

“How to Manage Anger”
(James 1:19)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. This morning, we considered James’ warning against anger:
 - a. That the anger of man does not achieve or bring about the righteousness that God desires.
 - b. God can be angry and not need to be careful about sin.
 - (i) He is infinitely holy.
 - (ii) When His heart is stirred strongly against something or someone, His wrath is holy: it is perfectly just and righteous.
 - c. But the same isn’t true about us.
 - (i) Our hearts are not perfectly holy.
 - (ii) There is some grace in an ocean of sin.
 - (iii) When our hearts are stirred up or agitated against something or someone, often the waves it creates are very destructive.
 - (iv) As the author to the Hebrews warns us, “See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled” (Heb. 12:15).
2. There are two things we need to consider about our anger:
 - a. What caused it?
 - (i) Was there really something sinful done to me or someone else (perhaps God)?
 - (a) If so, I have the right to be agitated about it.
 - (b) This rising of my spirit against that unrighteous thing is meant to give me the strength to overcome it.
 - (ii) But if it wasn’t really sinful, or something that was actually good, I don’t have the right to be angry.
 - (iii) I need to subdue that resentment that could easily develop.
 - b. How has it affected me?
 - (i) Can I be angry at the injustice done to myself or to God, and yet not break the Great Commandment?
 - (ii) It’s true that sometimes the psalmist expresses hatred for God’s enemies:
 - (a) “Do I not hate those who hate You, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with the utmost hatred; they have become my enemies” (Ps. 139:21-22).
 - (b) But it’s very instructive that the hatred is directed against God’s enemies – “those who hate You, O Lord,” “who rise up against You” – and not those who hate him.

- (iii) I'm supposed to love all men, even *my* enemies. If I'm so angry and embittered that I can't do this, I'm in sin and not righteously angry.
- (iv) Paul tells us, "Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger" (Eph. 4:26).
 - (a) If my anger causes me to sin, then I must repent of it.
 - (b) And I mustn't allow it to stay in my heart for very long, or else it will turn to bitterness and resentment.

B. Preview.

1. This evening, we'll consider what James has to say about managing this anger.
 - a. It's a dangerous thing, so we need to subdue it.
 - (i) If that anger is against God.
 - (a) Some believe James is speaking about being angry with God.
 - (b) That we shouldn't be embittered against Him for our trials, but listen to what He tells us and not judge Him too quickly.
 - (c) Certainly, that's possible: verse 21 even continues the theme of putting off our sins and listening to His Word, which is able to save us.
 - (ii) But others believe it refers to our anger against those who injure us in some way: whether real or perceived injuries.
 - (a) In this case, James is referring to another trial we have to face: not becoming unrighteously angry with those who provoke us.
 - (b) Either way, the answer is still the same.
 - b. James tells us that we must:
 - (i) Be quick to hear.
 - (ii) Slow to speak.
 - (iii) And slow to get angry.
2. Let's consider these as antidotes against the sin of unrighteous anger.

II. Sermon.

- A. First, we must be quick to hear.
 1. First, let me digress for a moment and deal with the opening words: "This you know, my beloved brethren."
 - a. "This you know."
 - (i) This either refers to the fact they know God doesn't tempt but is good (has saved them, called them to be His children, gives them every good thing they have), and that the temptation comes from within and without.
 - (ii) Or he is saying, "Know this!" as a command: they need to believe it to be true if they doubt, so the enemy doesn't tempt them to be angry with God.
 - b. And he says, "My beloved brethren."
 - (i) Some think James is a harsh book.
 - (ii) But we need to see that it comes out of a heart of holy love:

- (a) Engendered by the Holy Spirit.
 - (b) Desiring holiness for his hearers.
 - (c) This is true love: that our brethren walk in the ways of the Lord.
 - (d) And so James tells them what they need to know.
- 2. What is the loving thing James must tell them to protect their hearts against anger? What must we do to protect ours? First, we must be quick to hear.
 - a. We must be ready to listen and respond to God's Word.
 - (i) We must not shut our ears to His truth, even if God is bringing a difficult trial.
 - (ii) We must believe it is for our good and rejoice, as James told us.
 - (iii) We must be quick to hear God's Word in all circumstances:
 - (a) It will go a long ways in ending controversies before they begin.
 - (b) Matthew Henry writes, "Dr. Manton here says of some assemblies, 'That if we were as swift to hear as we are ready to speak there would be less of wrath, and more of profit, in our meetings. I remember when a Manichean contested with Augustine, and with importunate clamor cried, *Hear me! hear me!* the father modestly replied, *Nec ego te, nec tu me, sed ambo audiamus apostolum--Neither let me hear thee, nor do thou hear me, but let us both hear the apostle.*' The worst thing we can bring to a religious controversy is anger. This, however it may pretend to be raised by a concern for what is just and right, is not to be trusted. *Wrath* is a human thing, and the wrath of man stands opposed to the righteousness of God. Those who pretend to serve the cause of God hereby show that they are acquainted neither with God or his cause. This passion must especially be watched against when we are hearing the word of God."
 - b. Likewise, we must be ready and willing to listen to others to keep from anger.
 - (i) We mustn't jump to conclusions before we hear what others have to say, especially in their defense or in defense of their position.
 - (ii) We must weigh their words carefully and be willing to believe the best.
 - (iii) We need to fight against letting our anger close our ears.
 - (iv) Oliver Cromwell is represented as saying to his son, "When men stop talking (and presumably listening) they reach for their swords." Let's pray that they keep talking.
 - (v) As long as the channels of communication are open, that is an indication that we still have control of our spirits and that there is still hope to work through the situation.
- B. Second, we are to be slow to speak.
 - 1. Certainly, we are to be slow in accusing God.
 - a. For all of the reasons James has mentioned.
 - (i) Every good gift comes from Him.
 - (ii) Our salvation comes from Him (in the exercise of His will, He brought us forth).

