

CAPITOL STUDIES

FEBRUARY 24, 2021 • WEEK 7



SEVEN DEADLY SINS AND CIVIL SERVANTS

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Verse of the Week

Ephesians 4:26

Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.

The Sin of Anger (Part II)



ALICE CHILDRESS, AMERICAN NOVELIST and playwright, was steaming hot: “I was so mad you could have boiled a pot of water on my head.”¹ She was well beyond grumpiness; she was livid. What sent her into a spell of anger? How did she feel in this situation? She had been as calm as a cup of water, and something spurred her to rage. In the Oxford English Dictionary, we can see that the word anger seems to derive from Old Norse “angr,” which is said to mean “trouble, affliction, [even] pain.” Robert Thurman (Columbia University) notes that, “This etymology encourages us to say that anger is pain; it comes from feeling pain.”²

Anger is not only the sensing of pain. It relates to pain in this way: whenever we are angry, we are feeling the pain of an injustice as we define it. In a moral world, God created us in His image, to feel pain about injustices, so that we (like He) might take action to correct injustices. The reaction to the pain of injustice is what we call anger.

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(This study is adapted from an earlier series by Rev. Gauthier, 1960–2020.)



INTRODUCTION

We saw last week that anger can be good; indeed, it can be very good and very godly. God Himself is just and, as we saw last week, the angriest person in the Bible (and righteously so). We saw Jesus Christ (past, present, and future) consistently exercising righteous anger against the injustices of sinning people. God is just. All violations of His justice must be satisfied (theologically, they must be “propitiated”³). However, anger can be sinful, and when it is, anger can be deadly.

1. SINFUL ANGER WANTS *TOO MUCH* JUSTICE

Anger is a God-given emotion to correct injustices. God has anger, and He has designed humans to be like Him, giving them anger for the correction of unrighteousness. Anger exists to set things right, to stop evil—for the right reason, at the right time, in the right people, and in the right way. But remember:

SINFUL ANGER IS A PERVERSION OF RIGHTEOUS ANGER. RIGHT ANGER IS A GOD-GIVEN EMOTION FOR CORRECTING INJUSTICES.

A. Justice: The Way Things Should Be

Justice is literally “that which is according to the law.” The word has its roots in one Latin word with two spellings: *Jus/Juris*. *Jus/Juris* is simply *the law*. Someone in the Capitol with a *Juris Doctor* has studied *the law* at a professional, *doctoral* level. A criminal brought to *justice* is brought to punishment by *law*. Justice is that which is according to the law. God’s divine Law rules, regulates, and runs the universe. When His law is followed, all is well in the world. Wherever His law is violated, there is chaos and pain in culture. For God and the godly, wherever His law is violated, there is pain in the heart. This pain is the pain of anger, a pain that cries out, “That’s not right! This is NOT the way it *should* be!” I trust you see the brilliance in this command (not suggestion):

Ephesians 4:26

Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.⁴

B. Righteous Anger Corrects Injustice

While the righteously angry, divine God-Man Jesus Christ cleansed the Temple, he was quoting Scripture justifying His actions. He did not quote His perfectly angry Father; He quoted the political leader, and mortal man, King David. David had been moved by injustices to feel pain and zealous anger in his day.

Psalms 69:9

For zeal for Your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.



2. VOLCANO HEADS: EXPLOSIVE, SINFUL ANGER

Righteous anger enables people to correct injustices. Sinful anger takes two forms: anger expressed explosively, and anger stuffed sinfully. The triple command in our key verse reproveth both kinds. It says to (1) feel righteous anger, (2) act righteously because of it, and (3) do not be passive and disobey the commands to feel and act this way.

Ephesians 4:26

⁽¹⁾Be angry, and ⁽²⁾yet do not sin; ⁽³⁾do not let the sun go down on your anger.

THREE CLEAR COMMANDS ALL TOO OFTEN DISOBEYED

A. Sinful Anger Is Too Harsh

A timeless principle that all wise lawmakers and judges use in all cultures and all centuries is *Lex Talionis* (Latin: *Law of Retaliation*). Government officials must always see that the violations of justice (injustices and crimes) are met with equal and opposite penalties and punishments. *Lex Talionis*: the penalty fits the crime. What a great idea. Right amounts of anger based on right definitions of law can cause a just judge to seek justice, just the right amount of justice, in just the right way—*Lex Talionis*. Sinful anger is a desire for “too much” justice in several ways. First, sinful anger is *too* harsh. A classic example of sinfully harsh anger, expressed out of proportion with the injustice incurred, is Lamech (Enoch’s great-great-grandson). He had gone berserk.

