

In our previous studies we have been considering together what the Bible has to say about the subject of anger. We have seen that anger in and of itself is not sinful if it meets three criteria. Anger is not sinful if it has a right object, which is sin; if it has a right expression, that is one that is rational and controlled; and if it has a right resolution, one that uses biblical methods to resolve the cause of the anger. This kind of anger is not sinful. Now we saw that both God the Father and Jesus Christ expressed anger of this kind, and of course both of them are without sin. Indeed the Scripture itself commands us to have righteous anger in Ephesians 4:26 ***Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.*** Furthermore, to fail to be angry at sin is to fail to be like God. However, we considered together last time in our study on this subject that there is a sinful anger. In fact the vast majority of biblical references are to this kind of anger. Sinful anger has a wrong object, which is God. It has a wrong expression, either that of clamming up and internalizing anger or the blowing up of uncontrolled verbal or physical violence. It also has a wrong solution which violates biblical principle in its efforts to resolve the source of its anger.

Now today what we want to do then is to consider further what the Bible has to say about sinful anger. Having seen the definition of sinful anger, that it has a wrong object, a wrong expression, and a wrong resolution; today we want to consider together the cure for sinful anger.

Now any competent doctor knows full well that before a remedy for a disease can be prescribed the cause of the problem has to be identified and the seriousness of the problem has to be understood. If the cause of the problem is not properly understood, then of course a wrong remedy is going to be given. If the seriousness of the problem is not understood, then the patient will not bother to use the remedy. He will not see the danger, so he will not respond to the cure that is being offered. Thus when the cause of anger is understood and the seriousness of anger is understood, then the remedy of anger will be seen both as proper and as necessary. So the course that I propose to chart this

morning is that we consider together the cause of anger, the seriousness of anger, and then finally the cure for anger.

In the first place then this morning, let us consider together the cause of sinful anger. Now the cause of sinful anger is neither complex nor is it obscure. In fact it is so simple that it could be summarized in one word, and that word is pride. Time and again it is this characteristic of pride that is seen to be the cause of sinful anger. Now notice the association between pride and wrath in the scriptures: In Proverbs 21:24 it says ***Proud and haughty scorner is his name, who dealeth in proud wrath.*** So Pride and wrath are very intimately linked together in Proverbs 21:24. Furthermore in Jeremiah 48:29-30 God says ***We have heard the pride of Moab, (he is exceeding proud) his loftiness, and his arrogancy, and his pride, and the haughtiness of his heart. I know his wrath, saith the LORD; but it shall not be so; his lies shall not so effect it.*** In other words, when God looked at Moab as a nation and saw its pride, its arrogancy, and its haughtiness; he said, "I also see his wrath." Thus over and over again in the Scriptures we see this connection between pride and wrath that occurs again and again. You remember the story of Naaman the Assyrian who was struck with leprosy. His little servant girl who was a captured Israelite said to him, "Go to the land of my fathers. There is a prophet there, and he'll heal you of your leprosy." Thus Naaman the Assyrian went to Elisha the prophet and asked him if he would cure him of his leprosy. Now you have to remember that Naaman the Assyrian was a great man in his kingdom. He was accustomed to things being done with class and with due circumstance, pomp, and ceremony. When he came to Elisha, it says in II Kings 5: 10 that Elisha sent a messenger to him saying, ***Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.*** His reaction is recorded in the following verse: ***But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper.*** You see his rage and his anger were the result of his offended pride. "Go wash in the dirty Jordan river. Ha! That's beneath a man of my dignity. He should have come out and with due pomp and ceremony, and he should have

stood before me and put his hand over the place. That would have been a healing worthy of my status position and stature. But to go lower myself, descend off my chariot and go to the Jordan river..," he thought. No that was an offense to his pride. Now thankfully he had a recovery from his pride and his anger; and he went up the Jordan, washed himself, and was cleansed. It is obvious here that his anger was a result of his pride being offended about the fact that things did not happen the way he thought they ought to happen to a man in his situation and circumstance.

We see the same thing happening to Haman in the book of Esther. In Esther 3:5 it says, ***And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath.*** What King Ahasuerus had commanded with reference to Haman was that these people offer him worship. They were not only to bow down to him, they were to do him reverence. However, Mordecai being a Jew would only bow down to and do reverence to one being, and that was almighty God. For the first commandment says, "I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt have no other gods before me." And the second commandment gives reference to idols, "Thou shalt not bow down thyself nor worship them, for I am the Lord thy God." Mordecai could not obey God and the king at the same time, so he refused to offer and to extend this act of worship to Haman. It says, ***And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath.*** Once again we see that anger is a result of offended pride. "My station, my position, my sovereignty as second in the kingdom is not being duly acknowledged," thought Haman. You will remember the rest of the story, that Haman sought to put all the Jews to death; but God turned the tables on him, and he was hung on his own gallows.

