

Men to Men Ministry

Lesson Five in the Letter of James

Anger management

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James 1:19–21 NASB

19 This you know, beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger;

20 for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.

21 Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

Introduction

Reading through the book of James, it is easy to think that he has an action only approach in his understanding of what it means to be a Christian. In other words, one can have the impression that he thinks a right relationship with God is all about doing this or doing that. That, however, is a wrong impression. With all his moral instruction and ethical exhortation, James is not telling a person how to become a Christian. He is not setting a new list of actions to earn your way into God's grace. The overarching assumption of James was that his audience was already justified before God. James was writing this letter with the assumption that the readers were his brothers in faith. Brothers in the belief of the Messiah Jesus. Brothers who were fellow Jews or Jewish proselytes. Brother who were loved by James by the association with God. A quick look back at James 1:19 we find this brethren relationship: In the exercise of His will, He gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among his creatures.

Exposition

To better understand this moral reaction to what James calls anger, we must understand what he was talking about. These concepts must be understood in light of the next verse in James 1:20 **"For the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God."**

What is anger?

The definition of the word in Greek: Anger - (Greek, orge)

- “Indignation which has arisen gradually and become more settled” – Thayer
- “Orge suggests a more settled or abiding condition of mind, frequently with a view to taking revenge” .
- Anger, then, is a lingering, seething emotion.
 - It is a well calculated well pointed or willful lashing out.
 - It is not the Greek word thumos, which is “The sudden outburst of passionate anger” or a “The blaze of temper which flares into violent words and deeds, and just as quickly dies”

The Old Testament has much to say about this kind of emotional response.

- In Psalms: **“Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret — it only causes harm.”** - Psalms 37:8
- In Proverbs:
 - **“A quick-tempered man acts foolishly, And a man of wicked intentions is hated.”** – Proverbs 14:17
 - **“He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, But he who is impulsive exalts folly.”** - Proverbs 14:29
 - **“A wrathful man stirs up strife, But he who is slow to anger allays contention.”** - Proverbs 15:18
 - **“He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.”** - Proverbs 16:32
 - **“A man of great wrath will suffer punishment; For if you rescue him, you will have to do it again.”** - Proverbs 19:19
 - **“Better to dwell in the wilderness, Than with a contentious and angry woman.”** - Proverbs 21:19
 - **“Make no friendship with an angry man, And with a furious man do not go, Lest you learn his ways And set a snare for your soul.”** Proverbs 22:24-25
- In Ecclesiastes: **“Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, For anger rests in the bosom of fools.”** - Ecclesiastes 7:9

In the New Testament there is much about anger.

- To the brethren in Rome, Paul wrote: **“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.”** - Ro 12:19
- It is included with those things Paul lists as the **“works of the flesh”** in Galatians 5:19-21
- To the Ephesians Paul writes: **“Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.”** - Ep 4:31
- In a similar vein to the Colossians: **“But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.”** – Colossians 3:8.

It must be noted that Paul seems to infer that if anger does come to mind occasionally it may not lead to sin.

- **“Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath,”** – Ephesians 4:26

On several occasions Jesus expressed anger:

- Towards the money changers in the temple - Jn 2:13-17
- Towards the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees - Mt 23:13-36

In both testaments, God is presented as a God of anger as well as a God of love

- In the Old Testament - Psa 78:49-51, 58-61; Isa 5:25
- In the New Testament - Ro 1:18; 2:4-11

Therefore, how do we reconcile those passages which demand that anger and wrath is folly and something to be put away, with those that speak of anger on the part of God, Christ and even the Christian?

I find in the section of James 1:19-25 four sections that may help us to understand this overarching concept of anger. I may be outlined in four sections:

- The process of anger
- The solution to anger
- The ignorance of anger
- The solution to anger.

