

Respectable Sins: Anger

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[0 : 00] Welcome here for this Sunday, October 24th. It's funny, I sit at the front, so I don't get to see surprises, and then I come up here, and other people have come.

So welcome here, everyone, this morning. Everyone's so spread out, I kind of feel like, okay, I'm closing every row except for the first four in the two center sections. But we can't cram in yet. We will cram in one day.

So as we continue in our sermon series, The Respectable Sins, this morning, we're going to refresh a few things. Over the course of this series, we've considered that the idea of sin, even the word itself, has become watered down.

I've heard that word used even a few times this week in ways that are kind of puzzling, in contexts that make no sense. Even many churches and preachers, we recognize that the reality of sin should be a central focus for us as Christians, as followers of Jesus Christ.

And yet, somehow, it's become less than a priority. One commentator that I've read to you in the past has said that, at its root, sin is essentially selfish disregard, choosing what we want over everything else, seeking to fulfill our selfish desires over the needs of another person, or, even worse, over the will of God in our lives.

[1 : 29] Sin is a serious issue for God because it represents things that are completely contrary to His nature, to His holiness. But we recognize that the holiness of God is not just a characteristic of Him.

It's a calling for His people as well. And as we continue in this series over the coming weeks, we're going to continue to approach this topic of sin from the perspective of sins that we may commit in our lives, that we may tend to minimize or discount or often outright tolerate.

Someone cuts you off in traffic or doesn't wait their turn in line. A person you trust insults you, or you learn that they've been talking about you behind your back.

Your child is picked on by another kid in their class. People behave in what you perceive to be closed-minded and stubbornly selfish ways that negatively affect other people.

A co-worker who is on your team consistently drops the ball, forcing you to have to juggle everything that's already on your plate as well as their responsibilities.

[2 : 57] You're confronted or accused by someone else of doing something that you didn't do. Your mouth dries up.

Your hands get cold or sweaty or both. Your heart beats faster. You begin to vibrate from the adrenaline coursing through your veins.

Your mind becomes singularly focused or instantly distracted. Your fists, your teeth, even your stomach clench.

Time suddenly begins to slow down to the point of a crawl, and you seem to develop tunnel vision. You may be able to relate to some or all of the situations or symptoms I listed there, and they're all connected this morning, as we consider the sin of anger.

As I was reflecting on anger in particular this week, I was reminded of a TV show that I watched in the 70s called The Incredible Hulk.

[4 : 12] You may remember it. You may not. You may want to forget it. But the line that stuck out to me from that show was Bruce Banner, who's a scientist who, when he becomes angry, turns into the Hulk.

He had a line that he would say particularly once in a while. And he would say, there was a journalist who was constantly hounding him, and he would say, Mr. McGee, don't make me angry. You wouldn't like me when I'm angry. Anger. Last week, we considered the connection between what I call the twin sins of impatience, and then the sin that's most often directed, directly related to

it, which is the sin of irritability.

You ever played the game Snakes and Ladders? Maybe not recently. But I got thinking about that. You're making progress, moving from space to space, then you suddenly land on a slide, or a snake, or something that knocks you down.

Right? I think it can be like that when we get on this path of impatience that leads to irritability, and if we don't recognize it, we don't head it off in time and give the situation back to God, anger is the next step in that downhill slide.

[5 : 38] It knocks us off course. It spins out of control and ultimately leads to things like chaos, utter chaos, regret. I confess to you last week that impatience and irritability are real issues for me personally.

But in recognizing my Irish and Scottish heritage, my passionate wiring as a ginger, you can't tell it up here as much, but you can still see it in the beard, anger can be a real issue for me as well, friends.

Is the same true for you? Can you recognize anger as a respectable sin with which you struggle? We're going to consider three things as we explore the sin of anger together this morning.

Recognizing anger, remedying anger, and then releasing anger. First, and there are sermon note sheets if you'd like.

We can, I can have, say, Connor run and get one. If you'd like, just put your hand up. First, this morning, how do we recognize anger? Well, I touched on what we would consider to be some of the triggers and symptoms of anger already this morning.

[7 : 01] But let's take a moment to define it. What is anger? One definition I read said that anger is a strong feeling of annoyance, displeasure, or hostility.

Another said a strong feeling of displeasure, and usually antagonism. And a third said anger is a strong feeling of being upset or annoyed because of something wrong or bad.

The feeling that makes someone want to hurt people or shout or things along those lines. A wise quote I read said, anger doesn't build.

It builds nothing, but it can destroy everything. We can recognize the verbal expressions of anger that include yelling and arguing and cursing and sarcasm.

However, anger can also be expressed physically by raising a clenched fist. You're shaking a fist at somebody, you're mad. Sometimes raising a certain finger expresses anger.

[8 : 19] Throwing a book on the floor, breaking something out of anger. Hitting a wall. There's a dent in one of my older brother's bedrooms that we chuckled about over time, but he got so mad one day, he put a fist into the wall.

That same undercurrent runs through me sometimes, and I have to be careful. It's also important to recognize that sometimes anger isn't expressed externally.