Nebuchadnezzar provides us with our next example of this in Daniel 3:13-19. He set up this large golden image, which many think was an image of himself. He wanted a religion to unite his kingdom which revolved around the worship of himself. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would not bow down to worship the golden image, then it says that Nebuchadnezzar was full of fury. You remember that this fury caused

him to have them cast into the furnace, but the Lord Jesus Christ met with them there and delivered them from that. Thus Nebuchadnezzar's pride was involved because he as a king and had issued a decree that they did not obey, and they would not choose to worship a god which he had made.

Then we see in the New Testament this same connection between pride and wrath. Jesus is preaching in the synagogues of Israel in the town of Nazareth, and he says in Luke 4:25-28, ***But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian. And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath.*** Now why were these people so angry? Well the reason why is because the Lord Jesus was bringing out the fact that during these two times of crisis in Israel God made a point of ministering to the Gentiles. You see this widow of Sidon was not a Jew, she was a Gentile. And Naaman the Assyrian was not a Jew, he was a Gentile. Jesus is pointing out that during this time of Israel's history, because Israel was in rebellion against God, God did not minister to them. Instead, he ministered to the Gentiles as a precursor of what would happen to national Israel subsequent to the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. Israel as a nation would be rejected, and the Gospel would largely go out to the Gentiles. Well this offended Jewish national pride. "Ha, to think that God would minister to the gentiles more than the Jews," they thought. They were so angry at this offense to their pride of being God's special people that they were ready to do murder upon our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is just a sampling of passage, but they demonstrate time and again that pride is connected to wrath, provokes wrath, and is the source and origin of wrath. Pride is simply an inordinate self-esteem in which one thinks more highly of himself than he ought to think with the result that he views both God and his fellow man with contempt

and with indifference. You see, pride is simply a self-importance that arises out a sense of personal sovereignty, personal autonomy, and personal importance. The prideful person believes that everyone and everything is in place to serve him. He believes that their failure to do so is a crime against his rights; therefore, it arouses his wrath. You see the reason people get angry is because they think they deserve better treatment. They think they are special. They have this exalted view of self-importance, of sovereignty, and autonomy that believes that everyone and every thing is in place to please and serve them. When others do not please and serve them, then they get mad about it. Their prerogatives and their desires were not served properly, according to their expectations, by those around them.

This is the reason we said in a previous message that sinful anger is really anger against God. It is anger that God has exalted his sovereignty in such a way as to impinge upon our sovereignty. You see, there can only be one sovereign in the universe. Man exalts himself in pride to become sovereign, but God in his sovereignty thwarts that individual's desire. The thwarting of his desire fills him with wrath, and that wrath is directed towards the ones who deprived him of the desires that he was attempting to achieve. Thus when we are angry at people because they did not do what we wanted them to do, when we are angry at situations because our expectations were not fulfilled, when we are angry because we did not get our way, then that anger is really anger with God. God is in control of those people, and God is in control of those situations.

Thus the cause of sinful anger then is pride. It is the exalting of ourselves and our will against the sovereignty and will of God. If Haman would have realized that God alone is to be worshipped, then he would not have been angry at Mordecai for refusing to worship him. However Haman was really in competition with God for the worship of people, as was Nebuchadnezzar, as was Naaman the Assyrian, as were the Israelites who thought that they were better and more special than all others. When God chose to favor another people, they in essence were saying, "God you cannot do that. It's not right. We won't tolerate that. We'll throw anyone who says that might occur to his death off the

brow of the hill." You see, in every instance, it was a violation of man's sense of sovereignty and self-exaltation that provoked anger. It was a violation of man's sense of importance and perceived right to be served in a certain way by others that brought about the expression of wrath. This then is the cause of sinful anger.

In the second place this morning, we want to recognize not only the cause of sinful anger but also the seriousness of sinful anger. Now many people say, "Well, so what? Yes I blow my top from time to time, but what's the big deal? It's not so serious is it?" Well, in fact it is serious. It is a big deal. Sinful anger is incredibly destructive and evil. The sad thing is that the angry person is often the last one to see this. The seriousness of sinful anger is shown in its destructiveness. First of all it is destructive of our own reputation. Ecclesiastes 7:9 says, *Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.* Thus a person who is angry is a person who can be categorized as a fool. Proverbs 14:17 says, *He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly: and a man of wicked devices is hated.* Hasty anger is sinful anger, and sinful anger labels one in the eyes of others as someone who is very foolish. This is because, as we will see, it is understanding which causes a man to defer his anger. Those who lack understanding are those who capitulate to anger. Therefore, if we have any concern for our reputation in the eyes of others, if we have any concern for not being labeled by others as a fool, then we need to be people who are slow to wrath. We need to be people who rule our spirits because he that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a strong city.