Genesis 4:23-24

Lamech said... “Listen to my voice... give heed to my speech, for I have killed a man for wounding me; and a boy for striking me.

²⁴...Lamech [is avenged] seventy-sevenfold.”

Youth disrespecting their elders is not just, and it is “not the way it should be.” When Lamech was insulted and wounded, he could have been patient with the insult and protected himself (even forcefully) from physical wounding. However, in his anger, having felt the pains of those minor wrongs, Lamech saw red and exploded in personal vengeance. He wanted justice “too much” and bragged about the resulting brutality. He did not correct the injustice, justly. He was sinfully angry, and it proved to be deadly (literally).

B. Patience Tempers Righteous Anger

When I hear any Christian say, “Righteous anger is impossible,” it tells me more about their own emotional problems than what the Law of God and Scriptures clearly command. That saying miffs me. Such statements are not according to the *Jus/Juris*—not according to *the Law* of God. Being miffed, I am motivated to correct such injustices through the reproof of Scripture. Do not contradict Ephesians 4:26; rather, counteract your own sinful anger. Anger crackles out of some in little flashes like electricity in a cat’s fur. If you err this way, realize that patience can temper your anger. God modeled such long-suffering patience before the flood for many years.





1 Peter 3:20

...The patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark....

President Thomas Jefferson also advised the delay of anger:

**“WHEN ANGRY, COUNT [TO] TEN BEFORE YOU SPEAK;
IF VERY ANGRY, [COUNT TO] A HUNDRED.”⁵**

C. Bad Anger Has Roots in Wrong Reasons

All people get angry because justice (the way things *should* be) has been violated (according to *their* reasoning/*laws*). This hurts them, and they react to the pain in anger. Observe God reviewing right reasoning with the pouting prophet Jonah who was sulking. He had turned his wrongly reasoned anger inward.

Jonah 4:9

Then God said to Jonah, “Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?” And he said, “I have good reason to be angry, even to death.”

Jonah was wrong. He did not have good reason. He was incensed since his bitter enemies, the Ninevites, had been forgiven because of their repentance. The pagan Assyrian king and his people had been released from God’s lethal, scorching anger against them. God had been rightly ready to use His anger to correct the immense injustices they committed within the view of His all-seeing eye. Jonah’s anger was unjustified because it was unjust.

Two questions to ask while you are counting to ten (or to one hundred) are these: Do I have good reason to be angry? Has God’s law truly been violated or just some standard of my own that is not based on good or godly reasoning? Ask. Sinful anger *will* hurt you.

**“MALICE ITSELF DRINKS THE LARGEST PORTION OF ITS
OWN POISON.” – SENECA⁶**

3. PASSIVE POISON: SINFULLY STUFFED ANGER

Some people are walking buzz saws. Their unbridled tempers are like atomic bombs or category-five hurricanes. Stay away from such unholy hotheads.

Proverbs 22:24-25

Do not associate with a man given to anger; or go with a hot-tempered man,²⁵ or you will learn his ways, and find a snare for yourself.

A second type of sinful anger is the opposite of *explosive*, volcanic anger. It is *implosive* anger that is wrongly internalized, like a dangerous undercurrent in a river. This anger belongs to stuffers, bottlers, and those who put a cowardly cap on their anger (for too long and for the wrong reasons). Ephesians 4:26 is genius in its confrontation of these bitter buriers of anger’s emotions. It commands, “Be angry... do not let the sun go down on your anger.” Volcanic anger scorches, burns, and buries;



underground anger poisons, pollutes, and internally contaminates. Both are sinful.

A. Anger Is to Be Expressed, Not Repressed

Jonah was mad at God. Jonah was like Jim Carey, who finally told God what had been on his mind. In the movie *Bruce Almighty* (with Jennifer Aniston in 2003), Jim's character (Bruce Nolan) has had enough of God's unreasonable ways, and His high and holy demands upon his life. Bruce was not like Lamech, boasting in his brutality. Bruce was bristling because he had bottled up his anger and reached a point where he could no longer hold it in. This is usually the case, and what is the problem with bottled anger? It comes out (later, stronger, and bitterly so). Bruce was ticked, and like a tick-tocking time bomb, he finally released his repressed anger, screaming up at God:

SMITE ME, THOU ALMIGHTY SMITER!