It remains internal, as an internal rumination, something that's percolating under the surface. I thought we had the lighting issue figured out.

Clearly, we don't. Just ignore it like I am and pretend it's not there. Anger, to me, as I thought about this, should be considered to be like an infection.

That's maybe a strong image, but one that will continue to spread. It will continue to fester if it's left unchecked. Anger is also like a raging fire, because it can consume and destroy everything it touches.

[9 : 30] Another perspective I read on anger this week says, speak when you're angry, and you'll likely make the best speech you'll ever regret.

Speak when you're angry, and you'll likely make the best speech you'll ever regret. Have you lived those words? I have. In Ephesians 4, verses 26 and 27, Paul, reflecting back on the words of Psalm 4, verse 4, says, Did you catch that in the beginning of that?

Paul says, In your anger. The Bible doesn't actually tell us that we shouldn't be angry. It's pretty fascinating, right? So are you saying, Okay, wait a second.

If that's true, then why are we talking about anger being a sin? Well, recognizing that we will experience anger, the Bible tells us that it's important to handle our anger properly when it comes. Handle our anger properly, recognizing that it will come. When we vent our anger thoughtlessly, it can hurt others.

[11 : 02] It can devastate relationships. And if we bottle it up, it can poison us from inside. Being perpetually angry can literally suck the joy out of your life.

So Paul here is encouraging us to deal with our anger immediately and do that in a way that will build relationships rather than damaging them.

If you ever had a conflict with someone, felt hurt or misunderstood, and then intentionally sought them out, to make sure you were both heard and understood.

Have you ever done that? Or do you tend to just go, Ah, forget it. And just be mad. Well, as awkward and uncomfortable as it can be to seek someone else out when you've had a conflict and you're feeling angry, perhaps you recognize how difficult that is.

But hopefully you can also recognize if you have done that, if it has happened in your life, you can feel immense relief. Generally speaking, in my experience over time, when you have those kind of hard conversations, the relationship benefits.

[12 : 22] It is elevated to another level through which conflict was required. By going through a difficult time, by going through a difficult conversation together, you are strengthening things, right?

So for anyone who's listening on audio, you're not experiencing the fantastic light show in the sanctuary this morning. Our lighting board was fixed this week and now it's behaving, misbehaving again.

Well, I'll be angry at the lighting board later. So can you, have you experienced that kind of situation, that kind of relationship, that kind of hard conversation that you had with someone?

Maybe you can recognize that even though it was hard, dealing with the anger was healthy.

Second, how can we remedy anger? Well, if you ever considered, this hit me like a ton of bricks this week, if you ever considered that anger isn't something really that develops or stands on its own, I'll let that sit for a moment.

Anger isn't something that develops on its own or stands on its own. Anger is actually a symptom. Anger is a symptom of something else.

[13 : 44] It's a symptom of something more, something deeper. Anger. There's a root emotion or a set of conditions that leads us to anger.

Can you recognize that? So let's consider that for a moment. Disappointment or frustration with another person or our circumstances can lead us to anger.

resentment over others or over how our circumstances compare to theirs or grudges against other people who have hurt us can lead to anger.

So this may seem strange at first, but I believe fear, anxiety, worry, uncertainty, a sense that we've lost control in a situation, a sense of vulnerability even perhaps, all of those things can also lead to anger as we go into a self-preservation kind of mode.

Grief, sadness, a sense of loss or regret, those can lead to anger as well. As we considered last week, impatience and irritability can definitely lead to anger.

[15 : 06] And all of the things that I've listed here are emotions, right? But we can so easily and so often quickly replace those more vulnerable or even reasonable emotions that I've explained with anger.

Anger towards other people, anger towards other, our circumstances, or even anger towards God directly. I believe anger gives us a sense of power or control.

Can you recognize that for yourself? Even if these are actually false senses of those things that we experience, anger can lead to a desire to get revenge, to hurt back when someone else has hurt you.

So what about the idea of righteous anger? Well, I could preach an entire sermon on that. But I think a sense of righteous anger may come when we perceive we've been mistreated, right?

When we've been treated unjustly by someone else. Righteous anger. Well, I'll get back at them. They hurt me. I have every right to get my pound of flesh, get my revenge.

[16 : 26] Well, driving our desire to stand up for ourselves or receive justice, whether we actually deserve it or not in a situation, can be a source of anger.

So I've heard variations of the next thing I'm going to say expressed to me in a few different ways by people lately. When you feel justified in being irritated and ultimately angry with another person or your circumstances, is your perception of your anger or your emotion at being justified, is it warranted?

Is it righteous? Truly righteous? Or is it actually self-righteous? what I'm suggesting here is, is your reaction or behavior correct?

And is it actually everyone else who's wrong? Or do you need to look inside? Well, it's important to return to what Scripture tells us here.

Psalms 86, verse 15 tells us, and Psalm 103, verse 8 has a similar message. But you, O Lord, are compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness.

[17:54] So remember here what we've considered before. As God's people, we are called to be holy. We are called to reflect the behavior, the attitude, the priorities of Jesus in our lives.

