

## Be Slow to Wrath

James 1:19-20

11/7/1999

The book of James, chapter 1. The book of James, the first chapter. We will read together verses 18 through 20. James, chapter 1, verses 18 through 20. It says, with reference to God:

“Of his own will begot he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.”

Now in our previous studies together, we have been considering how we should *act* in relationship *to* the word of truth. And as we have seen in verse 18, which I just read to you, that it is through the word of truth that God brings about the new birth. Of his own will begot he us *by* the word of truth. And so the preaching of the truth of the Bible is what God uses, in *addition* to the operation of the Spirit of God, to *regenerate* His people.

Now since the Scriptures are such a powerful instrument in the hand of God to the conversion of sinners, and since the Scriptures are the milk and meat upon which Christians grow and mature, how, then, should we be conducting ourselves in relationship to them? Well, James has told us in verse 19, first of all, that we are to be swift to *hear*. And we saw in our previous studies, this means that we are to be *quick* to expose ourselves to every opportunity to hear the word of God preached. And when we *hear* that word preached, we are to listen with a diligent attentiveness and seek to learn, retain, and practice that which we have been taught. We are to be aggressive, eager, and ready to avail ourselves of every opportunity to acquaint ourselves with the word of truth through the teaching that others give us, and by the reading of the word ourselves.

And then we saw that we were to be *slow to speak*. That is, we are to be more ready to listen than to speak when it comes to the word of God. Many people are altogether too rash to declare the meaning of the word of God before they have scarce learned it themselves. Therefore, we are to listen far more than we speak and be far more ready to *be* taught than we are to *teach*. We need to swift to hear qualified, proven teachers of the word of truth, and *slow* to be teachers of that word ourselves.

And that brings us then this evening to the third directive that James gives us regarding our relationship to the word of truth, and it is found in the last part of verse 19. He says, in relationship to the word of the truth, we are to be swift to hear. In relationship to the word of truth, we are to be slow to speak. And then, thirdly, the subject of our study this evening, in relationship to the word of truth, we are to be slow to wrath. Why? Verse 20, because “the wrath of man worketh *not* the righteousness of God.”

Now we must understand that there is often controversy and conflict between people regarding the meaning of *Scripture*. One person asserts, The Bible teaches this. And another person asserts, No, the Bible teaches that. And there is *danger* that such debates can become somewhat heated, and that they can ultimately degenerate into anger. Or, someone is listening to teaching on a biblical passage, and that teaching *conflicts* with beliefs or practices that they have held and carried out. It is easy for them, then, to become agitated and angry with the teacher because he is contradicting what they have previously held and believed.

And so it is precisely this expression of anger, in relationship to the meaning and application of the Scriptures that James exhorts us to avoid. Ecclesiastes 7, and verse 9 says, “Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger rests in the bosom of fools.” And so just as James tells us we are to be *slow* to wrath, the writer of the book of Ecclesiastes says we are to be *slow* to be angry. And the reason why is because someone who gets angry quickly is declared to be a fool.

As a general rule, then, it is not fitting that anger should be associated with either the *hearing* of the word of God *or* the *speaking* of the word of God. I would like to read to you out of Thomas Manton’s comments on this section of Scripture, in his fourth volume, page 138 through 139, “Observation 1.” He says:

“The worst thing that we can bring to a religious controversy is anger. The context speaks of anger occasioned by differences about the word. Usually no affectations are so outrageous as those which are engaged in the quarrel of religion, for then that which should bridle the passion is made to be the fuel of it, and that which should restrain undue heats and excesses winds up engaging them. However, this should not be. Christianity, of all religions, is the meekest and must humble. It is founded upon the blood of Christ, who is a Lamb slain. It is signed and sealed by the Spirit of Christ, who descended like a dove. Both the Lamb and the dove are emblems of a meek and modest humility. And should a meek religion be defended by our violences, as the God of peace served with wrathful affections, and the madness of an evil nature betray itself in this, the best of all causes? Christ’s warfare does not need such carnal weapons. As Achish said, ‘Have I need of madmen?’

“So, hath Jesus Christ need of our passions and furies? Does the God of heaven need a tongue set on fire of hell? Michael the archangel was engaged in the best cause against the worst adversary, with Satan about the body of Moses; and yet the purity of nature would not permit him to profane his engagements with any excesses and indecencies of passion. He dared not bring against him a railing accusation. And as the wrath of man is unsuitable to the matters of God, so it is also prejudicial.