Section 1 The process of anger

This you know. It is common knowledge among the church. This first phrase is pointing to the information provided earlier in the letter. It is important to remember James was writing about TRIALS and TEMPTATIONS. In verse 1:16 he speaks of being deceived, or don't let your decision making within trials to be motivated by deception. But here James is preferencing his process of anger that these Jewish Christians were well aware of what the pitfalls of trials are. This new section starts with an understanding that there were some that had been deceived and the result was not good. This deception caused the process of temptation. Further, our scripture of focus for today points at the deadly action that often results from trials and temptation. They were well aware, This you know, is a transition from the reality of trial to the reaction to trial. You got this, it is known by you. It is not something new. Trials can and often do lead to anger.

1. **This you know,** James is speaking about the problem the situation in which we live. We all are subject to TRIALS. Life has to be lived. And all in the church have this understanding of the inevitability of hard times. And further the expected new trials that would befall them. Here James is simply saying “You know about the hard times.”
2. **My beloved brethren,** James was speaking of those who were in the church and living a life pleasing to God and to James. He loved them because they were part of the great Family of God.
3. Threefold admonition - **Quick, slow and slow.**

The first of these threes seem to me as a start of an emotion. As we have studied before emotion is a heart thing. It is a moral decision.

First is slowing down long enough to hear another's point of view, and second the willingness to let someone speak but not interrupt him. The third is a moral reaction to the first two. ANGER or as the KJV calls it WRATH. It is not a gentle "I don't agree with you and I respect your right to say it", but a outward, revengeful, reaction that spews venom. It is saying simply, "you are an idiot." It seems that James is saying amid our trials, our tough times, our terrible times of circumstance that when someone comes to you and tries to tell you, "You are going through this horrible, awful time and start to tell you things like: "I went through the same thing and I survived" or "God is getting even with you because of all the bad things you have done," or "It is not the big of a deal." Our reaction to hearing with intent to understand and not speaking rashly can cause anger. These three moral responses to someone trying to explain to you about your most intimate and soul bending circumstance is to listen for the good and godly stuff, but it is not there, don't respond by accusation and counter arguments and worst of all don't respond in anger.

4. James immediately writes the direct result of Anger.

This this anger does not result in the knowledge or experience of the righteousness of God. **For a man's anger does not bring about the righteousness of God.** This anger does not lead to maturity, or perfection, or a Crown. This anger is an emotional, passionate, and moral decision and therefore you justly receive what you sow.

5. What happens you when you are angry.

Scientists have pinpointed a specific region of the brain called the amygdala as a key player in processing fear and triggering anger. The amygdala acts like an emotional alarm system, alerting us to potential danger and activating the famous "fight or flight" response. When you encounter a situation that triggers anger, your amygdala gets busy, sending signals throughout your brain and body. It's like the red alert button for emotions. Further, anger creates energy surges. When you're angry, chemicals like adrenaline flood your bloodstream. This surge of adrenaline leads to increased heart rate, heightened blood flow, and tension. Interestingly, sustained anger can negatively impact your cardiac health. It's like putting extra strain on your heart, which isn't great for the long haul. So, next time you're fuming, maybe take a deep breath and count to ten—your body will thank you.

One model of anger, proposed by psychologist Jerry Deffenbacher, suggests that anger results from a combination of factors:

- **Trigger Event:** This is the initial provocation—the thing that sets off your anger. It could be anything from being cut off in traffic to getting yelled at by a parent. In our view of James this trigger event is two fold, 1) you are going through a trial, and 2) you are being advised as to how to get through it.

