who kill them make tremendous incomes in the meantime. HORRIBLE! This is the kind of injustice we should get angry about!

And what about the drug trade, or the pornography businesses, or the human trafficking ordeals that are going on right under our noses? These things destroy the lives of millions of people, yet we remain calm and passive. We SHOULD BE ANGRY about these things! This is not what God has desired of us, but what Satan is convincing us is good. It's gone beyond being right or wrong, but it's now all about the money that is involved. If we can exploit people and make a profit while doing it, NO! We need to stand up and get angry about this kind of destructiveness taking place all around us.

But rather we find ourselves getting angry because our football team got robbed of a victory at the game last night. We get angry because we don't have the luxurious homes of the rich and famous.

We get angry because the competing business down the road, or in the next community, is getting more of the share of the market than we are. We get angry because the person in front of us isn't moving fast enough from a stoplight than we want them to move. We get angry for the silliest things, and we stay calm and passive when the great atrocities affect millions of people. And meanwhile, millions suffer for our reluctance to get Angry.

But there is a time and a place to become Angry, and that is the key. Aristotle, one of the early Church Fathers, said, "Anybody can become angry, that is easy. But to be Angry with the right person, and to the right degree, and at the right time, and for the right purpose, and in the right way – that is not within everybody's power and is not easy."⁴

Indeed we need to be careful about our Anger.

But what is the remedy of Anger? How can we get beyond this self-destructive sin? Let me give you an example. Let's learn from a woman of Belfast, Northern Ireland, a hard-working, devout Christian who does much good among the poor of that troubled city.

She was a widow and had recently remarried. When asked by an acquaintance when her husband died, she replied, "He was murdered ten years ago."

"Murdered?"

"Right. I kissed him on the cheek as he left the house for work one morning, with our wee daughter at my knees. As he got into his car in front of our house, a car pulled up, two men emerged, and one show him five times in the face. The other show at me, trying to kill me, but my daughter and I jumped back in the house and the bullets only shattered the door. Then they sped off. Paramilitaries, they were, IRA. My husband was a superintendent of a local jail and he was considered a fair target."

"That's just horrible," the acquaintance said.

"It was horrible. They shot him up so bad, we were not able to let his dear mother see him before burial,' she said.

⁴ (James F. Colaianni, *Sunday Sermons Treasury of Illustrations*, pg. 17)

“How on earth were you able to go on?” the acquaintance asked in amazement.

“Well, that very moment, as I stood there over his horribly bloody body, I started saying the Lord’s Prayer. I got as far as ‘Forgive us our sins, as we forgive the sins of others...’ And I said at that point, ‘Lord, You have forgiven so many of my sins, so I guess You expect me to forgive others of their sins. I will try to do that, but You’ll have to help me every day not to be destroyed by Anger. Every day.’ And the Lord gave me that wonderful gift. I was able to forgive. I let God be angry with them, or punish them, or forgive them, or whatever the Lord chose to do with them. I chose to forgive. The gunmen killed one of the most wonderful men in the world, and none of them was ever convicted of the crime; but my anger was no match for God! God wouldn’t let the anger of it all kill me!”⁵

God is the One who judges us. It’s not our right to judge one another, but to forgive one another. You see, “*God has shown us how much He loves us – it was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us! By His sacrificial death we are now put right with God; how much more, then, will we be saved by Him from God’s anger! We were God’s enemies, but He made us His friends through the death of His Son. Now that we are God’s friends, how much more will we be saved by Christ’s life! But that is not all; we rejoice because of what God has done through our Lord Jesus Christ, who has now made us God’s friends*” (Romans 5:8-11).

God had the very opportunity to strike out against us in vengeance for the sins in our life, He magnificently forgave us. When in His Anger, God could have retaliated against us for the very things we have done to Him and to one another, to wipe us out off the face of the earth, instead He chose to forgive us, and provide for us a way to become reconciled with Him again. When He could have let this whole world destroy itself through Anger, He chose to provide us His peace as we turn to the cross of Jesus Christ. It was there that our sins were nailed; it was there that our sins were atoned, IF we are willing to turn to Jesus and claim Him as our Savior.

And if God can forgive us, even as we are, with all our Anger and Pride and Envy, then we,

⁵ (William Willimon, *Sinning Like a Christian*, pg. 76-77)

too, can in turn forgive one another, release our Anger and claim the peace of God, which passes all understanding. **We can let Anger hold us hostage, or we can break free from it through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.** But it's your choice. Let's pray.

Father God, there is so much Anger in each one of us, and we often let that Anger drive us to do and say horrible things. We are influenced so much by our world that tells us to just let it go, giving us permission to express our Anger toward one another. But that is not Your desire for us. You desire that we forgive one another, to reconcile with You and with our enemies, so that we might find Your peace. Help us to turn to Jesus Christ, the One who endured our Anger and bore our sins upon the Cross. Through Him we find newness of life, a life without Anger to destroy us or anyone else. Give us the courage to trust in Him, to lean upon His forgiveness, so that we might also forgive. This we pray in His most precious and holy Name, the name of Jesus. AMEN.