“When tongue is sharpened against tongue, and pen against pen, what followeth? Nothing but mutual animosities and hatreds, whereby, if we gain aught of the truth, we lose much of love and goodness. Satan attempts to be even with God. The Devil’s kingdom is mostly ruined by the rage of his own instruments; and you cannot gratify Satan more than when you wrong the truth by an unseemly defense of it; for then he victors over Christ, overturning Christ’s kingdom by those who are engaged in the *defense* of it. Briefly, then, if you would do good, use fit means. The barking dog loses the prey” because he opens his mouth to bark. “Violence and furious persecution seldom gains. Those engaged most successfully that use the hardest arguments and the softest words; whereas railing and revilings, as they are without love, so they are without profit. Be watchful; our religious affections may often overset us.” Can’t be said any better than that.

Well then having seen in our previous messages that in regard to the word of God, we are to be swift to hear and slow to speak, today we want to consider together that in regards to the word of God, we are to be slow to wrath. In the first place then this evening, let us consider together the people addressed—the people addressed.

Now when James says that we are to be slow to wrath, *who* is he talking to? Well, the people addressed are clearly those spoken of in the first part of the verse—those who are hearing and those who are speaking, with reference to the word of God. Those who are hearing the word of God—they're to be slow to wrath. And those who are speaking the word of God, albeit they're slow to speak, nevertheless, they do speak—they are to be slow to wrath.

So this exhortation to be slow to wrath applies to both the hearers of the word of God and the speakers of the word of God, and what it is saying is that the word must not be received, nor must it be delivered, with an angry attitude or with a wrathful heart.

In the first place then, under the people addressed, let us consider together its application to the *teacher*—it's application to the teacher. The one who is speaking the word of God is not to do so in wrath. Now teachers can become frustrated with their listeners for several reasons. First of all, they can be frustrated with their lack of attendance upon the teaching, which can manifest itself as an indifference to their labors and their effort in *preparing* for them. And this can make teachers of the word wrathful.

Or, they become wrathful because of their listeners' lack of *attentiveness* to the teaching when they are present. You're teaching along, people go to sleep, they engage in private conversation unrelated to the message, they draw pictures, they allow their minds to wander without any discipline or control.

Or, thirdly, they become angry with those they are teaching, not only if they fail to attend and if they fail to pay attention, but thirdly, by their lack of any visible effort to *apply* the message. The same chronic problems occur year after year with no improvement, in spite of repeated instruction on the matter. And that can make a teacher of the word angry.

Or, fourthly, a stubborn refusal to believe and embrace the teaching, in spite of the lack of overwhelming biblical, factual, or logical reasons for doing so.

These things can easily provoke a teacher of the word to anger with those that he is teaching. They don't care if they come. When they're there, they don't care if they pay attention. When they hear the word, they don't bother to apply it. Or if the word is presented and the requirements are clear, they just choose not to believe it. Has that ever happened to me? Happens lots.

And so these things can kind of get under your skin, and they can provoke you to anger with those whom you are teaching. And the teacher, then, can give into the temptation to lash out at his listeners, using the Scriptures as his weapon, and make the word of truth the vehicle to express his own anger at people for their slowness and inattentiveness. Any of you home-school moms ever felt that way? Here you are, you're working hard to teach your kids. And you're laboring and just explained something to them, and you realize, They're staring off over there—they didn't hear a word I *said*.

Moses made this error towards Israel. In Numbers, chapter 20, in verses 1 through 6. I guess we're going to have to turn there. I didn't print those verses out. Numbers, chapter 20—why don't you turn there—verses 1 through 6. We have Israel out in the desert. It says, Numbers, chapter 20, verses 1 through 6:

“Then came the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, to the desert of Zin in the first month: and the people abode in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there. And there was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. And the people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the Lord! And why have ye brought up the congregation of the Lord into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there? And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? it is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink. And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell on their faces: and the glory of the Lord appeared unto them.”

Now Israel had already been through this little episode on several previous occasions. For example, the same thing happened back in Exodus when they had first *left* Egypt, after they had crossed the Red Sea and before they got to Mt. Sinai, in Exodus 17, verses 1 through 7. You can read it yourself. At the waters of Massah they had no water, and they were ready to stone Moses to death and deny God because they’d brought them to no place of water. And God said to Moses, He said, Take your rod and go and strike that rock there and *water* will come *out*. And indeed, water did come out. And God chode with the people there because they did not *trust* Him and because they did not believe Him and His provision *for* them.

