

Well, in our previous we began a study on what the Bible has to say about the subject of anger. We saw that anger, like all human emotions, is not evil in and of itself. Yet like all human emotions it can become sinful if it is improperly managed when it is provoked. Now we considered in our previous study that anger is not always sinful because God himself is said to be angry in certain circumstances. We saw that on certain occasions during his ministry here on earth the Lord Jesus Christ was angry. Therefore we concluded that there is a righteous anger, an anger that is not sinful. This righteous anger that God has is one that we are to have as well. If as Ephesians 5:1 says we are to be imitators of God, then this is an area in which we are to imitate him as well. We are to be angry when God is angry. We are to be angry at that which God is angry. Now this was clearly seen when we looked together at Ephesians 4:26 and there we saw that we are commanded to have and to exercise righteous anger. The passage is in the imperative mood and it says, ***Be ye angry.***

Thus we saw that we were commanded to have righteous anger but that we were to be careful to have no sinful element attach itself to and be mixed in with that righteous anger. If a sinful element does attach itself to that righteous anger, then it is to be forsaken and repented of as soon as possible. So we saw last time that righteous anger is first of all anger at sin. One man has said, "He that will be angry and not sin, let him be angry at nothing but sin." Thus we saw that righteous anger is anger at sin. Secondly we saw that righteous anger is controlled anger. It is not an irrational flare of emotions that is an impulsive reaction to an irritating situation that results in an angry outburst. It is rather an anger that is rational, that is deliberate, and that is controlled in its expression. Then thirdly we saw that righteous anger always works toward a solution of the problem according to biblical principles and in a rational fashion. Righteous anger moves us -- it is a very powerful motivating force -- to seek biblical solutions through biblical methods to the source of the anger, which is sin.

Having seen then last time what righteous anger is and how it manifests itself, today what we want to do is to consider together what sinful anger is and how we might avoid it. We considered the warning against it in our last study found in Ephesians 4:26, ***let not the sun go down upon your wrath.*** We saw that we are not to let the sun go down on the sinful dimension of our wrath. We must determine then what is the sinful dimension of our wrath and how we might avoid it. We'll start by considering a definition of anger, and then we'll consider the causes of anger.

So in the first place then let's consider the definition of sinful anger. Now just as righteous anger has three characteristics so sinful anger has three characteristics. First of all sinful anger has a wrong object. Secondly sinful anger has a wrong expression. Then thirdly sinful anger has a wrong solution. If one of these elements is present, then we are guilty of having sinful anger. We want then to consider together and examine each of these elements of sinful anger in turn.

The first element of sinful anger that we will discuss is that sinful anger has a wrong object. Now we saw last time that righteous anger has sin as its object, as we said,

"He that would be angry and not sin, let him be angry at nothing but sin." So it follows then that unrighteous or sinful anger has something other than sin as its object. Now the ultimate object of sinful anger is always God himself. Sometimes this is expressed very directly. It is popular to say in our day that it is permissible to be angry at God. In fact this concept has become so widely accepted and so widely promoted as some kind of a cure for working through problems that people almost take pride in saying, "You know I'm really angry with God about this or about that." Well this is an attitude and a behavior that is wicked and evil in the extreme. Anger with God is the most blatant of expressions of rebellion against him, and it comes under his severest censure. God asked Job in Job 40:8, ***wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?*** You see, this is what Job was doing. One of the things that he expressed was anger over the fact that all those calamities had come upon him, which he did not deserve. After all, he had done right and good; and when his friends accused him of doing wrong, he maintained that he did not do wrong. So Job came very near to and at times did accuse God of injustice for the way in which God was dealing with him. When God finally responded to Job in the final chapters, one of the questions he asked him was this: ***wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous?*** This is precisely what people are saying when they are angry at God. They are claiming that they are more just and more righteous than God is and that God has treated them unjustly in their situation. Therefore they are going to be angry with God, and they are going to condemn God because God has dealt with them in this fashion. Now this is the worst kind of blasphemy. To be angry at God is to accuse God of wrongdoing, it is to accuse him of injustice, and it is to declare him to be sinful in his conduct. No creature, much less any sinful creature, has the right to do that.

Now many people are not quite so bold as to declare themselves to be angry at God. They recognize the intrinsic impropriety of that. Nevertheless they are still angry with God, even though it is in a veiled form. For example, we often get very angry when things do not work out according to our plans. People will not do what we want them to do, and circumstances do not unfold the way we hoped they would unfold. Perhaps the job does not go the way we had hoped. Then we are unhappy because our goals and our desires were thwarted. What we are really demonstrating is that we are angry at God's providential management of the situations we are in. While we profess to be angry at our situations, what we are really angry at is God who is managing those situations according to his providence. We did not get what we wanted, God did not do things our way, he did not meet our desires; so we get upset. Perhaps we wanted to go camping but it rained. Perhaps we wanted to go to the store but the car broke down. Perhaps we wanted to get some sleep but the baby cried. Perhaps people are not acting the way that we wanted them to act; even though their actions are not necessarily sinful, they thwarted what we hoped to achieve. Whatever the causes may be, our anger at God's providential dealings with our lives is really anger toward God himself. It is asserting that God is too cruel or too weak or too dumb or too indifferent to know how to properly manage our situations. It is declaring that he is not managing our situations in wisdom and that he is not working all things together for our good. It insinuates that he does not know what he is doing; for if he really did know what he was doing, he would do things the way we wanted them done in order that they would turn out the way we wanted. Anger at God is claiming that

we know better than God how our lives and our circumstances should turn out. Thus anger at situations and anger at people are very often expressions of anger at God who controls those situations and those people. They are expressions of rebellion against God's management of our lives. This anger states that we will not tolerate the way that God and his providences are dealing with us.