Anger is not only destructive of reputation, but secondly it is destructive of relationships. The angry person is a miserable person with whom to live. Anger destroys marriages. It states in Proverbs 21:19, *It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman.* It could also read, "with a contentious and angry man." The gender is irrelevant. What is relevant is the fact that it is miserable to live with an angry person. It is better to live in the most difficult of conditions out in the wilderness than to live in the most pleasant of conditions with an angry person. It says in

Proverbs 27:3, *A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty; but a fool's wrath is heavier than them both.* I remember an incident when I was on a boy scout camp-out. (I don't know if I should tell this story. Now don't any of you children do this.) We had gone down this canyon, and we had to pack out all of our gear. Some of the guys got all the way to the top of the hill and opened their packs, and, lo and behold, what was in the bottom of their packs? -- Rocks. Someone had put rocks into the packs, and the guys had carried that heavy weight -- ten, fifteen, twenty pounds more than they needed to carry -- to the top of the hill. It was a weighty burden they had to carry. If you have ever carried a wheel barrow load of sand, you know how heavy and what a burden that weight is. Well a fool's wrath is a heavy burden to bear. When someone lives with an angry person, he labors under a load that is worse than carrying out a backpack full of rocks. Proverbs 27:4 says, *Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?* You see, to live with an outrageous and a cruel person who is constantly burdening down those in his household with his anger, that is a miserable state of affairs. Anger destroys marriages; it destroys children. Ephesians 6:4 says, *And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.* When we by our unjust behavior cause a just anger to rise up in our children, it causes alienation between parents and children and destroys that relationship. Wrath destroys friendships; no one wants to be around an angry person. It says in Proverbs 29:22 that angry people do not have friends because they are always full of argumentation and are always a source of transgression and sin in the relationship. The reason no one wants to be around an angry person is because he realizes that anger is really a manifestation of one who is an insipient murderer. Jesus says Matthew 5:21-22, *Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.* Why? -- Because, you see, it is anger that leads to murder just like the lustful look leads to adultery. Anger destroys relationships, and, if carried out to its ultimate extreme, it eventually results in

the destruction of the object of the anger. Is not this what Haman did to Mordecai, or at least what he tried to do? Is not this what the Jews tried to do to Jesus when they took him to the brow of the hill to cast him headlong? They wanted to kill him. Is not this what Nebuchadnezzar attempted to do to Shadrach Meshack, and Abednego when he tossed them into the fiery furnace? Anger leads to murder because sinful anger in its expression wants to destroy its object. This is why anger is such a serious thing because, if left unchecked, it can lead anyone, including me and you, to the sin of murder.

Anger is not only serious because it is destructive of reputation and of relationships, but thirdly it is destructive of service to God. If we ever hope to serve God, we cannot be angry people. The Bible says specifically that one who desires to be an elder must be one that is not soon angry. In James 1:19-20 it says, ***Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.*** In other words, if we desire to advance the cause of the kingdom of God, it will not be advanced through anger. It says in I Timothy 2:8, ***I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.*** We cannot enter into congregational prayer and lead the congregation in prayer if we are people who are in a state of unbelief, full of doubting about the promises of God, the goodness of God, and the willingness of God to answer prayer. Nor can we enter into prayer if we are angry people. If one has anger towards someone else in the congregation, it is not suitable for him to be leading that congregation in prayer. A man cannot wrestle with God and wrangle with his neighbor at the same time. You will remember Moses lost the opportunity to serve God in the promised land because of his wrath. In Psalm 106:32-33 we read, ***They angered him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes: Because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips.*** It was out of a provocation of spirit and anger that Moses struck the rock when God told him only to speak to it. As a result, he was not able to serve God in the promised land.