- b. Every charge of evil against God is a false charge.
 - (i) In the middle of a trial, we're often tempted to accuse God.
 - (ii) But we need to remember that even our trials will be sanctified to our growth in grace, if we love Him.
 - (iii) We must not be quick to accuse God of any wrongdoing.
 - 2. We must also be slow in making hasty judgments against our brother or sister or neighbor.
 - a. We must be quick in listening and slow in responding.
 - b. Listen to the wisdom of Solomon:
 - (i) "The one who guards his mouth preserves his life; the one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin" (13:3).
 - (ii) "He who restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding" (17:27).
 - (iii) "He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him" (18:13).
 - (iv) "He who guards his mouth and his tongue, guards his soul from troubles" (21:23).
 - c. Albert Barnes collected some helpful sayings which reflect the same truth:
 - (i) "Men have two ears, and but one tongue, that they should hear more than they speak."
 - (ii) "The ears are always open, ever ready to receive instruction; but the tongue is surrounded with a double row of teeth, to hedge it in, and to keep it within proper bounds."
 - (iii) So Valerius Maximus, vii. 2: "How noble was the response of Xenocrates! When he met the reproaches of others with a profound silence, some one asked him why he alone was silent? Because, says he, I have sometimes had occasion to regret that I have spoken, *never that I was silent.*"
 - (iv) The son of Sirach says, cap. v. 11: γινουταχυςεντηακροσει σουκαιενμακροθυμιαφθεγγουαποκρισιν. "Be swift to hear, and with deep consideration give answer."
 - (v) We must be ready to listen, and think carefully before we speak.
 - (vi) We may do far more damage than good with our words.
- C. Finally, we must be slow to get angry.
 - 1. If we keep our ears open and our mouths closed, this will go a long ways in helping us subdue most of our sinful anger. It will help us not to jump to false conclusions and become angry without just cause to begin with.
 - 2. But we also need to do what we can to subdue the emotions of our hearts so that we don't lose control.
 - a. We need to slow it down, put on the brakes.
 - b. We saw several warnings this morning against having a spirit that is out of control.

- c. We need to subdue the sin of our hearts and grow in holy love.
 - d. This will give the necessary strength to keep our anger from getting out of control and expressing itself in sinful ways.
3. Certainly, we be slow to be angry with God.
- a. We are never to be angry with God.
 - b. We can never have just cause, for all He does is good, even when He judges.
4. But we must subdue sinful anger in our hearts towards one another as well.
- a. Consider all we saw this morning.
 - b. The anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God: When we are agitated in our emotions, the likelihood of doing right is remote.
 - c. Adam Clarke, quotes the Midrash (Jewish commentary of the Tanak): “‘There are *four* kinds of dispositions,’ says the *Midrash hanaalam*, cap. v. 11: ‘*First*, Those who are easily incensed, and easily pacified; these *gain* on one hand, and *lose* on the other. *Secondly*, Those who are not easily incensed, but are difficult to be appeased; these *lose* on the one *hand*, and *gain* on the *other*. *Thirdly*, Those who are difficult to be incensed, and are easily appeased; these are the *good*. *Fourthly*, Those who are easily angered, and difficult to be appeased; these are the *wicked*.’”
 - d. On the basis of what James tells us, we should seek to be like the third group: slow to anger and easily reconciled. This is honoring to God.
 - e. Matthew Henry writes, “Whereas men often pretend zeal for God and his glory, in their heat and passion, let them know that God needs not the passions of any man; his cause is better served by mildness and meekness than by wrath and fury” (Henry).
 - f. Let’s seek to keep our ears open, our mouths closed and subdue the passions of our hearts that we might serve God in an acceptable way. Amen.