

The Anger of the Fool

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Introduction.

- A. One of the strangest things about modern American society is which age group it has chosen for its role models. In most societies, it is the old who are the most respected and looked up to. They are revered for their wisdom, and all other age groups are expected to show deference to them. In America, by contrast, it is the young who are the focus of society's attention. Our country admires them for their youth and health and beauty, and if our TV shows and movies are any guide, we also think they are more in touch and with-it than their elders. Apparently, we think wisdom is something you're born with that deteriorates over time.
- B. A dangerous consequence of this cult of adolescence is the ease with which Americans give in to anger. There's nothing particularly lovable about the teenage girl who throws a screaming, door-slamming temper tantrum once a week, but we recognize that with proper guidance, she'll grow out of it. The problem comes, though, when our embrace of youthfulness leads us to embrace that youthful expression of anger. There are millions of people in this country who should know better, but choose to act just like that teenage girl whenever things don't go their way. If we aren't careful, we can end up in that category ourselves.
- C. How, then, do we deal with this problem? How do we keep a godly grip on our anger when so many around us do not? We can only accomplish this important spiritual goal through a constant assessment of our behavior based on the standard of God's word. Within the pages of Scripture, we find all kinds of advice about this ungodly anger. Let's turn, then, to the Bible today to learn from its teachings about the anger of the fool.

I. Characteristics of Foolish Anger.

- A. As we consider this idea of the anger of the fool, we need to begin by identifying some of its characteristics. The first of these characteristics is that foolish anger is **SELFISH**. We see this illustrated toward the end of the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:25-28. Here, the prodigal son has already returned, his father has already embraced him, and the celebratory feast has already begun. In comes the older brother of the prodigal son, he sees this unexpected feast, and he wants to know what's going on. One of the servants tells him that it's because the prodigal son has returned. Instead of rejoicing on his brother's behalf, who has repented of his wicked ways, the elder brother becomes angry. Why? Because he doesn't care about the salvation of his brother at all. He cares only about himself. All he sees is that his worthless younger brother has gotten a feast, whereas he himself has NEVER gotten a feast despite all his hard work. The anger of the elder brother here is all about what he thinks he deserves. It's about his selfishness.
- B. It's easy to shake our fingers at the elder brother, but we need to ask ourselves how much of the time OUR anger is similarly selfish. Here's what all of us need to do. The next time we're angry, we need to stop and ask ourselves WHY we're angry. Is it because God has been treated contemptuously? Is it because someone else has been treated unfairly? Or is it because we think WE have been wronged, because we think someone has shown US disrespect? So much of the time in my own life, friends, when I'm angry, that's the reason why. Somebody's hurt me, and the key word in that sentence is "me." I'm not concerned about anybody else. I'm concerned about my feelings, my rights, my privileges, my elbow room. It's all about me. It's selfish. When we're angry, we need to make sure that selfishness is not the reason for our anger.
- C. In addition to being selfish, foolish anger is also **UNRIGHTEOUS**. Consider the words of James in James 1:19-20. There are many important points in this context, but the one I want to zero in on is the last one: "The anger of men does not approach the righteousness of God." That's so important to remember, and so easy to forget, because one of the primary components of anger is that deceptive feeling of righteousness it gives us. When we become angry, the world suddenly becomes very simple. We think that we're absolutely in the right, the other guy is absolutely in the wrong, and boy! are we ever going to set them straight. In reality, James 1:20 sets US straight. God is a lot smarter than we are. Even when He is angry, His wisdom is such that He can still judge righteously. We can't. Once we get mad, our ability to see things honestly goes right out the window. We believe we're completely right, even when we're completely wrong. We need to remember that. We need to remember that all the righteousness we feel is unfounded. It's just an illusion.
- D. Besides this, we must also recognize that **EASILY PROVOKED** anger is the anger of a fool. Look with me at Ecclesiastes 7:9. This passage describes people who allow anger to continually dwell inside them, just waiting until they have an excuse to unload on somebody. We've all known people like that, and if we're perceptive, we've also noticed the misery and loneliness of the lives they end up leading. Nobody wants to be close to a human volcano. However, we can fall into the same trap, especially if we get too sensitive about other people respecting us properly. We can spend our whole lives looking for signs of mistreatment or disrespect, and then erupting on people who give us what we're looking for. There's no point to that, folks. If anything, our constant demands for respect prove only that we aren't worthy of respect. Let's not be easily provoked.

