



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

Seven Deadly Sins

Part 7: Anger Management

Steve Lombardo | September 18, 2016 | Ephesians 4:26-27



We're near the end of our series on the Seven Deadly Sins. At the Aurora campus, a member was heard to say, "I'm really enjoying the seven deadly sins." I think we know what he meant. But how have you liked the series? Have you been convicted of sin? I know Tim and I agree that it's hard to preach on sin, because we also struggle with sin. So if you've been convicted of sin, that's a good thing.

Or maybe you've been tempted to think more like a Pharisee who thinks, "Boy, a lot of people are struggling with this stuff, but I'm not really struggling all that much." Or like the Pharisee who would publicly pray, "Thank You, God, that I'm not like all these other sinners." We don't want that reaction either, do we?

We ask that God would bring us to a place of repentance. In Romans 2:1-4, we read that it's God's grace and kindness that leads us to repentance. So when we feel conviction of sin, when we feel the Holy Spirit working on our conscience in such a way as to bring us to repentance and turning from that sin, that's a great gift of God's kindness to us. We've been praying that God would reveal His kindness to us as we strive to deal with sin in our life.

Today we're going to be talking about the sin of anger. We'll begin in Ephesians 4:26-27: *"Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil."*

Are you a slave to the sin of anger? We just read, *"Be angry and do not sin."* It's possible to be angry and not to sin. How is this done?

1. We need to discover the place where anger originates.

In order to be angry and not sin, we need to understand where anger originates. Let's discuss a definition of anger.

Anger is an emotional response based on a perceived injustice.

Have you ever been angry? More than likely you've been angry because something has happened that is a perceived injustice. Because it's always easier to talk about other people rather than ourselves, let's go to the nursery for our example. There are two kids playing with the toys. One kid has a toy, and the other kid comes up and takes the toy. The first kid gets angry. He may start to cry or yell, or even fight. He perceives that there has been an injustice. Now the first child might have that toy, but this time it is the nursery worker coming to clean up who takes that toy from him. He may still see this as an injustice and have the same type of reaction.

In other situations, something has happened that causes anger, but it might not be manifested by yelling or crying, but rather by a settled anger. When your kid is being bullied at school and nothing seems to be being done about it, you might have an inward, settled anger at the injustice that is happening.

Anger, both good and bad, comes about as result of a perceived injustice.

Anger is rooted in God's Person.

That leads to a second point, that God is angry, and in fact anger is rooted in His perfections. God is a perfect God, perfect and holy. He is love, but He does experience anger. Because we are created in His image, we experience anger like He does. Did you know God gets angry?

You might say, "Show me in the Bible." That's a good response. We're Village Bible Church, so let's see if it's true that God does get angry. God gets angry at sin. Isaiah 30:27–28:

Behold, the name of the Lord comes from afar, burning with his anger, and in thick rising smoke; his lips are full of fury, and his tongue is like a devouring fire. His breath is like an overflowing stream that reaches up to the neck; to sift the nations with the sieve of destruction.

God shows anger toward individuals.

- Psalm 88:16–18, *"Your wrath has swept over me; your dreadful assaults destroy me."* God expresses anger toward His people Israel in the Old Testament.
- Exodus 32:9–10, *"And the Lord said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them.'"* God has anger toward all the nations because of sin.
- Ezekiel 25:17, *"I will execute great vengeance on them with wrathful rebukes. Then they will know that I am the Lord, when I lay my vengeance upon them."*

God experiences anger. This is a settled anger, as part of His being, as part of His holiness when it is juxtaposed to sinfulness and evil and unrighteousness. Jesus, God in the flesh, gets angry as well—and we'll see that in a moment.

2. We need to discern the purpose of anger.

So in order to be angry and not sin, we first need to discover the place where anger originates. Then second, we need to discern the purpose of anger. Good anger has a purpose. Anger that is directed toward unrighteousness—godly anger—has a purpose.

It is to seek to stop evil.

If you are angry because of evil or an injustice, you're going to stop it.

How many people know what M.A.D.D. stands for? Mothers Against Drunk Driving. That began with a mom whose daughter was killed in 1980. Thirteen-year-old, softball all-star Cari Lightner was killed on May 3, 1980, in Fair Oaks, California. She and a friend were walking to a church carnival. A three-time repeat offender, out of jail just two days from a fourth DUI arrest, was barreling down the road and hit Cari from behind, throwing her out of her shoes 125 feet. He then fled the scene, but was later arrested and charged with her death. So this mom got mad. She was angry at the injustice and evil that had taken place. Because of the work of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, the rates of vehicular homicides have been drastically reduced.

It is to save the evildoer.

So while the purpose of anger is to seek to stop anger, it also seeks to save the evildoer. We get angry, yet in our anger toward injustice we remember that it must be directed toward the salvation of the evildoer. This is the heartbeat of God.