Now it is important for us to recognize that God is not the author of sin, but God is the author of everything else; therefore to be angry at anything but sin is to be angry ultimately at God himself. Now we can be angry at sin while not being angry at God because God is not the author of sin. But we cannot be angry with anything else and not also at the same time, either directly or indirectly, have anger at God. Thus the nature of sinful anger is that which has a wrong object. Since everything that is of sin is not of God and everything that is not of sin is of God, the ultimate object of sinful anger is God. This is why we state, "He that would be angry and not sin, let him be angry at nothing but sin." If the source of our anger is not sin, we have no right to be angry because our anger is really toward God. So then sinful anger has a wrong object.

The second aspect of sinful anger is that it has a wrong expression. Now the expression of sinful anger may take two forms. First of all it may take the form of clamming up, this is the internalization of anger. Or it may take the second form of blowing up, this is the ventilation of anger. Both of these, clamming up and blowing up, are wrong.

Consider first of all then the response of clamming up. Now often when people are angry, they will withdraw into a hurt, sullen silence that pouts and attempts to punish the objects of their anger by cutting them off from communication. The inward thoughts say, "You made me mad, so I'm not going to talk to you. I'm just going to walk around in sullen, hurt silence." People with this attitude are people who are tense, irritable, and miserable to be around. They silently build up grudges, resentments, and bitterness towards others, and they will not communicate in such a way as to resolve their anger. So the anger just builds up inside. Now sometimes these people will try to justify this clamming up as being a biblical restraint of anger. "I don't want to explode, so I'm just going to internalize it," they say to themselves. But this is not a biblical restraint of anger because, when people clam up in the way that I have described, their intent is to hurt the objects of their anger by cutting them out of their lives and cutting them out of their communication. The expression of this says, "I'm angry with you; so I'm just going to cut you out of my life, and I'm not going to talk to you. I'm just going to ignore you and treat you like you don't exist." Therefore clamming up is not a biblical restraint of anger. Its intent is to hurt others by cutting them out of our lives and communication. It is also a form of response that is full of self-pity and self-justification. "I didn't get treated right, so I'm going to pout."

Now sometimes this clamming up is not obvious. People might continue to maintain a veneer of politeness and civility. They will talk, but nevertheless they are boiling inside. But this kind of clamming up will always and ultimately manifest itself in

this second aspect or way of responding wrongly to anger. That is it will ultimately and always lead to blowing up. Proverbs 26:23-26 speaks of those who internalize anger and clam up. It says, ***Burning lips and a wicked heart are like a potsherd covered with silver dross ...*** A potsherd covered with silver is an effort to hide what is really going on inside. ***He that hateth dissembleth (lies) with his lips, and layeth up deceit within him...*** meaning that he is not being honest with how he really feels inside. ***When he speaketh fair, believe him not: for there are seven abominations in his heart. Whose hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be shewed before the whole congregation.*** What the passage is saying is that those who clam up and internalize their anger, even though they may maintain a veneer of niceness on the outside, ultimately they will explode. It may take many months or many years. But we have all heard of situations where someone that was thought to be just a nice guy grabs his gun, goes down to the workplace, and shoots twenty people. Then everyone remarks that they would have never have thought he would have done such a thing. What had this person been doing? He had been internalizing anger until finally it exploded.

So a wrong expression of sinful anger is to clam up. It is also wrong to blow up. Now people who wrongly express anger this way do not make any pretense of closing their mouths or of internalizing their anger. These are people who yell, scream, stomp around, throw things, and resort to verbal and physical violence when they are angry. Now this pattern of behavior is also a means of striking out at the objects of their anger. In fact it is an effort to inflict injuries upon others, and often it is an expression of an inward desire to destroy them. This is the reason Jesus says in the sermon on the mount in 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.*** His point is that sinful anger expressed sinfully is an incipient form of murder. You see, the yelling, screaming, verbal and physical violence, stomping around and throwing things are really the first steps to killing the objects of anger. Now very few of us will actually carry it that far, but Jesus says that the intent of the heart is sin as much as the actual commission of the act itself. This is why anger and murder are so closely connected together in the Scripture. The one can inevitably and will inevitably lead to the other if it is not controlled and contained. In Genesis 49:5-7 Jacob has called his sons to announce his blessings and predictions upon them. In verse 5 he speaks about Simeon and Levi. He says, ***Simeon and Levi are brethren ... (notice) instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.*** This passage is of course referring to the slaughter that these two men committed against all the inhabitants of the city of Shechem. This is where the men of Shechem were after they had been circumcised as part of a covenant they entered into with Simeon and Levi. You remember that they went in and killed them all because they were angry over the defilement of their sister. Now what the men of Shechem did to their sister certainly was not right; but once Simeon and Levi had entered into a covenantal agreement with these

men, then for them to break that covenant by going in and slaughtering them was utterly wicked and sinful. Jacob condemns it in no uncertain terms, and he declares that the cause of this sin was uncontrolled anger. Thus he says *cursed be such anger*.

