

Overcoming Anger
Pastor Joe Oakley - GFC – 6/11/23

We're in a series on James called Wisdom for Everyday Life. Today I am preaching part 2 of a message on anger called "Overcoming Anger."

Anger is a huge part of the American culture these days. There are levels of anger ranging from irritation and annoyance to rage. There's road rage, airplane rage, waiting in the grocery store line rage, rage at sporting events, workplace rage, homeplace rage. But we see in our text - which is the same as last week - James 1:19-20.

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

Last week I taught that anger is just a feeling, an emotion - it's not necessarily right or wrong. But, why you are angry and how you handle your anger determines if it is right or wrong.

If we are angry about the things that anger God - things like sin and injustice - that is the right kind of anger. In fact - we should have that kind of righteous anger. Many things going on in our world today should make us angry! But, in our anger we must not sin.

For example - Moses got angry several times with the children of Israel. It was righteous anger because of their sin and rebellion. But one time he acted unrighteously in his anger and that kept him out of the Promised Land. In our anger, we must not sin! Ephesians 4:26-27 says:

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

So - according to the Bible: It's possible to be angry and not sin. We can control how long we are angry. If we don't control our anger - it will give the devil a place in our lives.

The dictionary definition of anger is this: a strong emotion or feeling of annoyance, displeasure, or hostility resulting from real or perceived injury, mistreatment, or opposition.

There are many reasons for anger, which I'll talk about later. But if we are angry for wrong reasons - that's a different story. When is anger wrong?

1) When it leads to sin. Proverbs 29:22 says:

An angry man starts fights, and a hot-tempered one commits many sins.

2) When there is no justifiable cause - we're angry for no real reason.

3) When it becomes rage.

The Bible does not condemn the feeling of anger but it does condemn rage. Rage is what comes bursting out, often uncontrollably or violently. It is never right to scream, call names, cuss out, hit or hurt in anger!

4) Anger is also wrong when it becomes malice. Malice is an attitude of ill will – even hatred – towards a person, a desire to injure them in some way. Malice is a desire for revenge – to get even.

5) When there is bitterness and an unforgiving spirit; a determination to make them pay for what they did to you! Ephesians 4:31 says:

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

In this verse, the word angry means to be violently angry. It's dealing with the actions of anger – like rage, brawling, bitterness, and malice.

Those are wrong reasons to be angry and they always hurt others. There are also wrong ways to handle anger – even when the anger is justified. Proverbs 29:11 says:

A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.

Many times, we're just out of control, in the flesh. But it is possible to get angry and not get even, not get hateful, not get mean, not hold grudges, not attack back. It is possible to not "lose it." We cannot always control the feeling of anger – but with God's help – we can overcome "losing it" and control our response.

The NLT of Ephesians 4:26 says - *Don't sin by letting anger control you.*

Many people get out of control when they are angry. They usually try to justify themselves and excuse their anger.

Here are some common excuses people use for their anger:

"That's just the way I am – that's my personality – I just can't help it. I was born this way so I cannot control my anger."

Yes you can help it! You just have a pattern of fleshly response that has gone on for so long out of control that it seems like you have no choice. The truth is we were all born with a sinful nature. It cannot be controlled – it must be crucified. You must take your anger to the cross and die to yourself in this area.

"It's someone else's fault that I lost it. They made me mad! They pushed me over the edge. They made me lose it."

The truth is – people do things to cause feelings of anger in you – but you alone are responsible for your response. So, quit blaming others.

“I have every right to get upset when things don’t go my way.”
 Oh really, says who? Why argue for the right to be upset?
 This isn’t about our rights – it’s about doing what’s right!

Remember – anger is the feeling – you determine your response. There are two main wrong ways of handling anger – to blow up or clam up.

Those who blow up are obvious. They’re easy to spot because they’re the ones with the red face, the bulging veins and the loud mouth. This blow-up response is a habit some have developed in life. Some develop it as small children. They threw tantrums and learned that gave them the ability to have their own way, so they throw tantrums as adults to control others.

If it’s a learned habit – it can be unlearned. Just because you’re always responded like a 2-year-old does not mean you have to go through life responding like a 2-year-old. You can put away childish things and learn to respond like an adult.

The clammer-uppers can come across more righteous than those who blow up because they’re not outwardly losing it. And there are two types of clammer-uppers. One is deniers who believe if they ignore their anger it will go away. The other clammer-uppers acknowledge anger but try to suppress it – stuff it.