Jonah and Bruce were both ready "to die" and be "smitten" in their anger at God. Jonah bottled and internalized his anger. In Jonah 4:9, God challenged Jonah's unrighteous reasoning which was actually the basis for his anger. Jonah spoke what was on his mind, contradicting God's opinion (implied in the question: "Do you have *good* reason to be angry?"). Jonah angrily answers God in this verse. He insists that the pain he feels is so great that he wants to die. He feels he is right to be angry due to the "injustice" of God, since God forgave Jonah's vicious political enemies.

Before Jonah 4:9, in Jonah 4:4, God questioned Jonah's anger for the first time. Listen for the deafening silence of Jonah's reply.

Jonah 4:4-5

The LORD said, "Do you have good reason to be angry?"⁵ Then Jonah went out from the city and sat east of it...

Jonah's answer was no answer. He walked away with a zipped lip. He was a stuffer. Maybe this prophet thought it was "ungodly" to have a conniption fit, so he kept his fury inside. He had not learned from the scriptural Psalmist to cry out to God with all kinds of honest emotions (God already knows how we feel).

Jonah opted to give God the silent treatment. Years ago, a friend had a communication conflict with a person who was a bit of a stuffer. Eventually, so hurt by the lack of honest communication, he calmly told this person, "You need an emotional enema... I mean you really hold stuff in, and then you get passive-aggressive, and then you might *finally* tell me (weeks later) what's really bothering you. If I've caused you pain, or if you are angry at me, please just tell me." Stuffed anger poisons the well of one's own heart, and it hinders, halts, and hurts relationships. Do not harbor bitterness and perpetually visit the grave of injustices long gone. American novelist Dorothy Walworth told of someone who buried their bitterness in sinful anger: "They buried the hatchet, but in a shallow, well-marked grave."





B. What About the Sun Going Down?

We maintain relationships with clear communication and care. Have you reconnected with a dear friend after years apart? Upon reconnecting you say, “It’s like it was just yesterday.... We picked up right where we left off.” *Time is no hindrance in good relationships.* In strained relationships, time is a time bomb. In my relationship with God, mentors have taught me through the years to “keep short accounts with God.” We all commit many sins against God, doing injustice and not walking according to His Law. Keeping short accounts with God means coming back to Him often in prayer, honest communication, and confession. That is true of our relationships with people as well. I laughed when one comedian spoke about Ephesians 4:26 and our need to keep relationships good by keeping short accounts with each other. We need to manage the God-given gift of anger wisely. She wisely joked:

**DO NOT LET THE SUN GO DOWN ON YOUR ANGER:
STAY UP AND FIGHT!**

CONCLUSION & APPLICATION

Anger is good, but like all God’s gifts, it can be misused. May all your anger be based in good reason and God’s Law. May you manage your anger well for the sake of your emotional health, your staff, your family, and your Senate relationships. May you move Nebraska forward with the energy found in righteous anger. Be angry, dear Senator, and do not sin.

According to God’s Law,

Rev. Perry M. Gauthier

FOOTNOTES

1. Alice Childress and Trudier Harris, *Like One of the Family: Conversations from a Domestic’s Life*, Beacon Press, 2012, page 44.
2. Robert Thurman, *The Seven Deadly Sins: Anger*, The New York Public Library: Oxford University Press, 2005, page 19.
3. “Propitiated” means “satisfied” or “appeased.” 1 John 4:10 says that God “loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins,” satisfying His divine wrath.
4. All Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible 1995 Update* unless otherwise noted.
5. Found in Thomas Jefferson’s letter of February 21, 1825, to the then-infant Thomas Jefferson Smith, who was named after him. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/98-01-02-4987>.
6. From Letter LXXXI, “On Benefits,” in *Moral Letters to Lucilius* by Lucius Annaeus Seneca, also known as “Seneca the Younger,” the Roman philosopher and statesman who was also a tutor to Nero, the Roman Emperor.