- **Your anger is very unique** to the place you are in your walk with Christ, your personality, temperament, and past experiences play a role. Some people are more prone to anger due to their individual character traits.
- Psychologists suggest that **all anger is a response to other factors**, or that anger does not really exist. Anger is a rational moral decision in response to a trigger of Fear, Hurt or Frustration.
 - **Fear:** Maybe it's the threat of violence or the memory of that time you accidentally stepped on a Lego barefoot. Fear can fuel anger. In this case of the freely given advice on how to handle FEAR of continuing trials is a fear we all have. Knowing that trials will always come and you will have to face them, can cause a fear response in anger. Anger toward God, anger toward the circumstance, anger toward the person who is giving you advice, even anger toward James even mentioning it.
 - **Hurt:** When someone steps on our emotional toes—whether intentionally or not—we feel hurt. And hurt often morphs into anger. Beliefs that a different and making the inference you are wrong and they are right can cause hurt. There is an internal desire to consort and conform to others. They are our beloved brothers who seem to want to help you. But when they tell you that trials are nothing we are hurt by that very idea. Politics is a major trigger of hurt in our culture. Religion can be a trigger and often causes hurt.
 - **Frustration:** Following the line of logic here in James I would assume the trigger of frustration would be the cause of anger. Frustration with those who do not respond to my needs. Frustration with those who simply do not understand. I have listened intently, I have held my tongue in telling them they are simply wrong, my frustration level is now off the charts. Why does my godly actions in response to trials not understood?
- **Appraisal of the Situation** How you interpret the trigger event matters. If you perceive it as a threat or injustice, anger is more likely to flare up. It is also what is the source of the anger. But our reaction is what James is talking about. This reaction which may well be called anger has many names:
 - **Resentment:** Resentment is closely related to anger. It's like anger's long-lost cousin who holds grudges. Resentments stem from past injustices—real or perceived. They're like emotional fossils, preserving old feelings of anger connected to events or people. The challenge with resentment is that it keeps us stuck in the past, preventing healing and growth.
 - Being **Consciously Present** with Anger. One strategy to work through anger and resentment is to practice being consciously present with these emotions. Observe them without judgment. The suggestion here is that anger caused by any of the triggers must be seen in a slow methodical view point. Imagine putting a little space around your anger. Create a buffer zone. Notice what happens when you allow it to simply be without immediately reacting or suppressing it.

The first section on anger the process of anger. Anger in response to other Christians who would minimize your trials.

Section 2 the solution to the anger problem.

Because you know the problem, the type of encounters you have and will be confronted with, and because you know what kind of life that needs to be lived. What is the solution to this anger problem.

James 1: 1:21 **Therefore, ridding yourselves of all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.**

The text seems to be saying that this anger is coming from a personal unworthiness. That this anger is coming from an image of yourself that is less than what God would desire of you. **It may well be a negative emotion caused because the spiritual place where you are currently is not sufficient to meet the need of the trial you are in.**

The first action in response to anger, whether the trigger is fear, hurt, or frustration is to understand your relationship to God. **We are spiritual beings living in an earthly existence.** The first step to overcoming your anger is to look deeply within ourselves and seek humility. Humility is the seeing yourself through a spiritual window and not through your bodies opaque door. The verse that precedes our portion of scripture says: **In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the Word of Truth, so that we might be as it is were, the first fruits of His creatures.**

First step in the solution to anger is to fully assess your relationship to God.

As we have stated many times there are specific and measurable actions by which this new birth is attained. It is the same for Jews, Greeks, Romans, and all other Gentiles:

1. **Current state of life** – For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23 and Romans 5:12, Just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all man, because all sin. And again in Romans 6:23, For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus. It is an understanding of the separation between God and self.
2. **Belief** – an intellectual understanding of the availability provided by for redemption. John 3:16, For God loved the world the gave his only Son, that who ever believes in Him will have everlasting life. And again in John 3:36, He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.
3. **Repentance** – Acts 17:30, Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent.
4. **Confess** – I John 1:9, If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
5. **Receive** – We must accept the life changing offer. John 1:12 But as many as received Him into them He gave the right to become the children of God, even to those who believe in his name.

It must be noted there is no great theological understanding of the process of salvation toward the result of justification, the realignment of man to God but is included here

because at the lowest level salvation is the basis of all comprehension of belief, and the root of all our attitudes, and therefore all our moral actions.

JAMES 1:19 This you know, by beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger.