So both of these expressions, clamming up or blowing up are sinful expressions of anger. They are the ones that we commonly see. People will either cut themselves off from others by silence, or they will begin to use their tongues in an uncontrolled fashion to attack and destroy others.

Sinful anger not only has a wrong object and a wrong expression, but the third mark of sinful anger is that it pursues a wrong solution. One of the things that we said about righteous anger is that it seeks to address the cause of the anger, sin, in a calm and rational fashion through the application of biblical principles. One example is the process of Matthew 18:15-17 *Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican*. You see, that is a rational, controlled biblical response to sin that arises out of our anger and dissatisfaction with that sin.

However, sinful anger does not seek to address the cause of anger in a biblical fashion or to deal with it according to biblical principles. An individual who is guilty of sinful anger does not pause to ask when he was provoked, "Did he sin against me? Do I have a right to be angry in the first place?" (Look if someone has done something to make you angry but it is not sin, then you need to repent of your anger towards that person.) But you see, the person who is sinfully angry does not go through that process. He does not ask if it was sin that provoked him to anger or whether he has the right to be angry in the first place. If he does have the right to be angry because sin is present, he does not ask if he is expressing it in a controlled and rational fashion. The person with sinful anger does not pause to seek a biblical method for addressing the sin that was committed against him. He does not pause to seek the most God-honoring way to resolve the situation. Instead he attempts to resolve the situation by using sinful anger to try to scare and intimidate the other person into doing what he wants. By expressing anger toward others, the one with sinful anger exercises power over them. If they do not do what he wants, then he will try to force them through punishing them with his anger. By making them fear the sinful expression of his anger, his clamming up or his blowing up, he manipulates them into doing what he wants. He has no respect for the biblical principles he might trample in the process. Now the person who uses his anger to scare and intimidate others into doing what he wants may be able to get his way, but he does so at the cost of the destruction of relationships. Sinful anger may and often times does achieve a momentary victory. In other words, sinful anger elicits the desired response from others, but it leaves behind it a trail of destruction, fear, and wounded spirits.

And you know what else? Sinful anger never really fixes anything; it never really solves the causes of the anger in the first place. It merely makes the situation worse, which then provokes more anger, which makes the situation even worse, which provokes more anger until the relationship is totally destroyed. For instance, husbands, your wives do not do what you want so you become angry. What do you do? Instead of resolving the cause of your anger, you merely manipulate them with fear over your response. The underlying cause of their behavior is never addressed, therefore the behavior never changes. So guess what happens again and again and again? Thus sinful anger may win an occasional advantage, but it always, always loses the war. People who use sinful anger sinfully to try to achieve their goals only drive the accomplishment of those goals further away. Anger may give us a sense of power over others, a sense of superiority over others, and a degree of triumph over others for a brief period of time; but in the end we are despised by all, and we are rejected by all. We find ourselves utterly alone because no one wants to be around an angry person. The very power that we sought to exercise over people we lose.

Thus, sinful anger has at least one of these three elements. Now often it has all three, but it always has at least one of these three elements. You see, we can be righteously angry at sin but express it wrongly, or we can be righteously angry at sin and be expressing it properly but seek entirely unbiblical solutions. Thus sinful anger always has at least one of these elements. It will have a wrong object -- we will be angry at something other than sin. Or it will have a wrong expression -- we will either clam up or blow up instead of dealing in a controlled, rational fashion by means of biblical communication. Or it will have a wrong solution -- we will attack and manipulate people instead of attacking and resolving problems.

Any time you become angry, I would exhort you to examine yourself in these three areas of questions:

1. Why am I angry? Am I angry at sin, or am I really behind everything else angry at God because he did not work things out or cause people to do what I really wanted?
2. How am I expressing this anger? Am I clamming up or blowing up, or am I expressing it in a controlled, rational fashion, using biblical communication? (Now this does not mean that we cannot be agitated. We can be very agitated and yet still control our tongues and communicate in an honest, fair, straight-forward fashion.)
3. How am I resolving my anger? If the source of my anger is sin, then am I addressing the sin biblically and trying to resolve it? (If the object of your anger is really God, then you resolve it by developing an attitude of submission, learning, and contentment towards the providential dealings of God in your life.)

This then is how we begin to analyze and to manage our anger. May the Lord help us to adequately and properly assess our anger, to see where it is right and where it is wrong, and to manage it for the glory of God and the blessing of his people.

