

An angry man stirs up dissension, and a hot tempered one commits many sins.

We're in the book of Proverbs again this morning, if you'd take a Bible and turn there. We're looking today at Proverbs chapter 29 and just one verse, as we come to the Lord's table today, verse 22. Proverbs 29:22.

We are investing a few weeks in Proverbs - looking at some topics that arise there over and over again, topics that are as contemporary today as they were in Solomon's time. Proverbs offers us wise counsel toward living a healthy life, and toward pleasing God in the things we do and the ways we think.

These last few weeks, we've looked at the warnings in Proverbs against greed and lust and vengeance. We've been challenged to take to heart the dangers in adopting these attitudes and the lifestyles that go with them.

Today, we read about the dangers of anger.

Anger is an interesting topic in Scripture, and it's different from the other three topics we've covered in this study so far. On the one hand, there are many clear warnings here in Proverbs and in other places in Scripture against anger. Solomon says that the wise turn away anger (29:8). Jesus says in Matthew five that anyone who is angry with their brother will be subject to judgment. These and many other passages give us the clear sense that anger is not good.

And yet we see places in the Bible where anger is present and apparently justified. Jesus Himself was angry at the desecration of the temple...of His Father's house. Several times He was angry with the religious leaders of his day and particularly with their treatment of people. We see God the Father's anger burn against his own people's disobedience and against the rebellion of other nations who rejected Him.

So we come to understand that anger is not like greed or lust or vengeance in that there are times when anger is justified. Scripture *never* justifies greed or lust or vengeance in us. These things are the fruit of a warped heart – a heart that isn't walking as closely with God as it should. Living in greed or lust or vengefulness is sinful behavior; these are weeds that need to be pulled in our lives.

Anger, on the other hand, *is* appropriate at times. Both God the Father and Jesus participate in anger, which tells us that anger, in and of itself, is not sinful. There is a kind of anger, some call it righteous indignation, that is appropriate in us when the right is ignored and the wrong is accomplished or even celebrated. When we see injustice happen, the Christian *will* be angered. If we're not, I'd suggest there may be something wrong with our sensitivity and our perception of good and evil. In fact, the longer we walk with God, the more sensitive we should be to the injustices of our world, and they should trouble our spirit, just as Jesus' spirit was troubled when the wrong prevailed.

Anger is an emotion that is sometimes appropriate in our world.

However, there is much misdirected anger in our world today too...anger that is neither good nor appropriate, and this is where anger becomes sinful.

What do I mean? Well, here are two common examples of sinful anger:

The first is that anger that seethes under the surface of a person's life. Maybe something happened years ago, maybe there's some scar that you're carrying that has caused a build up of anger inside you. It may have all started over a true injustice; maybe you were legitimately wronged, and your anger was justified. But carrying that anger bottled up in your heart, over a long period of time, is neither good nor godly. Anger that is nursed, that is held on to as a grudge, is never healthy anger, no matter how legitimate its origin.

Also, anger that is directed against *people* and not against *issues or conditions* is sinful anger. Anger directed at a person is not righteous indignation...anger directed at a person is an unforgiving spirit.

Now, don't get me wrong, we're certainly free, and at times we are called of God to oppose *issues*, but we are called of God to love people, and even those people who support issues that we oppose.

Jesus loved people, and He dealt with *issues*. We're called to do the same. Because if we don't, if we're content living with an angry spirit within us, if we turn our anger upon people rather than circumstances, sooner or later, we'll bring more trouble on ourselves.

You see, it's not just the anger that's inappropriate. It's what can happen when that anger comes out:

Verse 22 there: "*An angry man stirs up dissention.*" It's interesting that the word for "angry" here is translated "nose." The Hebrew paints a picture of an angry person: what happens when we get upset? Our nose gets red. It widens on our face because our breathing is more intense. Even without saying anything, it's obvious that we're angry – people can read it right here.

Proverbs says when someone gets angry, when someone is incensed, more often than not, they make trouble. Even if their anger is justified, when we operate out of anger, when we act in anger, we usually say things we shouldn't say...things that we don't really mean. Or, we say things in a wrong manner, with an inappropriate tone in our voice.

Proverbs says that when people operate out of anger, they cause dissention or discord or strife. This is a danger of anger. When we act in anger, we're not really in control of ourselves and we do things that we wish we hadn't.

You've heard the story about the man who bought himself a parrot for his birthday. But he soon came to find his parrot had a bad attitude and a horrible vocabulary. The parrot was hostile; he spoke rudely and cursed everybody. The man worked hard to try to change the bird's attitude – he spoke kindly, he was always gentle, he played soothing music – but nothing worked.

One evening, the man invited a woman who he'd been dating for a short time, a woman he liked very much, to his house for dinner. Throughout the evening, the parrot, from his cage in the kitchen, made one terrible comment after another until finally, embarrassed and furious, the man excused himself from the table, went to the kitchen, grabbed the parrot, put him in the freezer and shut the door.

For a few minutes, he heard the bird squawking and kicking and screaming...but then suddenly...quiet. The abruptness of the silence brought the man to himself. He realized what he had done in his anger, and he felt awful. Frightened that he may have really hurt the bird, he quickly opened the freezer door and looked inside.

The parrot, very calmly, stepped out onto the man's extended arm, looked at his owner, and said, "I'm so sorry that I have offended you with my language and my actions. I ask for your forgiveness and I promise to try to correct my behavior."