But clamming up is not healthier than blowing up. By clamming up we think we are neutralizing our feelings of anger, but actually we silently nurture it within and allow it to simmer on the back burner of our mind. If the anger is not brought out in the open and dealt with in a safe way, it will eventually be heard from. It will not be ignored.

By repressing anger, we think we bury it dead. Actually, we bury it alive. Sooner or later, it rises from its grave in another form. It’s usually not a pretty sight. You hold it in, hold it in, hold it in, then BAM! The volcano erupts. And suppressed anger usually comes out on a less threatening, unsuspecting person; usually that person is another family member.

Let me give show you how this works:

An employer has a bad day and takes it out on the closest worker. The employee feels the employer is wrong and anger rises up in him. But the employee is afraid of losing his job so he suppresses his anger and "stuffs" it down inside of him and goes home. The wife (unaware of what has happened) greets him at the door with a smile, but the man, still angry, only snarls at her.

The wife now has two options open to her. She can snarl back or she can "stuff it." She chooses to "stuff it." When the teenage son comes in, mom unloads her "stuffed anger" on him by finding something to yell about. The son in turn "stuffs it" until later when he unloads on his younger brother who unloads on his little sister who unloads by kicking the dog who unloads by biting the cat. And we wonder why cats are so neurotic!!

The effects of suppressed anger eventually flow out into our relationship with others. Suppressing anger is not the best way to deal with anger. When we are angry – we should not blow up or clam up – we need to learn how to properly express our anger.

There is a right way of expressing anger where it's under control and constructive, rather than out of control and destructive. Knowing when and how to express anger is important.

For instance – in the example I just gave – there is a time – when the boss had calmed down – to say – “You usually don’t overreact like this – is everything okay?” There may even come a time to say, “Please don’t take out your frustrations on me.”

The wife could ask her husband if he had a bad day and then let him sit down and unwind from the day’s work – realizing it’s not about her.

There are 3 things to remember in expressing anger:

1. Remember that out of control anger is always destructive.
2. Reflect before responding.

When you start to get angry, delay your response – take a time out. Stop and think before reacting. James 1:19-20 says:

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

The Bible tells us how to express anger – very slowly. So, listen before you open your mouth. Realize that your angry response is not going to bring about good results. So, give it up.

3. Restrain your remarks. Proverbs 21:23 says:

If you want to stay out of trouble, be careful what you say.

Talk about your feelings without accusing, blaming or attacking. Use sweet words because you may have to eat them.

Remember, if we don’t control our anger, it gives the devil an open door into our lives. Handling anger sinfully gives the devil ground in our lives. Handling anger righteously gives God ground in our lives. I want to give ground to God, not Satan. Where Satan takes ground, he destroys everything in his path. A simple argument can explode into something else.

In the spring of 1894, the Baltimore Orioles came to Boston to play the Boston

Braves in a routine baseball game. But what happened that day was anything but routine. Baltimore's John McGraw got into a fight with the Boston third baseman, Tommy Tucker in the 3rd inning. Within minutes all the players from both teams had joined in the brawl. The fight quickly spread to the grandstands.

Among the fans the conflict went from bad to worse. Someone set fire to the right field stands and the entire ballpark burned to the ground. Not only that, but the fire spread to adjacent blocks and eventually damaged or destroyed 170 other Boston buildings as well. It destroyed most of the part of Boston called lower Roxbury and became known as The Great Roxbury Fire of 1894.

That's the obvious type of destructive anger. When people blow up they destroy everything in their path. There are people who have destroyed their marriages – their families – their jobs – their lives – through uncontrolled anger.

But there's a less obvious type of destructive anger that those who clam up employ. It's there unseen but seething. You never know when it will flare up. It's like the infamous Hell's Oven fire.

In 1884 there was a bitter 5-month long strike between the miners and management in New Straitsville, Ohio. The miners were unable to talk management into meeting their demands, and it made them so angry they set the mine on fire. No one could have foreseen how big a fire they were setting.

The blaze started to burn under the ground in the thick, rich deposits of soft Ohio coal which ran for miles in all directions. The underground fires were so intense that people could draw hot water from their wells and make coffee without a stove. You could actually cook an egg on the sidewalk. Roads literally melted. Flames shot out of the ground like flaming geysers. The fire crept under the local high school, weakening the foundation so much that it had to be closed.