- E. Yet another characteristic of the anger of a fool is that it is **OBVIOUS**. Proverbs 12:16 illustrates this point. This passage should lead us to ask the question, "When someone provokes me, how do I react?" Do I fly off the handle? Do I let them know exactly what I think of them before another minute passes? Or do I choose instead to take some time to think about it first? Friends, cool-down time is so valuable in our lives. Even when someone does wrong us, an immediate, angry response is almost always the worst thing we can do. All that does is make them mad at us back. That may be satisfying, but it's not helpful. By contrast, when we take the time to consider our options, when we ponder what has happened after the mindlessness of our anger has died down, we can usually find a solution that WILL help. Let's keep our anger concealed.
- F. The last characteristic of foolish anger that we'll look at is that foolish anger is **ENDURING**. Let's ponder Paul's wise admonition in Ephesians 4:26. We need to be sure that our anger doesn't take up permanent residence in our hearts. If we allow it to do so, it can easily become bitterness, and bitterness is one of the most destructive forces known to man, especially in the church. Have you ever known one of those situations where there are two churches about five miles away from each other, and it's because they split 20 years ago and still won't have anything to do with each other? Nobody remembers what the original quarrel was about, but they'd rather risk going to hell than have fellowship with those scoundrels five miles down the road! That's bitterness, friends, and it is one of the deadliest weapons that Satan wields against the church. Let's all resolve never, ever, ever, no matter what, to allow ourselves to become embittered against our brethren.

II. Consequences of Foolish Anger.

- A. Just as foolish anger has a number of different characteristics, so too it has a number of consequences. The first is that it **CAUSES STRIFE**. Not that we need proof for this, but let's look at Proverbs 15:18 anyway. Once again, though, this is one of those truths about anger that we pay lip service to, but that we don't think about when we should. What this verse is telling us is that when we speak wrathfully to another, what we're going to end up doing is causing strife. I've stepped on a lot of my own toes in this sermon, but this is REALLY one I forget about. My wife is the most wonderful person in the whole wide world, but from time to time, I let myself get mad about some incredibly minor thing she's done. And I get mad, and I stew about it for 15 or 20 minutes, and I decide to let her have it, and in my mind, I paint this picture of what is going to happen. Clothed in my righteous wrath, I'm going to tell her everything about how wrong she is and how right I am, and she's going to be overwhelmed by the logic of my arguments, and she's going to confess how greatly she has failed, and then we're going to live happily ever after. That's the daydream, anyway. In reality, this is not the way things work. In reality, when I descend on my wife like Moses coming down from Mount Sinai, even my sweet, wonderful wife gets offended and starts to argue back. My anger doesn't actually solve my problems. All it does is cause strife, and whenever we're angry, we need to remember that.
- B. In addition to producing strife, foolish anger also **CORRUPTS OTHERS**. Let's consider what Solomon tells us in Proverbs 22:24-25. He's warning us to think about the effects that the anger of others can have on us, and the effects that our anger can have on others. Let's look at these applications separately:
 - 1. First, this passage tells us to avoid the wrathful people whom Proverbs paints in such unflattering colors. There's an excellent reason for this: anger is contagious. We understand the principle of contagion in the natural world. When it's cold season and half the brethren at church are red-nosed and sniffling, we either refuse to shake hands with them or we go home afterward and wash ours thoroughly. We believe in having fellowship with them, but we don't want the fellowship to include germs. In the same way, anger is a disease of the soul, and in our lives, we need to quarantine ourselves from the continually angry. Otherwise, their anger will infect us, and we will become angry too.
 - 2. Similarly, we need to guard against anger in our own lives so that we do not infect those we love with the anger we express. This is true of all our relationships, but it is especially true of our relationship with our children. Back when I was in school, I can remember being around kids who just seemed sullen and angry all the time, and I'm sure the same thing still happens today. Did you ever stop to wonder where the kid was getting all the anger from? That's right; they were learning it from Mom and Dad back home. Their angry parents were training them to become angry people. If we're not careful, we can do the same to our children. Let's not forget the influence we have. The lessons we teach our kids can last them the rest of our lives. Let's make sure that continual anger is not one of those lessons.
- C. The final consequence of foolish anger that we're going to look at today is that our anger **DESTROYS OURSELVES**. Let's think about Solomon's admonition in Proverbs 20:19. Although this passage in its entirety is really another warning to avoid the angry, it also tells us something important about the wrathful themselves. Sooner or later, their anger is going to catch up to them. It's going to draw them irresistibly to destruction the way that some little kids seem irresistibly drawn to poke their fingers in electric outlets. They need to be rescued over and over and over again. Eventually, the little kid will learn, but many of the truly angry never do. They lose their jobs, they ruin their families, and then, they blame it all on somebody else and get angry about it. Let's learn to do better ourselves.

Conclusion. Even if you suffer from continual anger, God will help you win your spiritual struggles if you come to Him.