

THE WEEDS OF ANGER

CHAPTER 17 IN

RESPECTABLE SINS BY JERRY BRIDGES

INTRODUCTION

- Selfish anger is prevalent. You witness it in a confrontation between a grocery shopper and the cashier; you find yourself in the middle of it when two drivers become enraged with each other on the highway; you watch it on Saturday afternoon between two college football players; you hear it in so many videos and TV shows; you listen to its lyrics in today's popular songs; and you struggle daily with this evil in your own heart (toward parents, siblings, teachers, and classmates). Perhaps, you have tried to put an end to your angry responses and get control over your spirit, but every attempt melts before another angry outburst.
- **Illustration:** Playing football at college—We had beautiful weather for the activity, the ankle that I had sprained three weeks prior didn't seem to be giving me too much trouble, and my very stacked team was winning 5-0. And even with such a big lead, attitudes on both sides of the ball seemed to be good. That is until the biggest player (standing at about 6' 2" and weighing in at about 250 lbs.) got blocked in what he felt to be an unfair manner. He immediately shouted out against the opposing team, letting every one know that the play was dead and clearly humiliating the smaller, younger, and inexperienced offender. An argument ensued, dominated mainly by the infuriated big man. In the end, he got his way, but he also stirred everyone's emotions along the same path as his own. A few minutes later, however, when another player got upset, this big man was quick to remark how surprising it was that a group of Christians couldn't get along even when just playing football together.

- “We tend to think of our anger in terms of episodes.”
 - Sometimes we apologize to the person with whom we are angry; sometimes we don't.
 - Usually, we, and the other person, gets over it.
 - Results in scarred, but not broken relationships.
 - This is the tolerable “way of life” we have developed.
- “The Bible...is not so [positive] about our anger.”
 - PUT IT AWAY! (Ephesians 4:31; Colossians 3:8)
 - POOR COMPANY (Eph. 4:31ff; Col. 3:8ff; II Cor. 12:20)

TEXT: Ephesians 4:26—“Be angry and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath.”

- Presupposes that we will get angry or have occasion for anger.
- He's telling us how to handle it...“Don't hold on to your anger. Get over it quickly!”
- “At best, anger is sin...and at worst, it leads to even greater sins.”

I. Description of Different “Weeds of Anger”

Explanation:

- “Weeds” because we want to get rid of them
- Noxious weeds

A. Resentment – “anger held on to”

Explanation:

- Internalized; feelings of ill treatment with inability to do anything about it; “nursing one's wounds”; dwelling on the hurt
- Example: Employee ill-treated by a boss; wife mistreated by overbearing husband

B. Bitterness – “resentment that has grown into a feeling of ongoing animosity”

Explanation:

- Long-term reaction to real or perceived wrong
- “I've forgiven, but I don't want anything to do with him.”
- Example: Church family—pastor doesn't listen or another member handles an issue “poorly”; home family—favoritism toward a sibling; not receiving inheritance; overbearing parents

C. Enmity/Hostility – “a higher level of ill will or animosity”

Explanation:

- May be masked by polite behavior, but usually expressed openly
- Example: Sarcasm, meanness, etc.; denigrating or hateful speech towards or about another;
- Usually involves other people in this spirit

D. Grudge – “associated with [hatred and] taking revenge on the object of the grudge”

Explanation:

- Occurs 5x in KJV; translated sometimes as “hate” in ESV
- Associated with taking revenge
- Bible example: Esau hated Jacob and planned to kill him; Joseph’s brothers feared he would hate them and pay them back; Herodius had a grudge against John the Baptist and wanted to put him to death
- Example: Planning in one’s mind how to “get back” and getting a perverse enjoyment of rerunning those plans in their mind
- Note Romans 12:19-21

E. Strife – “open conflict or turmoil between parties, usually...groups”

Explanation:

- Often due to self-righteous Christians who never consider the possibility that their own attitudes or heated words contribute to the strife.

Illustration: During the summer of 2005 I preached for my first time at the graveside service of an elderly gentleman. Only one of his adult daughters attended our church, and the rest of his family had been torn apart by hatred and bitterness. At least one of the sons had been estranged from this man for many years without any contact, and many of the other family members had a history of intense anger toward one another. The service itself was emotionless. People were guarded and

seemed to be there more out of a sense of duty than anything else. No tears were shed. In reflecting on that situation, I am reminded that no one had been murdered, but the amount of animosity within that family certainly revealed the very spirit that provokes murder.

I don’t know the progression of events that led to such an estranged family situation, but if it at all resembled many of our families, it was probably a minor misunderstanding or hurt that was responded to in the wrong manner and that led to the entire family being consumed with wrath.

Application: Anger is never static; the above, while not being sharply distinct from one another, do demonstrate an escalation of feelings of ill will and dissension. No wonder, then, that Paul told us to “let not the sun go down on your anger.”

Transition: “How, then, can we deal with our anger so that it does not begin to sprout these noxious weeds? How can we nip it in the bud so that the sun does not go down on it?” Consider these three basic directions.