And then, of course, the same thing happened with their desiring of food, and God sent the manna from heaven. And then they wanted *quails*, and God sent them quails, and they complained about *this* and *that*, and they said, This manna is too crummy. And God sent serpents among them. And time and time again they had complained against the Lord, or they had been *unthankful* for His provision. And you would think by now they would’ve gotten the message, *learned* their lesson, *followed* the voice of their teachers, and done the right *thing*, for once! Not these folks.

Notice. They once again complained against Moses, complained against the Lord. Numbers 20, verse 7, “And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, Take the rod and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shall bring forth to them water out of the rock: so shalt thou give the congregation and their beasts drink. And Moses took the rod from before the Lord, as he commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said to them, Hear now, you rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice.” You can just see, Wham! Wham! He’s *mad*. He is angry. He’s *furious*! “[A]nd the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also.”

Well, what happened? Verse 12, “And the Lord spoke unto Moses and Aaron, Because you believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them. This is the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the Lord, and he was sanctified in them.”

Now Moses was angry with the people—for their stubbornness against the Lord. And as a result, while he does accurately describe them as rebels, he let his *anger* at their rebellion against God and their refusal to believe God and obey God’s word, spill over into sin in his own life. He did

two things wrong out of his anger. First of all, he sought to glorify himself. He said, “Must *we*”—me Aaron—“bring water for you of this rock?” Now who was it that was bringing water out of the rock? Well, it wasn’t Moses and Aaron. It was God. And so what he did is he robbed God of His glory and he took God’s glory to *himself*.

And then secondly, he disobeyed God’s word. He *struck* the rock *twice*, and God specifically told him in verse 8, Thou shall *speak* unto the rock before their eyes. All he had to do was say, Rock, bring forth water, or something to that effect. But instead, he takes the stick and he clobbers the rock twice. Now without going into the significance of clobbering the rock, the point is, is he disobeyed God. Did he not?

Anger in the delivery of God’s word to God’s people can often result in the perversion of the message because the *anger* so colors the judgment that the teacher is more interested in inflicting retribution upon the people than he is in getting the truth conveyed accurately and glorifying God *properly*. It’s a great danger. Therefore, we must not make the word of God a servant to our personal anger or a weapon to be used in our cause, or to satisfy our own sense of personal offense.

Anyone who teaches the people of God needs to be a man who can put aside his anger at the way people have treated him, the way they have responded to the truth, or any other sinful behavior on their part, and deliver the word of God fully, fairly, accurately, compassionately, and for the glory of God, and *not* for his own advantage or for the *venting* of his own passion, or for the *satisfying* of his own desire and need for revenge. So, Max, be slow to wrath.

Now it’s time for you. Secondly, consider together its applications for the listener—it’s application to the listener. Now it is easy for those who hear the word of truth to become angry as well. And they also must mortify this tendency to become angry when they hear the word of truth.

Now why do people get angry when they hear the word of truth? Well first of all, it is easy for us out of pride and self-righteousness to become angry when we are given a just reproof or correction from the word of God. Now I’ve seen this many, many times, especially in personal counseling. People ask for help with their problems. They say, Pastor, we got a problem. We need help. Can you help us? I say, Sure, let’s meet together. So we meet together.

Well, you need to understand something, and that is, is that *all* problems, without exception, are the result of sin—either yours, or someone else’s. And so my job as a counselor is to discern where the sin lies that is at the root of the problem, expose the sin, and then bring the party who’s *responsible* for the sin to repentance with *reference* to it. But when you point out the sin that is causing the problem and call upon people to repent of it, pride rises up. You are told you don’t understand, and anger towards the counselor results in the termination of the relationship. Has this ever happened to me? More times than I care to remember. You see, anger is the first line of defense of a guilty conscience. Because it is really the *only* line of defense that a guilty conscience *has*, other than lies.

We see this dynamic at work in Acts, chapter 7, verses 51 through 58. Here Stephen is speaking to the religious leaders—the Pharisees, the Sanhedrin—and he says to them, “You stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so

do you. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom you have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.” Now there’s the identification of the sin.

Notice the response. “When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart”—that is, the conviction shot through them like an arrow. And they *knew* he had put his finger on them. And it says, “[A]nd they gnashed on him with their teeth.” That doesn’t mean they went up and started taking bites out of his arm, but what it means is, they began to speak to him in vicious and abusive and blasphemous language.