Finally, sinful anger is destructive of growth and of life. In Proverbs 19:19 it says, ***A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment: for if thou deliver him, yet thou must do it again.*** A person who does not resolve his problem of anger is constantly undergoing chastisement from God. Punishment it says here. He is a person who is constantly full of difficulty and problems, and he makes the same mistakes over and over again. If you deliver him, you have to keep on delivering him. As soon as you bail him out of one situation that his anger got him into, he sinks right back into another situation. Proverbs 25:28 states, ***He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.*** Now the reason cities had walls around them in the olden days was to protect the citizens from invading armies. A strong wall could resist all kinds of attacks. In the same way, we as Christians are under constant attack from the world, the flesh, and the devil; and it says specifically that if we have no rule over our own spirit, then we are like a city that is broken down and without walls. In other words, we are wide open to be attacked on every hand and are defenseless against attack if we cannot, do not, and will not rule our spirit. The ultimate conclusion of anger is that it is destructive of growth and life, as it says in Job 5:2, ***wrath killeth the foolish man.*** In other words, wrath is not only destructive of others, ultimately it is destructive of ourselves. How many times have we heard of angry people dying of ulcers, dying of heart attacks, or dying from doing something stupid in their anger -- in their anger they drove the car too fast, and, boom, into a tree. That's that.

Thus anger is not no big deal; it is serious. Anger is destructive of our reputation, it is destructive of our relationships in our homes and with our friends, it can lead us into the sin of murder, and it is destructive of our service to God. An angry person will never be able to do anything in the service of God. Anger is destructive of our growth and of our lives themselves. **Having understood the seriousness of the disease and the cause of the disease, thirdly and finally this morning, we will consider the remedy for sinful anger.**

Now having seen the cause and the seriousness, what is the remedy? Proverbs 14:29 says, ***He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly.*** In other words, the antidote to wrath is great understanding. The more one understands about God and about himself, the slower he will be to anger. Thus the measure of our temper is the measure of our wisdom. The less the temper the greater the wisdom; the greater the temper the less the wisdom. Where does anger rest? -- In the bosom of fools. (Ecclesiastes 7:9) It does not rest in the bosom of a wise man. Proverbs 19:11 says, ***The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression.*** Thus great understanding is connected to a person who is slow to wrath, and understanding causes a man to defer his anger.

Therefore, if we would conquer anger, there are some things we have to understand. One of which is: until we deal with our pride, we will never deal with our anger. Many people pray about their anger, they repent about their anger, they are grieved over their anger, but they see little success and progress in dealing with it. Why is this? Well the answer is because they have never struck at the root of their anger. It is like a maple tree. You can cut down a maple tree, but the stump just sprouts back. You can cut it down again and again, but it just sprouts back. Until you get in and chop up all the roots, it is going to keep coming. Likewise, we can attack our anger and can work at our anger; but until we get out and chop out the roots of pride in our lives, the anger is just going to keep sprouting back again and again.

Now there are some things we can do to deal with the issue of pride, and we must deal with our pride because, as we saw, pride is the cause of sinful anger. It is the exaltation of ourselves, the insistence upon personal sovereignty and autonomy from God, with a concomitant attitude that people and circumstances exist to serve us and our needs that lead us to become upset when things do not work out. The first thing we must understand then is that we must give up personal sovereignty and self-will. This notion that we have a right to certain outcomes and conditions in our lives is the cause of much of our sinful anger. James speaks of the proper disposition and attitude we should have

about personal sovereignty and self-will. James 4:13-16 says, ***Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.*** You see, James begins attacking the self-importance of man. He asks, "what is your life?" Is it something exalted and important and eternal? No, he says it is like the vapor that comes out of a steam kettle. Often I have watched something boiling on the stove, and I have seen the steam rising up and disappearing; and I think, "That's me." The recognition of that helps us to realize that we really do not have any importance, sovereignty, or self-will. James goes on to say, ***For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.*** He was addressing Christians that had this sense of personal sovereignty and self-will. "I'm going to do this; I'm going to do that. I'm going to achieve this; my goals and plans are all going to work out." (verse 13) He says, "Wait a minute. What you need to realize is that there is one Sovereign in the universe, and you need to make your plans and your will subject to him. He is the one that sits on the throne, and you are but a vapor. If He chooses to change your plans and to give you outcomes that you did not look for, then your attitude needs to be, 'not my will, but thine be done.'" You see, the solution to sinful anger is the giving up of self-will and the submission to the sovereign will of God. When we have given up our own will, then we are content with whatever God brings to pass. We have given up our own expectations and outcomes. Anger comes from rebellion against the sovereignty of God. It is an attitude that says, "I will not tolerate the way God in his providence is dealing with this situation." We must have instead the attitude of Job, who thought, "The Lord is in control of this; blessed be the name of the Lord. If the Lord brings this to pass, blessed be his name; and if he brings that to pass, blessed be his name." Job had sorrow, but he was delivered from anger because he recognized that God had the right to do with his life, his possessions, his family, and even his health whatever he pleased to do. Often people get angry at God because of the circumstances he has brought into their lives. However, God has power over the clay to do with all his vessels

what he pleases. He may choose to deliver a vessel, or he may choose to bring that vessel into distress. To be angry at God is to say to God, "My will be done, not thine."