There were many attempts to put it out, but that fire is still burning beneath New Straitsville, Ohio – 140 years later! The New Straitsville coal fire is the longest-burning manmade fire in history. An estimated 200 square miles of underground mineral deposits have burned since the fire began in 1884. Millions of dollars of coal have gone up in smoke. Jobs were lost and a town was destroyed.

Such is the destructive force of anger. It gives place to the devil and he always destroys – it may be all in one day like the Great Roxbury fire, or it may be over years, like the Hell's Oven fire. Either way – it destroys.

So how do we overcome rage, malice, bitterness, unforgiveness? We get a clue in the first record of anger in the Bible. Genesis 4:2-7 records how Cain and Abel both gave offerings, but God accepted Abel's, but not Cain's.

So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you

not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.”

Cain did not listen to God, instead he killed his brother. He could have avoided destruction by hearing and obeying the Lord. God asked - Why are you angry? Why are you downcast? We must ask ourselves the same question.

We must get to the root of our anger. That root is not always what it seems. It could be much deeper. It's not always about what is happening at the moment.

You must ask yourself why you are angry – Here's the main reasons-
When someone uses or abuses you, that does result in anger.

Anger can also come from:

Generational sin passed down - Grief or Trauma - A spirit of anger or rage
Selfishness – We all have to deal with the flesh - the tendency to live for self. If we sow to the flesh, we will reap death, but if we sow to the spirit, we reap life.

One of the main ways selfishness manifests itself is the desire to control others – to get our own way. And one of the main ways people try to control others is through anger.

Many times a young child will learn they can control their parents through anger. They can pitch a fit in the middle of a store until they get their own way. Children who grow up getting their own way through anger end up as adults trying to control others through anger.

By the way – parents - if you are allowing your child to control you through anger, you will raise an angry, controlling adult. Please discipline them now or it will get very ugly later!

Controlling others can be through outbursts of rage that instill fear, but it can also be passive-aggressive anger that ignores others or refuses to meet the needs of others through procrastination or outright refusal.

So, anger can be caused by selfishness or a desire to control others. But anger can be a symptom of hurt – pain – or a fear of hurt or pain. Sometimes it is undealt with pain from the past we're unaware of. Overreaction usually results from old pain. If we have a lot of pain, anger is used to protect us from further pain.

So those are the main reasons for anger – selfishness, desire to control, self-protection, pain, grief, trauma, a spirit of anger, and Generational sin passed down. Once we must identify the root of our anger we must lay the ax to the root – be ruthless - cut it off. Hebrews 12:14-15 says:

Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

This verse implies that old undealt-with-hurts turn bitter and if the ax is not laid to the root – the anger will grow – will cause trouble and will hurt many others. If the root of our anger is selfishness – we lay the ax to the root by dying to self.

If the root of our anger is pain, grief, or trauma – we will not control it until the pain is healed. That takes prayer, counseling, healing.

If the root of anger is generational sin or a spirit of rage, we need to do spiritual warfare for deliverance.

If the root of our anger is control, we lay the ax to the root by repenting of manipulating people.

Laying the ax to the root of anger usually involves repentance. Repentance means a change of heart that leads to a change of mind that leads to a change of action. We never change until we see the need for change.

We need to come to grips with the results of sinful anger and see the need to give it up. We need to ask God for forgiveness and the power to overcome.

To overcome anger, we must replace the lies and misbeliefs we believe with the truth of God's word.

We must continually renew our minds with the truth of God's word. His truth will set us free.

Realize what anger is doing your relationships before it's too late. Cain waited too long.

Who have you killed with your anger? Nobody of course.

Well maybe not physically – but life and death are in the power of the tongue and we kill each other with our words.

We may get angry with people – annoyed, exasperated, or irritated.

But it's never right to rage, no matter what your age.

It's never right to scream, no matter how bad things seem.

It's never right to call names or cause shame!

It's never right to shout, pout or cuss people out!

Yet, it is possible to get angry and not get even.

I know it seems impossible – but all things are possible with God!

With God's help, it is possible to get angry and not get hateful or mean!

By God's grace, it is possible to get angry and not hold grudges.

With God's power, it is possible to get angry and not "lose it."

We cannot always control the feeling of anger, but with God's help we can overcome "losing it" and we can control our response in Jesus' name!