“But he,” it says, “being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord”—and stoned him to death.

Now no one likes to admit it when they’re wrong, because of pride. And pride is the fountain out of which sinful anger arises. And we see this in the lives of these Pharisees. And so therefore, do not rise up in arms against a just *reproof*, though it is a very natural thing to do. We must be slow to do so, and we must resist *yielding* to the natural inclination of our nature, which is to gnash with our teeth upon those who bring to us an awareness and accountability for our *sins*.

You see, if the reproof is not just—if the reproof is *not* just—there’s no need for anger, because the facts and sound logic and biblical principle can *all* be applied to vindicate yourself from the false *reproof*. You see, an unjustly reprovved man is a *confident* man, not an angry one. And he is confident because he knows the facts and sound reason and biblical principle are *all* on his side, and so therefore there is no *need* for anger to carry his *cause*.

But as I said, anger is the first line of defense of a guilty conscience because it’s the *only* defense it has. Was Stephen right? I mean, did he have these guys nailed, or what? I mean, they couldn’t use the facts; they couldn’t use sound reason; and they certainly couldn’t use biblical principle to demonstrate that he was wrong. The only thing they could do is either *admit* it, or destroy him.

And that’s the difference between someone who’s a Christian and someone who isn’t. When a Christian is confronted, like David, he says, I’ve sinned against the Lord. Remember when Nathan showed up? You are the man! Yeah, I am. You’re right. I’ve sinned against the Lord. David didn’t have the facts, he didn’t have sound reason, he didn’t have biblical principle upon which he could vindicate himself. But instead of getting *angry*, he confessed. Instead of gnashing on Nathan with his teeth, he humbled himself before the prophet.

And so the true children of God are the most meek when the word of God reproves them the most directly. Contrition, not anger, is their response. David went on to say in Psalm 141, and verse 5, “Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness.” You know, when a righteous person comes to you and reproves you, it’s an act of kindness because if they didn’t have feelings of love and affection for you, they’d just let you go *on*. Because, you know what? It’s a dangerous thing to reprove people. You tend to get gnashed on and *stoned*. Nobody likes that. I don’t like it. And it’s only because I love people that I continue to *do* it and to be faithful to their souls.

So our response to the reproof of the word should be one of humility, meekness, admitting the need for change rather than one of anger, and if the reproof is not just, then just pull out the facts, sound reason, and biblical principle to show why it's *not*. But in any case, there's no reason \* for anger. Anger is virtually, without exception, the manifestation that the person has been *nailed*, and they're too proud to admit it.

Secondly. The second reason why listeners get angry is not only do they get angry when given a just reproof or correction from the word. Secondly, it is easy for us when we hear teaching that contradicts our present *beliefs* or practices to become angry. It is easy for us when we hear teaching that contradicts our present *beliefs* or *practices* to become angry.

Now I find this to be the frequent reaction, for example, of Arminians, when they are presented with the sovereignty of God and the doctrines of grace. Instead of using sober reason, based on the facts and biblical principle, they become agitated, defensive, withdrawn, and terminate the discussion. They've believed this for a long time, and you start to bring data that would seem to show that it's not true, and boy, the temperature goes up and so does the voice.

The same reaction often occurs when the necessity of keeping the Sabbath holy unto the Lord is set forth. You start preaching on the Fourth Commandment, and angry cries of legalism are soon heard. And a rational discussion of the merits of the doctrine virtually becomes impossible.

Or a similar reaction occurs when certain family *practices* are addressed, such as clothing, holiday observances, jewelry, the use of alcohol, mothers working, *where* children are schooled, *how* they are disciplined. I mean, you can fill in the blank. There's all kinds of family practices that people engage in that the word has something to say about, either one way or the other. And when you begin to bring the word to bear upon those things as the teacher, the listener can easily become angry with reference to teaching on family practices.

Now the reason for the anger is due to several causes. It's oftentimes due to pride, as we've said before, because oftentimes a family leader, notably a father, is unwilling to admit that what he previously believed, practiced, and enforced in his home is in fact *wrong*. And his reputation as a reputable and reliable guide of his wife and children is at stake. And so instead of modifying his family practices to come into harmony with the word in demonstrating humility, and the fact that he recognizes that he can be *wrong* about something, he winds up defending the practice, even in the face of compelling arguments to the contrary.

