

Good and Angry – Second Class

Zoom – Sunday 29 March 2020

INTRODUCTION

Tonight, we are primarily going to be sharpening our ability to analyze anger by looking at examples of people getting angry in 5 places in Scripture. Being able to think clearly about anger is an important aspect of pursuing sanctification both in terms of being *Good and Angry* and also in terms of expressing our anger in righteous and loving ways.

BODY

Chapter 3: “How Does that Shoe Fit?”

We will spend very little time in chapter 3, this evening, because this is a chapter which works best if you can slowly and reflectively consider it with the book in your hands. It is not well suited for quick, “off the cuff” responses and dialog. Furthermore, for reflection on this chapter to be truly helpful, it needs to be more personal and vulnerable than what would be appropriate for a video-conferencing discussion with 50 other people. That said, I want to alert you to the content of the chapter in case some of you (who don’t have the book) would like to do some reflecting on your own.

You will recall that chapter 2 was titled: “Do I have a Serious Problem with Anger?” And the entire chapter read, “Yes.” Chapter 3 is about unpacking how each of us responds to chapter 2. Dr. Powlison offers six representative responses, though naturally most of us we see our reflection in more than one of them and we might want to add a 7th or 8th response to our list. After unpacking each response, Dr. Powlison suggests how there may be a strand of truth in each of these responses, then he adds a potential blind spot for those who answer this way to consider. I am simply going to give you the six categories and the six potential blind spots.

Question: “Do I have a serious problem with sin?”

- I. **Yes, I know I’ve got an anger problem. I feel guilty and discouraged.** Blind spot? You can get mixed up about the goal of change. For example, the opposite of tantrums and bitterness is not a placid temperament and unflappable demeanor. And you can misunderstand the process of changing. For example, there is no technique or strategy to actually resolve what is going wrong. We need a different kind of help, a different helper, a different depth of self-understanding, and a different timetable for the process. And so your good intentions misfire because it’s hard to see the way forward.
- II. **Maybe, but I know other people who have a lot bigger problem than I do.** Blind spot? They don’t look deeply enough into their own motives. Is your seeming smaller problem still a serious problem worth tackling? When does being comparatively not-so-bad drift into being self-righteous?
- III. **No, I don’t have a problem. I’ve got good reasons to be angry and bitter.** Blind spot? They act as if two wrongs (or twenty) make a right. They don’t reckon with how plausible a blame-shifting stance seems, even while we are deceiving ourselves about

- ourselves. Could you be partly right and quite wrong at the same time? It happens all the time to all of us, which is why wise self-understanding does not reduce to a pat answer and easy solution.
- IV. **Well, I might get angry sometimes, but I'm not really an angry person.** Blind spot? They don't see themselves in the mirror in order to take responsibility for themselves. Are you really such a "nice guy" or "sweet lady"? Is your anger only an anomaly and alien intruder, the fault of others?
- V. **No way! I've found that anger is the empowering solution to personal problems and social injustice.** Blind spot? They don't see how easily the oppressed turn into aggressors, how subtly self-righteousness blinds us, how smoothly anger at real wrongs goes really wrong. Are you right about what's wrong, but wrong in your way of being right?
- VI. **Huh? I hardly every get angry. Life's usually been pretty good, and I try to keep the problems in perspective.** Blind spot? Overly calm sorts usually have a hard time seeing that human beings ought to care enough to get angry sometimes. They keep their distance from life's troubles in order to keep life peaceful. And they may not see the subtler forms of anger that still inhabit them, like a virus incubating in some remote corner of the body. Or is it an indifference that makes me detached from what I ought to connect to?¹

I would encourage each of you, with or without the above representative responses, to take some time to think through how **you** personally respond to the question: "Do I have a serious anger problem?" and to think through which aspects of the way you deal with anger could use genuine improvement. This reflection will help you a great deal as we move through subsequent chapters.

Chapter 4: "I'm Against That"

A Challenge that We Face: When we say the word "anger" we all respond to that word emotionally. The challenge in talking about anger is that we all respond to that word differently. Some words, like "toothpaste" or "pencil" probably mean very similar things to most of us – and those meanings probably don't entail a great deal of emotional baggage. Other words, like "alcoholic" can evoke very different responses if you are a student talking about alcoholism in a health class, a recovering alcoholic, or if you suffered emotional and physical abuse as a child at the hands of an alcoholic parent. The same word may carry very different emotional connotations depending on who is hearing it.