We must not only give up personal sovereignty and self-will, we must secondly recognize that the worst treatment that we receive is better than we deserve. Now a man who sees himself as he truly is, not only as a creature of God but as a sinful creature of God, does not get angry because he does not have better. Instead, he is amazed that he has as much as he does. You see this is the attitude of Jacob in Genesis 32:10, ***I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands.*** He recognized that God had dealt well with him. He looked at God's dealings with him and said, "I didn't deserve this; I'm not worthy of this. I'm not worthy of the least of thy mercies." He is stating that he is not worthy of any of God's mercies. "God you have no reason to relieve me from my distresses, except that you are a gracious God," thought Jacob. Jacob recognized that what he and we all deserve is death and hell. Any treatment we receive that is better than death and hell is better than we deserve. It is a cause of thankfulness not a cause for anger. Maybe you have difficult financial situations, maybe you have a difficult marriage, maybe you have a difficult health situation. Maybe your difficulties are otherwise; but I want to say to you that whatever your difficulties are, they are not nearly as bad as what you and I deserve. We are all in the same boat together, and what we deserve is to be sent to hell for our sins. If God has graciously given his Son so that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life -- if we have that, Beloved, we are rich. We have more than we deserve, and we ought to be filled with joy, thanksgiving, and rejoicing. It does not matter how many of our other itty-bitty plans did not work out. Look, we have the great plan. We are going to heaven; we are going to be with God. Why do we get so upset about the little bumps in the road along the way? The smooth and wide road leads where? -- to hell. Broad is the way and wide is the gate that leads to destruction. Strait is the gait and narrow is the way that leads to life.

Thirdly, we must remind ourselves that we have treated God far worse than we are presently being treated. Whenever we become upset at our mistreatment, we need to ask ourselves this question: Who am I to get angry with other people for the way they treat me when I have treated God far worse than they have ever thought about treating us? Others' provocations of us should move us not to anger but to shame and confession at the remembrance of our provocations against God. For example, you husbands out there, suppose your wife does not treat you just right. Suppose she does not respond to you in just the way you would like. Ask your self this question: Have I as the bride of Jesus Christ responded just right to him every time? Am I not really reaping what I've sown and far less than what I've sown? When I think of how I've treated Christ, my unfaithfulnesses to him, my insensitivities to him, my indifferences to him, my neglect of him, and my lack of wrapping my life around him completely; how can I be upset with my wife who has not done perfectly by me. Likewise, when others start to provoke you to anger, think about the fact that God has a lot more reason to be angry with you than you do with them. Remember that God has been oh so patient, so merciful, and so slow to anger with you; how can you not be slow to anger with another?

Fourth, we must submit our judgment to God's judgment about what is best for us. Romans 8:28 says, ***And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*** If you are a Christian, you believe that this verse is true. Now if it is true, and we are angry about what God does in our lives; then what we are really saying is that our idea about what is good for us is better than God's idea about what is good for us. This gets us back once again to the issues of pride, autonomy, and rebellion against God's sovereignty. Whatever God in his sovereignty and wisdom deems to be good for us happens in our lives. When we get angry over it, then what we are declaring is that it is not good. We are saying to God, "God, you don't know what you're doing. Your promises aren't true, and you're not good." This is exactly what we are declaring when we get angry at God. Anger fades away if we can but believe by faith that this provoking circumstance or that provoking person is a tool in the hand of God to do us good. How can you be angry when God is

doing you good? If this provoking circumstance is not being used by him for your good, then Romans 8:28 is not true. If that is the case, you better just throw your Bible away and stop being a Christian. If the verse is true, then you need to give up your anger, believe in the promises of God, and act as though they are true.

This then is what we must do in order to cure our anger. The remedy for sinful anger is to gain understanding. Understand the four things that I have just outlined goes a long way toward quenching and putting away anger. You see, a person that understands these four points is slow to anger because it takes a long time to think through them. As he thinks through these things, then the anger is put off and put off and put off. In fact, it never does come because the consideration of these things quenches it and takes it all way. This is why it says, "Be not hasty to be angry because anger rests in the bosom of fools, and a wise man understands these things."

Well then may the Lord help us to repent of our sin of pride in order that we might conquer our sin of anger.