Or sometimes this anger is due to *fear*. Fear, because if we are wrong on an issue, the implications of a *change* to a more biblical position are oftentimes *enormous*. For example, if you talk to an Arminian, they're afraid that if they embrace what you're talking about, they won't have a Gospel message anymore. How are you going to get people saved if you can't tell them Jesus *died* for them? How are you going to get people saved if you can't tell them God loves them? Why, I don't have a Gospel message anymore!

Or they fear they will have to give up personal sovereignty. Or those who, for example, reject the Fourth Commandment teaching on the Sabbath, they're afraid they're going to have to employ *all* of Sunday in the worship of God and give up watching sports on TV. That's an enormous change for some folks. They are afraid that if they accept *that* teaching, things are going to have to change.

This is not a new problem. It occurred in Paul's day. In Acts, chapter 19, verses 23 through 28, it says, "And the same time there arose no small stir about that way." Now when the way, that is God's way, is preached, there's always "no small stir." I've had people say to me, Well, can't we just have peace among Christians? Or, professing Christians, Can't we just all get along? Look, when you're preaching the way, there's always going to be a *stir*. Why? Because we're involved in a spiritual warfare, aren't we? We fight the good fight of faith.

And at the end of Paul's life, Second Timothy, chapter 4, he's looking back. He's ready to die. And as he looks back and assesses and summarizes the totality of this life, what are the first words out of his mouth? "I have fought a good fight." And then he says, "I've finished my course." And then he says, "I've kept the faith." All the Christian life, from start to finish is a fight. Mark it down. If don't you want to fight, then go join the Boy Scouts or something. But if you want to serve God, you're going to have to fight for God. And as Paul says to Timothy, Fight the good fight of faith. So there's a stir. Do we have stirs in our churches from time to time? Sure. Why? Because we're preaching the way. If we didn't preach the way, there wouldn't be any *stirs*. Well, we could go on, but we won't.

Notice if you will, verse 23, "And the same time there arose no small stir about that way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation," and said, Sirs, we are all gathered here to search and seek out the truth and determine what is right and follow it at any cost. Now, that's the attitude of a Christian. But that's not the attitude of Demetrius and his pals.

Notice. He said, "Sirs, you know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover you see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul"—notice the despicable, "this *Paul*" words that come out—"hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth. And when they heard these sayings, they were full of *wrath*, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians." You remember there was a big riot, and then for two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." They said the same thing, over and over and over again.

Man, have I ever had that happen? You know, you're talking to people and you say something in response to what they said, and they just say it again. And you say, Well, you know, I just said this and this and this, which shows that that's wrong. And they just keep asserting it, again and again and again. It's like, you know, remember it says, "They stopped their ears and ran upon him"? And it's like, okay, this person is not interested in pursuing the truth. This person doesn't *care* if it's true or not, what they care about is, will it *impact* their finances or their tradition or their pride or their reputation, or whatever?

So the words of Jesus in Mark, chapter 7 and verse 9, can well be applied to those who will not hear of a biblical examination of their own beliefs and practices. Jesus said in Mark 7:9, "Full well you reject the commandment of God, that you may *keep* your own tradition." You see, these folks, Demetrius and company, were not interested in the truth. They were simply interested in perpetuating a practice in order to preserve their pride and their wealth. And they

were *afraid* that if this *doctrine* that this preacher is preaching prevails, look what we're going to *lose*. We're going to lose our wealth. Let me ask you something. What did he really lose? He lost his soul, didn't he? And if he had all the wealth in the world that he kept and he lost his own soul, he was the loser.

You see, he missed out on the *true* wealth trying to hang on to the *bogus* wealth, to the counterfeit currency of the wealth of pride and personal reputation and stubbornness. That's really good currency—that really works well on the day of judgment. Try and pass that at the window of heaven—pride, stubbornness, self-will. They'll throw you in hell for counterfeiting.

And Paul asked the Galatians, in Galatians, chapter 4 and verse 16. He says to them—interesting question: “Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?” You see, Paul was telling these people the truth about their beliefs, about their practices, and about their personal behavior. And he says, Is that why you hate me, because I'm telling you the truth? Look, if I'm not telling you the truth, then show where it's wrong. And if I'm telling you the truth, don't hate me for it. Recognize that you need to *repent*.