From the context, it appears that these admonitions are given in regards to our reception of the Word of God: REFER to James 1:18, 21. Each of these qualities are needed in our relationship with the inevitable encounters with TRIAL and TEMPTATION. We have discussed in the last sessions the process of both Trials and Temptations. Even at first reading of our portion it seems that the third, anger, is preceded by to other attitudes of hearing and speaking. Anger is the state of mind that speaks of a uncontrolled negative emotion that often leads to negative actions. Further anger is a decision and not that uncontrolled emotion of FEAR, HURT or Frustration. These are qualities needed especially in times of trial when we need most the Word of God We need to humbly and calmly be receptive to what the Word of God has to say

The third section of our study is on the ignorance of anger

We need to do something instead of the display of anger. It is not enough to just quick to hear and slow to speak we have to do something instead of a attitude or a quick reaction to a trigger. James gives an illustration of a mirror. it is a simile it is like or similar to provide greater understanding of the primary subject. This section was interjected into the conversation to those who should know, should be cleaned, and saved.

A man looks in a mirror at the face with which he was born. literally, the face of his **genesis**. The mirror reveals the true character. It shows the responses to fear, hurt and frustration. It shows the emotional baggage of anger. Anger because you have been talked to, and you have listened and you were tempted to response negatively with ANGER.

James' choice of words may suggest different kinds of people:

First, a believer and that only. Accepts Jesus as the Messiah but goes no further, a Believer who only hears the word and notices his fallen nature still is the driving force in his life and due to the distractions of the world he does not do anything about it. He has belief but no righteousness, no morally positive actions to show for it. And because of this very nature there is frustration in the providence of God. This is probably a group in every church. Even back in James' time it would be those who were Messianic Jews. They believed that Jesus was the Messiah but would go no further. They would life their lives as if Jesus was an addon. They could easily keep going to Temple, keep all the rules, regulations and commands of the faith and feel good about it.

Second, an immature Christin who hears the word notices that he has been promised a new changed life and dealing with his personal problems by them self. He then proceeds to live as if he never looked into the mirror in the first place. Here we find the group that would classified as Christian Jews. The took the next step in their faith. They have been challenged time and time again to act like a loving person even if they never do.

Third the subject of the third section the one who does not shy away from the mirror. In that mirror he sees the divine perfect will of God. His response is to be blessed in all that he does.

Conclusion

Ah, the wisdom of James! Let's unravel the meaning behind being "slow to speak." James, the half-brother of Jesus, penned this advice in his letter to scattered Jewish Christians. Imagine parchment, ink, and a quill—James jotting down timeless truths for us.

So, what's the admonition about being "slow to speak"? Swift Ears, Slow Tongue, slow Anger. It's a three-part harmony: quick listening, unhurried speaking, and a simmering temper. Imagine a conversational waltz—graceful, deliberate steps.

The Art of Listening: "**Be quick to listen.**" James nudges us toward attentive ears. Ever noticed how good listeners lean in, eyes wide? They're like human satellite dishes, catching signals. Listening isn't just hearing words; it's deciphering emotions, reading between the lines, and understanding the unsaid. It's like decoding a secret language of hearts.

The Pause Button: Now, the hard part: "slow to speak." Picture your tongue as a race car revving at the starting line. James says, "Hold your horses!" Why? Because hasty words often crash into walls of regret. We blurt out things—sharp, jagged—that leave scars. But measured words? They're like healing balm.

Anger Management: James adds a twist: "slow to become angry." Anger's a wildfire, it burns bridges, singes friendships. When we're fuming, we're deaf to reason. So, pause. breathe. Count to ten. Let anger cool like a neglected cup of coffee on your desk.

Why This Matters: James knew his audience—scattered, suffering, facing trials. Life wasn't a cakewalk; it was more like a rocky path with Lego landmines. Being slow to speak isn't about bottling up thoughts. It's about choosing words wisely, like a jeweler selecting gems. It honors God and keeps relationships intact.