"Anger" is a lot more like "alcoholic" than it is like "toothpaste." A person who grew up in a peaceful home with a very happy marriage thinks different things when they hear the word "anger" than someone who feels he or she has to walk on eggshells all of the time lest their spouse explode in a vicious tirade against them.

The difference isn't so much in how each individual would define anger, but with how we carry many experiences of anger with us when we think about that word. It will be helpful, therefore, if we can move from experiences of violence, passive anger, bitterness, self-righteous anger, and irritability to get to the core and define what anger *is*.

¹ Excerpted from David Powlison, *Good & Angry*, pp. 25-31.

Definition: David Powlison defines anger like this:

At its core anger is very simple. It expresses “I’m against that.” It is an active stance you take to oppose something that you assess as both important and wrong.²

Dr. Powlison comments:

The DNA [of anger] is *not* a heightened pitch of emotion. It’s *not* the surge of adrenaline. It’s *not* any particular way of expressing anger. It’s *not* which events or people happen to tick you off. It’s *not* whether you get into arguments. The underlying essence is the negative evaluation; **active displeasure toward something that’s important enough to care about.** ...

This evaluative core *underlies* our narrower associations to anger. Every incident has three things in common.

1. I identify some *perceived wrong*.
2. I take a *stance of disapproval* and feel displeasure.
3. In some way I’m moved to action – to say or do something about it. (At minimum, there’s an implication of potential action.)³

We are going to look at how this sort of value judgment works by looking at five examples from the Bible:

I. Esther 1:1–12

[1] Now in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces, [2] in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne in Susa, the citadel, [3] in the third year of his reign he gave a feast for all his officials and servants. The army of Persia and Media and the nobles and governors of the provinces were before him, [4] while he showed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor and pomp of his greatness for many days, 180 days. [5] And when these days were completed, the king gave for all the people present in Susa the citadel, both great and small, a feast lasting for seven days in the court of the garden of the king's palace. [6] There were white cotton curtains and violet hangings fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rods and marble pillars, and also couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl, and precious stones. [7] Drinks were served in golden vessels, vessels of different kinds, and the royal wine was lavished according to the bounty of the king. [8] And drinking was according to this edict: “There is no compulsion.” For the king had given orders to all the staff of his palace to do as each man desired. [9] Queen Vashti also gave a feast for the women in the palace that belonged to King Ahasuerus.

² David Powlison, *Good & Angry*, p. 39

³ David Powlison, *Good & Angry*, p. 39

[10] On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha and Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, [11] to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the princes her beauty, for she was lovely to look at. [12] But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs. At this the king became enraged, and **his anger burned within him**.

And we see how the King acted on his anger in verse 19:

[19] If it please the king, let a royal order go out from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes so that it may not be repealed, that Vashti is never again to come before King Ahasuerus. And let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she. (ESV)

II. Job 32:2-3

[2] Then Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, burned with anger. He burned with anger at Job because he justified himself rather than God. [3] He burned with anger also at Job's three friends because they had found no answer, although they had declared Job to be in the wrong. (ESV)

III. 1 Samuel 18:7-9.

[7] And the women sang to one another as they celebrated,

“Saul has struck down his thousands,
and David his ten thousands.”

[8] And **Saul was very angry**, and this saying **displeased him**. He said, “They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands, and what more can he have but the kingdom?” [9] And Saul eyed David from that day on. (ESV)

IV. Exodus 32:1-10

[1] When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, “Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” [2] So Aaron said to them, “Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” [3] So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. [4] And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” [5] When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a

proclamation and said, “Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD.” [6] And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

[7] And the LORD said to Moses, “Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. [8] They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’” [9] And the LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. [10] Now therefore let me alone, that **my wrath may burn hot against them** and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you.” (ESV)

V. Mark 3:1-6

[1] Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. [2] And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. [3] And he said to the man with the withered hand, “Come here.” [4] And he said to them, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent. [5] And he looked around at them **with anger**, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. [6] The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him. (ESV)