You know, Paul had to ask the question, “Am I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?” I have become the enemy of many people for telling them the truth. But I would rather be an enemy of people than to be an enemy of God. And you become an enemy of God when you start telling people what they *want* to hear instead of what they *need* to hear and what they ought to hear.

Well, don't be angry with a faithful teacher of the word, simply because he tells you the truth about your beliefs or practices. If you don't think it's the truth that he's telling you, then use the facts, use sound reason, use biblical principle to show why you *don't*. But don't just become angry and cut off communication. And if it *is* the truth, then don't become angry with the messenger, but become angry with *yourself* for having disobeyed God, and humble yourself before God and confess your sin.

These, then, are the people addressed. The *teacher* can become angry in delivering the word. The *listener* can become angry in receiving the word. That brings us, then, to our second major point this evening, in which I'll be far more brief. Having seen the people addressed, notice in the second place the *reason* supplied—the *reason* supplied.

Now the reason supplied is found in verse 20. He says, “For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.” Now notice, if you will, it is the wrath *of man*, that is, the wrath which *proceeds* from man as its source and has human nature as its *fountain*, that is *condemned*. *Righteous* anger, that is, anger at sin, may not properly be called anger that is human anger or wrath that proceeds from *man*, because righteous anger proceeds from God, and it has its source in God. And while it is true to say that wrath of *man* works not the righteousness of God, it is equally true to say that the wrath of God *does* work the righteousness of God.

So it is the *originating cause* of this wrath, namely, remaining depravity in *us* versus the operation of God's *Spirit*, that is condemned here. It is the originating cause of this wrath that corrupts it—that it comes from fallen human nature.

Now we are to have wrath in order to accomplish the righteous purposes of God, and I preached a five-tape series on Anger, in which I spent an entire message identifying and defining the nature and application of righteous anger, and I'm not going to re-preach that here. I would encourage you to get it if you have questions about it, but suffice it to say this: We are to have wrath in order to accomplish the righteous purpose of God, but it is to be a *righteous* anger. And a righteous anger is marked by, number one, a right motive because *justice* has been violated. It is marked by a right *object*—it is anger at *sin*. He who would be angry and *not* sin must be angry at nothing *but* sin. And it has a right *expression*. It is *controlled* and *rational*. You don't see God throwing fits. When He expresses His anger, He's in control. And He is rational. And He administers *precise* justice, even in the *fury* of His anger. And so it must have a right motive and a right object and a right expression and a right *end*, a right goal—the glory of God, not the satisfaction of our own emotional needs. That's righteous anger.

And so *our* wrath, if it is righteous wrath, is to be the wrath of God, not the wrath of man. It is to be the wrath that comes *from* God, the wrath that *imitates* God in *His* expressions of anger. The wrath of *man*, that proceeds from pride and fear and self-righteousness and self-pity and revenge, that kind of wrath can never accomplish the righteous purposes of God.

And so what does he tell us? We are to be *slow* to wrath to ensure that the wrath we eventually *do* have—for we are to have wrath—we're to be slow to it. But we are to have it. Just like we're to be slow to speak, but we are to speak. We must be slow to wrath to ensure that the wrath we eventually do have is the wrath of God, and not the wrath of man, because the wrath of man *doesn't* accomplish the advancement of the word of truth.

So anger in all circumstances isn't always wrong. We're to be slow to wrath, but that doesn't mean we are to be never angry with righteous anger. In fact, teachers may be angry with a willful hardness of heart on the part of those they teach. Jesus—Mark chapter 3, verses 1 through 6—it says, “And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand. And they watched him, whether he would heal him on the Sabbath day; that they might accuse him. And he said unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth. And he said unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace.”

They wouldn't answer. This is often how faithful teachers are treated by the ungodly. They stand back in silence, refusing to talk, listening for a chance to have something to accuse him with, that they can catch out of his mouth. But they won't commit *themselves* to the conversation or to talk. They held their peace.

Verse 5, “And when he,” Jesus, “had looked round about on them with *anger*, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he said unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other. And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him.”

Now Jesus was angry with those that He was teaching. And why was He angry? Because of a *willful* hardness of heart. It was there only to find an opportunity to catch His words and to destroy His Person. In that extremity, the teacher has a right to be angry with His listeners.