We have something interesting going on in 1 Peter 3. Evidently some believing women are being instructed on how they are to relate to unbelieving men. There is some injustice being done, maybe some harsh treatment—an inequality before the Lord. These women are upset, probably angry about their situation. Peter says in verses one and two, *"Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives—when they see your respectful and pure conduct."*

That's counterintuitive. "Don't get mad. Don't yell. Don't make snide remarks. Don't tell your girlfriends how stupid your man is. Rather, let that anger at a perceived injustice—or maybe he is wrong—let that anger spur you on to love and good deeds, so that by your conduct you may win him over to Jesus." Maybe you're a woman in that place right now, and God would say to you, "You're angry. There is injustice being done. But by your love and good deeds, that anger can produce fruit in order to save the evildoer."

It is to strengthen our faith.

So the purposes of anger are to stop evil, to save the evildoer, and then thirdly, it's to strengthen our faith. There are times when we're angry that we can't do anything about the evil. There are times when we can't save the evildoer. Let's turn to John 11 where Jesus gets word that His friend Lazarus is ill. We don't have time to go through the whole passage, but essentially Jesus waits until Lazarus dies before He shows up in Bethany. Verse 17: *"Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother."*

So Jesus gets there and everybody is in mourning. Lazarus has died. Jesus wasn't there in time. Beginning in verse 28, Martha says to Mary:

"The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Jesus is a close friend of Lazarus and Mary and Martha. He was a frequent visitor in their home. They had sent word that Lazarus was sick, and yet Jesus didn't come in time. "Jesus, if only You had been here, Lazarus would still be alive." Verse 33, *"When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled."*

That phrase "deeply moved" is not just a simple emotion of being upset. It means indignation. The literal word refers to a war horse snorting as it goes into battle. It's a mixture of anger, indignation and being fired up by the situation. Jesus is deeply moved. He's angry.

And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?" Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it.

So Jesus is angry. He's angry at the situation. He feels this anger that you and I experience—but He experiences it perfectly. He experiences it toward the sin in the world, the sin that produced the death in front of Him. He is angry that people are lost, that they don't trust or have faith in Him. He sees the evil and He's deeply moved. He's angry deep in His spirit.

When we have these emotions, if we were where Jesus was, we couldn't do anything about it. So it's in those moments that anger should work to strengthen our faith in Christ. Then in those times when we don't have any answers, in those times when we don't know what's going on, in those times when we feel deeply moved but there's nothing we can do—those are the times we must believe. We must have faith and put our hope and trust in the God of justice.

Pastors have opportunities that touch eternal matters. I've been with people at the point of their death, as they've stepped into the presence of Jesus. Sometimes I'm there before or just after the death. I remember one time in a home where the grandfather was dying. The whole family was there with him. He wasn't really old, but he had cancer which had come upon him quickly and he went downhill very fast. Earlier that day he had been talking, but by the time I arrived he was nearing the end. We had prayed throughout the time he was struggling. His prayer was that the Lord would watch over and protect his family, and that He would save them. He prayed for his grandsons. He also prayed that his death would come quickly—that he wouldn't linger. I got to pray with him and his wife. After I said, "Amen," about 10 seconds later he stopped breathing. I'll never forget the cries in the room, the heaviness that was present in the family. There was a deep sense of the injustice of death. It hurts. And it's in those times that we put our faith in Jesus, because this is Who Jesus is.

Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." The man who had died came out, his hands

and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

In those times when you don't have the answers—even in the face of the injustice of sin and death—we strengthen our faith because we have our faith and hope not in ourselves, but in Jesus Christ, the Creator and Ruler of all things. While we don't have answers, nor can we stop the evil or save the evildoer, yet we can still strengthen our faith in Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

3. Distinguish between a pair of angers.

So in order to be angry and not sin, we need to discover the place where anger originates. We need to discern the purpose of anger. Then we must distinguish between a pair of angers. There are two ways to look at anger.

Anger can be definitive.

First, anger can be definitive. The facts are clear. An injustice has been committed. Your anger is a righteous anger. You trust in God to take care of it. This is the definitive type of anger.

Anger can be distorted.

But then there's a distorted anger. Most of the time, this is the kind of anger we deal with. This is the anger that leads to sin. While we sometimes think it's definitive, we have misconstrued the evidence. We are not perceiving things correctly. James 1:20 says, *“The anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires.”* Many times we are not perceiving things rightly, but have a distorted view of what's going on. Often our anger is rising up in us, and we are rising up, thinking our anger is going to produce something good. But all too often our anger does not produce the righteousness of God.

4. Diagnose whether anger is a problem.

Am I sinning in my anger? We must diagnose if our anger is a problem—maybe it is for you, as it is for me.