2. Directions for Dealing with “Weeds of Anger”

A. Firmly believe in the God’s sovereignty.

Explanation:

- Biblical example: Joseph was grievously sinned against by being sold into slavery in Egypt. He didn’t elect to go there; yet, according to Genesis 45:8, he understood the bigger picture surrounding his brothers’ hatred. Never, in Potiphar’s house or in prison do we get a hint that he was resentful or bitter. Instead, he did his work well and the Lord blessed him. He was highly respected and he cared for people.

Application:

- “Actively call to mind that the actions of another person that triggers our angry response are under the control of God. Though the actions may be sinful in themselves, God intends them for our good. Follow Joseph who responded to his brother’s anger by reminding himself...Genesis 50:20.”
- What is that good? Christlikeness, greater usefulness, or we may never know.

B. Diligently pursue brotherly love.

Explanation:

- I Peter 4:8...
 - “If someone snubs you or does something that embarrasses or inconveniences you, love will enable you to overlook it.”
 - “Love will certainly cover many ordinary wrongs.”
 - “Earnestly” = pursue this diligently in dependence upon the Holy Spirit
- I Corinthians 13:5 – “Love...is not easily provoked/angered”
 - “Are you? Can just a little sarcastic remark by someone almost ruin your day, or can you, out of love for the person who made the remark, shrug it off or ‘cover’ it?”
 - “Sinful words towards us do hurt, but we can choose whether or not they make us angry. We must love that person deeply, so that we are not easily angered by unkind words.”
- I Corinthians 13:5 – “Love keeps no record of wrongs.”
 - Filing away the wrongs done to us; “I can forgive, but I cannot forget” isn’t true → a sure road to bitterness
 - We must cease to bring wrongs up to ourselves or to another party; we cannot erase the hurt from our minds, but we must not feed on it; when it does come to our minds involuntarily, we must dismiss it.

C. Humbly demonstrate God’s forgiveness.

Explanation:

- Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:21-35)
 - Peter’s question
 - Jesus’ answer – not a literal 490x, but more, as the parable demonstrates
 - Jesus’ explanation (the parable)
 - Servant 1 owes 10,000 talents
 - Talent = 15+ years wages
 - Then: He owed 150,000-200,000 year’s worth of wages.
 - Today: \$6-8 billion dollars
 - Lord forgives servant 1
 - Servant 1 finds Servant 2 who owes 100 denarii
 - Denarius = 1 day’s wage
 - Then: 100 day’s wages
 - Today: \$10,000-15,000
 - Servant 1 does not forgive servant 2
 - The LESSON: Hangs on the difference between the two amounts of money
 - The first large sum (which would have been a hyperbolic sum in Jesus’ day) represents the debt we owe God. “The damage to God’s glory by our sin is determined not by the severity of our sin but by the value of God’s glory.” **Illustration:** Spilling black ink on discount carpet (bad) vs. on Persian rug (much worse). This debt was “forgiven” at a great loss of the master’s net worth (Parable: \$6-8 billion; Reality: Christ’s life).
 - The second smaller sum (which is still a significant amount of money) represents the wrongdoing that is done and said against us. However, it doesn’t compare at all with the wrongdoing of our debt against God.

- The POINT: “The basis of our forgiving one another is the enormity of God’s forgiveness of us. We are to forgive because we have been forgiven so much. **Until we acknowledge that we are the ten-thousand talent (\$6-8 billion) debtor to God, we will struggle with forgiving people who have wronged us in significant ways or people who continue to wrong us.”

Application:

- “Once we embrace the reality that we truly are such debtors to God because of our continual sin against Him, we can say, “God, that was a terrible wrong against me, but I am the ten-thousand-talent debtor. His sin against me was nothing compared to my sin against You, and because You have forgiven me, I, from my heart, forgive that person.”

team benefited from the play; he was upset that he had been blocked (fairly). He yelled at an opposing player and stormed away muttering, “I’m going to pay them back.” Well, he didn’t; in fact, his anger was never expressed outwardly beyond the verbal exchange. Yet, he still responded in sin.

- After a situation like that, “life goes on as normal.” But NOT from God’s perspective. He has just been sinned against; our already-forgiven debt to Him has just gotten larger, while we’ve neglected to forgive the small debt of someone else.
- May we learn to hate that which God hates:
 - Proverbs 6:16, 19 – 7 abominations, one of which is “one who spreads strife among brothers”
 - Matthew 5:21-22
- May we “Be angry, and sin not, and let not the sun go down on our wrath.”

CONCLUSION

- The goal in this chapter is “to help us face the fact that much...of our anger is sinful, even though it may arise from the sinful actions of others.”
 - “Two wrongs never make a right.”
 - The wrath of man worketh not [does not achieve] the righteousness of God [the righteousness which He requires]” (James 1:20).
- Much of our anger, however, is probably not a result of significant injustices against us, rather than a manifestation of our pride and selfishness.
- Even when there is an “excuse,” however, God says there’s NO excuse.
- **Illustration:** Toward the end of that very football game I mentioned earlier, another moment of angry tension arose. One botched play on my part resulted in a fumble, a near recovery of the football by the other team, but a regaining of it by one of my teammates, who then ran for a gain of several yards. Everyone on my team laughed at the odd manner in which we were able to turn a near disaster into a great gain...well, everyone except one guy. He didn’t care that his