We see Moses doing the same thing with Pharaoh. In Exodus 11 and verse 8, after he had done nine of the ten miracles, and he says to Pharaoh, Look, all the firstborn of Egypt are going to *die* if you don't let God's people go. And you remember how many times Pharaoh had said, Oh I've sinned, you know. I'll let the people go! Get the plague away! So the plague gets away, and what happens? He says, Nah! Get out of here! I'm not going to let the people go! This happened over and over and over again. And it says, in Exodus 11 and verse 8, that after Moses delivered his final message to Pharaoh and Pharaoh says, Get out of my sight! Don't *ever* see my face again! And Moses said, You have well spoken. I will *never* see your face again. And he didn't. And it says in verse 8, "And he went out from Pharaoh in a great anger."

That night, all the first-born were killed. The people of Egypt, ignoring Pharaoh, went to Moses in Israel and said, Get *out* of here! And they all left. And what happens? Pharaoh chases him, Moses divides the Red Sea, he goes across, Pharaoh goes across, and he's history. He gets drowned. He never saw Moses' face again.

Now Moses did blow it at the rock of Meribah. But you see, the anger was different. The motive was different, the purpose was different, the attitude was different. Everything was different about it. It was *not*, it was not a righteous anger. But rather, it was an anger that had a wrong motive, a wrong object, a wrong expression, and a wrong end.

Listeners may be angry, though they're to be *slow* to anger, just like teachers are to be slow to be angry. Listeners may become angry when heresy continues to be taught, even after it's been clearly exposed.

Now, you know, it's one thing to be told, You know, your practices are wrong. And you, on the basis of the facts, sound reason, biblical principle show that what you believe and practice *isn't* wrong. And then the teacher continues to assert that it *is* wrong. And you patiently go through the evidence again, answering his objections, showing him that his position is without biblical warrant, and he continues to assert it and will not responsibly deal with the word of truth. This occurred to Paul when he was on his first missionary journey.

When he had gone to the Isle of Paphos, Acts 13:6, "[T]hey found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus"—son of Jesus. Some name, eh? "Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man"—I don't know how prudent he was having this guy around, but the Scripture says he was prudent, "who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith."

Paul would teach the truth, and this guy would say, Oh, no, that's not right. This is right over here. And Paul would say, No. It's this way. And this guy would say, No. It's this way. You don't want to listen to this guy. And it says here, "Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand."

Here was a case where Paul got tired with a teacher and became angry with the teacher—put the teacher out of commission. When someone continues to willfully promote heresy in the face of clear truth to the contrary, we may exercise wrath that we have been slow to come into.

So there is some ultimate ground for exercising wrath. Nevertheless, we must be exceedingly careful in allowing even righteous anger, for there is no passion of the soul into which sinful elements more easily enter than *anger*. And it is exceedingly easy to carry it to an unnecessary height and degree. Nothing is more prone to destroy the fruits of the Spirit than anger. And therefore, it must be allowed, even when *righteous*, to come into existence *exceedingly slowly*. Proverbs 19:11 says, The understanding of a man defers his anger. And one of the things he understands is that quick anger rests in the bosom of fools.

God Himself is slow to wrath, is He not? And if we're going to be like God, then we need to be people who are slow to wrath. Proverbs 14:17 says, "He that is *soon angry* dealeth foolishly." But Proverbs 14:29 says, "He that is *slow* to wrath is of great understanding."

Well, may the Lord help us to be slow to wrath, whether we be teacher, or whether we be listener. And may the Lord help us to, if when we finally do exercise wrath, have the wrath of God and not the wrath of man. For the wrath of man will not advance the cause of the truth. But the wrath of God employed properly did. Did Moses' proper wrath, in Exodus 11, advance the cause of God? Sure it did. And did Paul's righteous wrath, in Acts 13, advance the cause of God? Sure it did. And did Jesus' righteous wrath, in Mark chapter 3, advance the cause of God? Sure it did. But oh, brethren, be slow to wrath. Shall we pray?

Father, thank you, that you are slow to wrath with us. And help us, Lord, to put away this most dangerous of passions. Father, how we are warned again and again and again. Lord, help us, then, to bar up our hearts against wrath and to delay any expression for a *long* time. And Father, help us to examine our own hearts and see whether it is pride or fear, or those other negative, sinful attributes that is causing the anger.

Lord, I pray that you would help us to be calm in the face of false accusation, and in the face of indifferent and hard-hearted listeners. Father, whether we be a teacher or a listener, help us to take our respective responsibilities seriously and exercise them properly. Father, we ask these things in the name of Christ, our Savior. Amen.

\* Page 7, first full paragraph. Tape skips at ~29'29". Words supplied.