The man was astonished, but before he could say anything, the parrot went on, "And if I could, may I ask what the chicken did?"

"An angry man stirs up dissension." He says things and does things in his anger that creates trouble for himself and for others.

And then the second part of verse 22 there: "***and a hot-tempered man commits many sins.***"

The word for "angry" here in the first part of this verse is the Hebrew "aaf." The word is different for "hot-tempered" in the second part of the verse. "Khay-maw" means "hot" or, interestingly, it can be translated as "poison" too. A khay-mah man, a hot man, a poisonous man is a person who is on a slow boil. He's been simmering for a while. It's a person who lives in a state of heatedness – a person who is ready to explode with relatively little provocation because he's carrying around this rage inside of him. "Aaf" is angry. "Khay-maw" is rage, or poison within, you see.

A girl doing her homework one night asked her father to explain to her the difference between anger and rage. So he went to the telephone and dialed a number and had his daughter listen in to the conversation.

"Hello," he said to the man who answered, "Is Melvin there?"

The man replied, “There is no Melvin here.” So, the father hung up. Then he dialed the number again and said, “Hello; is Melvin there?”

“Now look,” the man yelled, “I just told you there is no Melvin here. Why don't you look up numbers before you dial them?” Then he slammed down the receiver.

The father explained to his daughter, "You see, that was anger. Now I'll show you rage."

Again, the father dialed the number, and when the voice roared “Hello!?” he calmly said, “This is Melvin. Have there been any calls for me?”

“Khaymaw” is rage. It’s deep-seated, simmering anger that boils inside, waiting to explode, like the magma inside a volcano. It’s what happens over time when we allow anger to capture a part of us. It festers and grows. And just like that magma, given an opportunity, it will come to the surface in violent and dangerous ways. Anger will eventually control our responses and it will cause us to sin against God and against other people.

“A man *given to anger*,” that’s how the Revised Standard Version translates this part of verse 22; “A khaymaw man, a hot man, a poisoned man, a man who is given to anger commits many sins.”

Can I mention just one other thing, with regard to anger and rage...they affect our ability to worship, whether we realize it or not. In fact, it’s impossible to worship God truly while we’re harboring sinful anger against our neighbor. Jesus said in Matthew 5, "When you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift." Jesus said in Luke 6, “Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”

You see, Jesus never allows us to separate our relationship with God from our relationships with other people. John Wesley put it this way: “Christianity,” he said, “is essentially a social religion; to turn it into a solitary religion is indeed to destroy it.”¹ We can’t relate to our heavenly Father vertically if our horizontal relationships with one another are soiled by anger.

Now here’s the good news: If you struggle with anger today, believe me when I say, God would like very much to lift that burden from you. He would like to take away that rage in your heart; to temper your responses; to soothe the burning that you feel inside.

Would you welcome that? Would you be courageous enough to admit to God that you have this anger within you and that, try as you might, you just

¹ Jackson, Thomas, ed. *The Works of John Wesley. A.M.*, 14 Volumes, 1829. V, p 296.

can't seem to get rid of it? Maybe it's come out against your husband or wife or children or friends and its frightened them and it's even frightened you.

God offers overcoming grace to you today.

You know, here's the thing: I could give you all sorts of advice and suggestions for managing anger and rage. There are all sorts of techniques and ideas out there - things you can read in one of the many books written toward helping people manage their emotions, and particularly anger.

But the thing is, anger management is not the calling of the church. God is more interested in *transformation* than He is in mere management or improvement. And God has the power to do it.

Anger is a spiritual issue. It's an emotion that we have because of the fall – and if it rages inside you, then our enemy has stolen a part of you. God wants to give that part of your emotional life back to you, to use in godly ways and for godly purposes. He would like to do that today. The question is, “Will you let Him?” Will you let Him redeem and restore the part of you that anger has overtaken?

This redemption I'm talking about begins by establishing a relationship with God. We do that through faith in Jesus Christ, God's Son. He came and died to make a way for you and for me to know God, our Creator, and to begin walking with Him in this life.

We must admit that we need God in our lives – that we can't save ourselves.

We must confess that we've sinned against God and that we need forgiveness.

And then, we must receive Christ as our savior and begin walking with God, begin this relationship...this is the gospel, this is where it starts.

Then as we walk on with God, as He shows us those parts of us that still need redemption, those parts of us that still don't look much like Jesus, He challenges us to have faith in Him to transform us.

Walking with God means trusting Him with whatever He might want to do *with* us and *in* us today and tomorrow and every day after, until we see Him face to face, when this life is over.

The God who saves us will also redeem us and restore to us a healthy emotional life, a life free of sinful anger and rage.

His grace is sufficient. We celebrate that grace this morning.

Communion.

Will Rogers once said that "people who fly into a rage seldom make a good landing." God is interested in all of us making a good landing. He stands ready to transform us, if we'll come to Him honestly and with faith believing that He can change us for good.

As we come to His table today, think back over these things we've talked about in the last few weeks. If God has shown you vestiges of greed or lust or vengeance or anger in your life, let Him deal with those things right here. Let Him change your heart. Let Him transform those places, that as you take the body and blood of Christ, Jesus Himself would fill the greedy places with contentment, the vengeful places with forgiveness, the angry places with calm. Jesus would replace lust with real love – His love for others.

May He have the freedom to work in all of us today, that we would be more like Jesus.