

Handling Anger Matthew 5:21-22

Very rarely does anyone identify they have a problem with anger. "I've just got strong opinions", "I just speak my mind", "It's other people who make me angry so it's not my problem". So this is difficult subject matter because of the propensity to delude ourselves.

V21, 22. "Don't murder" but I say... Jesus brings out the full flavour of the command. When we treat people with contempt in our anger we are saying they have no value. This is the seed which leads to murder.

If we handle anger in a way that leads to ungodly outcomes and we are unrepentant then we have no reason to be assured that we are on the path towards God. Indeed if we continue to be unrepentant in our unrighteous anger then we show that we might be on the path to hell itself.

There is good and bad anger. Sometimes we are too angry, sometimes we are not angry enough.

Anger is an emotion that provides an opportunity to show what is inside our hearts. Anger provides an opportunity for us to enter into a workshop with God that helps us to recognise what we really trust in and to turn to Him instead.

We are not interested in self help strategies that simply modify our behaviour. We want to apply the gospel so that our hearts are changed. Handling anger in a godly way has nothing to do with controlling our external environment. Inanimate objects and mere human beings do not have the moral authority to dictate our feelings and actions.

What's the issue that leads to the anger? How do we seek to justify it? What's *really* going on? We're not believing that Jesus is enough for us. In that moment the fact that the Cross of Christ leads to eternal security and glory and that God is our Father through spiritual adoption and all by grace... is not enough. There is a truth that we believe more than this. What is it we are *actually* believing?

Jeremiah 2:13. We've turned from living water and drunk out of the toilet. "It's great that Jesus is alive and has died for me but I'm just so sad/disappointed/annoyed that x/y/z has happened." We turn from the truth about Christ and seek our own security/comfort/confidence/control/approval from other things. How different it is when we are able to say: "I am frustrated/hurt/annoyed about x/y/z but I am so grateful that Jesus is alive and that He is for me."

Points to Ponder

- 1 Have you found that anger is a challenging subject to talk about? What has been your experience of anger (either your own or that of others)? How do people typically seek to deal with anger [burying it, expressing it, passive aggression....]
- 2 Share some examples of anger, real or fictional, that can be used as case studies to explore how we can bring the gospel (the truth about all that we have in and through the Cross of Christ) to bear. What lies do we believe? What truths can we take hold about the work of Christ to help us respond differently?
- 3 "Anger shows what we really need". In what ways is this true? E.g. if we become angry because no one has noticed our hard work and effort it might indicate that we need that sense of approval more than is healthy. What gospel truth can be brought to bear?
- 4 Reflect together on Jeremiah 2:13. What is this actually saying and how do you see this played out in your life?
- 5 In what ways can we rehearse continually the truths of the gospel so they are real to us on a daily basis?

Outstandingly good Gospel centred resources to help with anger:

- *Good and Angry: Letting Go of Irritation, Complaining, and Bitterness* by David Powlison
- *A Small Book about a Big Problem: Meditations on Anger, Patience, and Peace* by Ed Welch
- *Respectable Sins* by Jerry Bridges
- *You Can Change* by Tim Chester