Am I perceiving things accurately?

This is an important question because we tend to get this wrong a lot. Our perception may not be aligned with reality.

I'm so thankful that my parents moved from downstate to just down the road from where we live. It's great for the kids. It's great for us. I like being close. We were over there recently looking through things and we found some old videos. I had told my boys how good I was at baseball in college. They thought I was Pete Rose or somebody like that. I found the video of a game and popped it in. I was pitching—and I wasn't that good. I seem to remember throwing the ball a lot harder. Even certain circumstances in that game were all fouled up in my memory. So we only watched about ten seconds of it. I didn't want my boys to see it.

But we tend to do that a lot. We don't perceive something for what it is. We remember it wrongly. And we can get angry over something that's not even real. We can be angry with someone who doesn't even know they've hurt or offended us. We have to be careful that our perceptions are true.

How can we know if our perception is right? Let me give you two simple things. First, Matthew 18 tells us how to deal with other believers—or even with all people. Jesus says, “First, if someone has offended you or sinned against you, go to that person.” That's the first step—go to the person and make it right. Now, there are further steps along that process, but as I've said from this pulpit before, I think if we do that first step well, that will take care of 96% of all the problems we find ourselves in with other people. So, according to Matthew 18, go to the person and express why you're angry—and see what the true case is.

Secondly, ask your friends and family members about the situation. Maybe they can help you. Ask your small group members. “Here's the situation. Here's what I'm experiencing. Here's what I'm feeling. I've got some anger here. Tell me if I'm off base.” See, God gives us people in the church for relationship and accountability and for help in living our lives, especially as we deal with sin, including the sin of anger.

Am I promoting God's righteousness?

So if anger is a problem, are we perceiving things accurately? Are we promoting God's righteousness? Would God be angry at what we're angry at? In our anger, are we concerned about stopping evil and saving the evildoer? Or is it just a quick reaction, a temper flare-up?

Am I provoking further anger or fear?

Does your anger cause the people around you to be afraid? Does your anger, Dad, that you demonstrate in the home make your wife or kids scared of you? That anger is sin.

Am I putting others or myself in a dangerous situation?

I read this past week that if something happens to you on the road—if you're a victim of a road rage incident, such as somebody cuts you off or honks at you or raises a certain finger at you—one out of two people will respond in kind. They'll do the same thing back. That's how road rage becomes terrible, because once it starts, there's a 50% chance the other person will respond.

We all have to admit—well, maybe not all of us, but I've had that feeling before—that when something happens on the road, we just feel like running the other car off the road. I've never thought that, by the way. Close.... But that's a problem.

So what do we do?

5. Deploy the best response plan when angry.

In order to be angry but not to sin, have a plan to deal with your anger.

Recognize you are angry.

For some of you, that's not hard. Your face turns red, your blood pressure goes up—everybody, including yourself, knows that you're angry. In that moment, take a deep breath. "Okay, I'm angry." But after that moment, be honest about your feelings.

See, sometimes we as Christians like to put on a happy face. "Everything's fine. No, no, it's fine." Yet there's a deep root of bitterness somewhere down there. There's anger toward someone, but just to be a good Christian you're going to say, "No, it's cool. Everything's fine." Recognize that you're angry.

Restrain your immediate response.

You might have the answer right away as to what to do, but restrain yourself. In Genesis 4, we see the story of Cain and Abel. Abel's sacrifice was accepted by God, but Cain's was rejected. And Cain was angry. Remember what anger is? It's an emotional response to a perceived injustice. His perceived injustice was that God rejected his sacrifice. Why would God reject it?

The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it" (Genesis 4:6–7).

Restrain your immediate response. "Cain, be careful. Your immediate response is to desire to kill your brother, to lash out in anger. Be careful. Sin is crouching at your door." He was angry, and sin was crouching—the sin of anger.

Resist the devil.

Then the best plan is to resist the devil. And now we end up back where we started, in Ephesians 4. There's a very interesting connection here between anger and the devil. Ephesians 4:26–27, "*Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.*"

When you have anger that's unresolved—whether it is against your spouse or a family member or somebody in the church—it stays out there. When Matthew 18 doesn't happen, when there is bitterness, then the devil has a place to grab you. He has a wound to pour salt in. He has an open door to do damage to you and render you incapacitated for Kingdom work for the Lord. So deal with your sin. Don't let the sun go down on your anger. Make it right.

So we want to not sin in our anger, we need to know what it is and the place where it comes from. We need to discern the purpose and distinguish what kind of anger it is—if we're seeing things correctly. And then we want to deploy a plan to deal with it.

Jesus died for our sins, including our sin of anger. We pray that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of life, the resurrection and the life, would grant us victory in this area.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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