

Sinful Anger, Part 3

Discerning a Righteous Anger, Eph 4.26

Review:

- There is a righteous and holy anger. For we see it in God (Dt 1.34-37; Mk 3.5) and in His prophets, Ex 32.19, and the Lord commands us to be angry when there is a just cause for it, Eph 4.26. So it's our duty to be angry when there's good reason for it.
- But holy anger is not the same as fretting, murmuring, and envy, which can never be good.
- And yet, the corruption of our nature is such, that when this passion arises in our hearts, it's exceedingly difficult to keep it within bounds and it's rare that it doesn't overflow its banks.
- Thus, holy anger becomes sinful anger when it breaks rank and goes beyond the boundaries.

I. A righteous anger has *four key ingredients*

- A. A stirring or disturbing of the spirit arising from a real wrong done, Acts 17.16; Mk 3.5. It's this provoking of the spirit that stirs up a man's desire to see the wrong rectified.
 1. This stirring of the spirit is *sinful* where there's no real wrong (Gen 4.5-7; Mt 5.22, KJV: "without a cause") or where it's taken to be greater than it is. Anger without cause is rash and carnal.
- B. A hatred, not at persons, but at sins. Holy anger hates that which is unholy and ungodly, Zech 8.17. It abhors that which breaks God's laws and dishonors His person, 2Cor 7.11 ("indignation"); Rom 7.15; cp. Ps 139.19-24 (note: vv.20, 23-24).
 1. This hatred is *sinful* when it overflows its banks so that it's directed not just against our neighbor's sin, but against his person, Mt 5.44
 2. To be holy, this hatred must stay fixed on the object: the sin committed and the evil done; and when it's on this trajectory it cannot be too much, for sin is to be hated as hell itself.
- C. A grief over the sin committed, Mk 3.5; 2Cor 7.11. This naturally follows a hatred of the evil, as hating a thing is joined with grief over it and over the damage done by it.
 1. This grief is *sinful* when it's only concerned with the wrong done to us and has no regard for the dishonor that's been done to God or the injury done to the person's soul who wronged us. Sinful anger feeds only on our wounds and not on God's.
- D. A desire for the vindication of the right and the honor of the party injured, Ps 43.1; Gal 5.7-12. Where a man's called to it (e.g. a magistrate) this desire may rightly issue in the infliction of an appropriate punishment, Rom 13.4. But where a man has no power or right to inflict, he commits the cause to God, Rom 12.19; Ps 43.1; 1Pet 2.23 (Christ, when in our place).
 1. This desire for revenge is *sinful* when it's only concerned for our right and our honor and has no concern for the honor of God or our neighbor; and when, instead of committing our cause to God, we satisfy our anger by arguing, fighting, slandering, and the like.

II. Therefore a righteous anger has these *four boundaries* (whatever goes beyond these bounds is sinful):

- A. The *grounds* of a righteous anger are just and warrantable: God's dishonor by our sins and the sins of others, 2Cor 7.11. Anger is righteous when it is against unrighteousness because unrighteousness is against God. Anger is sinful when it's motivated by our pride and self love and is only stirred because our will wasn't done or our persons were disgraced or wronged.
- B. The *degree* of a righteous anger is proportioned to the sin. The anger of Simeon and Levi was sinful because it was cruel and overmuch, destroying a whole city for the fault of one, Gen

49.5-7. Likewise, David's anger against Nabal was sinful because it was more than warranted, 1Sam 25.34

- C. For its *end*, righteous anger is directed toward the glory of God and the good of our neighbor, Jn 2.16-17; Ps 139.19-20. It ceases to be righteous when it consumes others and their goods just to satisfy our proud heart.
- D. The *effects* of a righteous anger are good in that, rather than disable a man from doing godliness, it fits him for his duty to God and man. It's a holy zeal that enflames a man for God and holiness, not an unholy passion that sets a man on evil, malice, and revenge, Eph 4.31-32; Col 3.8. When anger *hinders* duty and quenches love, it's sinful, Js 1.19-20

III. Righteous anger is well ordered *when it has these six markers*:

- A. It arises from a love for God and our neighbor and a hatred of sin.
- B. It arises slowly, like God's, and for a just cause.
- C. It's proportioned to the fault.
- D. It begins at home, moves to those nearer to us, and lastly to those afar off.
- E. It stays within the compass of our calling.
- F. It doesn't annul our love for those with whom we are angry and it fuels our prayers for them.

IV. **Directions**

- A. Stir up yourself to a holy anger, Eph 4.26. Our blood ought to boil when we see our Lord dishonored, Acts 17.16; Gal 5.12. A cold heart in the face of the Lord's dishonor is not an option for the Lord's people. Zeal for His name, house, holiness, Word, and worship ought to consume us, Jn 2.16-17
- B. Take heed of sinful anger. Don't be sinfully angry and don't sin in your holy anger, Eph 4.26
- C. See how deeply sinful anger runs in us! We must therefore watch against this sin and not excuse it as if it were an acceptable part of our nature. It's because it's part of our old nature that God calls us to cut it off and mortify it, Col 3.8; Eph 4.31; Mt 5.22