So recognizing that, what do you think our perspective should be on anger? Well, the connection is made for us in James 1, verses 19 to 21.

If you haven't read the book of James lately, I highly recommend it. It's a quick read and it's a deep and powerful read. James 1, 19 to 21 tells us, my dear brothers, take note of this.

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. For man's anger, hear this, does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you which can save you.

[19:12] One commentary I read said, these verses speak of anger that erupts when our egos are bruised. I'm angry because I am hurt.

I'm angry because my opinions aren't being heard. So friends, I want to turn this a little bit. When injustice and sin occur, we should become angry because others are being hurt.

When that happens, you should be angry. But we shouldn't become angry when we fail to win an argument, when we feel offended or neglected because selfish anger never helps anyone else, not even you.

Can you recognize a time in your life when you have been hurt, when you become angry and begin to plot how you're going to get even, plot your revenge against the other person?

They hurt me, I'm going to hurt them twice as much. So how would you get even by hurting someone else as much or more than they have hurt you?

[20:31] Does that help? Paul gives us a clear instruction for this in Romans 12 verses 17 to 19 when he says, do not repay anyone evil for evil.

Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Do not take revenge. Paul couldn't be more clear than that. Do not take revenge, he says, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath.

For it is written, it is mine to avenge. I will repay, says the Lord. third, how do we release anger? And I don't mean unleash on someone else, that's not a valid choice, but how do we let go of it?

Well, this morning, I won't ask anybody to raise hands, but do you have an anger problem?

[21:44] Can you recognize that in yourself? I have a question for you. Do you think that entertaining or indulging anger in your life is a choice?

If you recognize that you can change your response, if you recognize that you can change your attitude or your perception of your circumstances, and that you can respond, you can choose to respond, without letting that anger impulse translate into action, then I believe the answer is yes, it is a choice.

Remember, my friends, that anger is a symptom. I believe in our lives, you take ibuprofen, I have sore muscles, I have a headache, so I'm going to take something else.

I have allergy issues, so I'm going to take Claritin, or whatever product you choose to endorse. So we are a world that treats symptoms. So what I'm suggesting is that dig deeper.

If you are experiencing anger, it's a symptom. It can relate to past disappointment or frustration. It can relate to resentment, to grudges that you're holding against people, even to fear or anxiety or worry over uncertain circumstances.

[23:23] A sense that things in our lives are out of control, a sense of vulnerability, even grief or sadness. A sense of regret or loss can even result in anger.

So when you're feeling angry, here's our challenge. take a moment. Take a breath. Ask God to reveal the root of the anger you're experiencing.

Ask Him to help you to process that. And if, my friends, if the roots of your anger are so deep that you can't get by them, can't get past them, can't even seek them out, if they've lingered for a long time, you may be wise to seek counseling.

Because there are great Christian counselors who can help you process deep pain and deep hurt that causes anger in you. There's so many great verses we can find in the wisdom literature of the Bible that help us in having the correct perspective on anger.

I'm just going to go through them. Psalm 37 verse 8, refrain from anger and turn away from wrath. Do not fret. It leads only to evil.

[24 : 51] Ecclesiastes 7 verse 9, do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides, this is a great image, anger resides in a lap of fools.

Proverbs 14 verse 29 says, a patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly. Proverbs 15 1 reflects something similar to that.

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. Proverbs 15 8 says, a hot-tempered man stirs up dissension, but a patient man calms a quarrel.

The Bible even goes so far as to warn us about associating with people for whom anger is a problem. Proverbs 22 verses 24 to 25 says, do not make friends with a hot-tempered man.

Do not associate with one easily angered, or you might learn his ways, and get yourself ensnared. angered. Again, this is not to say that the Bible is telling us we won't experience anger, but it is expressing to us how serious and dangerous it can be, particularly if we don't recognize it and address it in a healthy way.

[26 : 23] Anger is so dangerous, in fact, that as that verse told us, that passage, we're told not to become friends with someone for whom uncontrollable anger is an issue, because anger can spread like a fire, like an infection.

Ephesians 4, verses 31 and 32 encourages us to get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

forgiveness. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you. Forgiveness.

It can be critical to resolving anger. Friends, we are called to forgive even if we haven't been asked by the person who hurt us to forgive them.

recognize past hurts in your life. Recognize disappointments or other challenges from your past that have given a root, that have planted a root of anger in your life.

[27 : 43] And ask God to heal you from those things. My friends, holding on to anger will gradually poison you.

It will negatively affect every relationship in your life, including your relationship with God. So my friends, ask God to help you recognize anger in your life.

And I'm including myself in that. Ask him to help you to heal from the things that have caused it.

Seek to remedy the anger by being quick to listen to other people, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.

And release your anger by responding to it in healthy ways and by forgiving people who have hurt you, whether they asked for it or not.

As we journey through a deeper exploration of some of these respectable sins together, we're doing this every week, I want us to say the words of 1 John 1 together each week.

[28 : 53] You ready? If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Amen.