

## Love is Not Easily Angered

8 of 11 in series *Love Is*

June 7, 2020

1 Cor. 13:5b

Greetings from Cornerstone Centre!

We've decided to begin filming weekly messages here now that the government is gradually lifting restrictions.

There are just two of us here at distance— Zach on camera, and myself—and we're following a specific set of safety protocols.

We do expect it will be quite a long journey before we can all gather together in this place again. But every journey begins with a first step, and this is ours. Let me tell you—it's good to be here. I hope is for you too, albeit vicariously.

Love calls us to wait patiently as a congregation for our literal return to this place, because lives are at stake, and as we heard from Pastor Kevin last Sunday, love always puts the interests of others first.

Today, we continue with our series *Love Is*. We've been exploring 1 Corinthians chapter 13, which is all about love— Christ-like *agape* love that lays down its life for the sake of others.

In this poetic chapter, the Apostle Paul essentially tells us that life minus love equals zero. If we don't get love right there's really nothing else worth getting right.

So far, we've seen that Christ-like *agape* love is patient and kind; it's not envious, boastful or proud. It's not rude or self-seeking.

Here's what's next on Paul's list of what love is and isn't:

Love... is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs.<sup>1</sup>

The subjects we've covered so far in this series have been challenging, and this week's subject is certainly no exception. Today, we're going to talk about a difficult issue that impacts so much of our world, and so many of our lives. We're going to talk about anger.

When Paul says love is not easily angered, he means that as you grow in the *agape* love of Jesus, you're going to become a person who isn't readily provoked or irritated. You'll

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:4a, 5b (NIV)

become someone who is not inclined to vent, leak, or mask your anger, but will be able to control it instead.

A helpful definition of anger comes from 13<sup>th</sup> century theologian Thomas Aquinas. He said that:

Anger is an emotional force that wells up within you when something blocks the way to a goal you desire.

Has anything or anyone ever blocked the way to a goal you desire? That's surely happened all of us, and that means we all know what it is to get angry.

But love is not easily angered, says our text. So the question is, are *you* easily angered? If so, it's both an indicator and an invitation. It's an *indicator* that you're not walking in God's love as fully as you need to be. It's also an *invitation* from God to open your heart more fully to his healing and transforming love.

Biblically speaking, anger is a complex issue, and I can't even come close to fully covering it in a single message. But let's use the time we have as best we can. Today, we'll explore **anger from three angles**. Throughout the message, I'm going to piggyback on a rhyming phrase that Tim Keller uses to describe the different aspects of anger – *blow*, *no*, and *slow*.

We'll start by considering:

### **1. The destructive power of “blow” anger.**

It may be surprising for you to hear that from the Bible's point of view, anger isn't always a bad thing. We'll talk more about that later in the message. Still, most of what the Bible has to say about anger is negative.

That's because anger, more often than not, is like dynamite. We can call this kind of anger “blow” anger, because it has explosive power. It has the power to literally *dis-integrate*, to pull your life apart— in a number of ways.

For starters, **anger is bad for your health**. Proverbs 14 says:

People with understanding control their anger; a hot temper shows great foolishness. A peaceful heart leads to a healthy body; jealousy is like cancer in the bones.<sup>2</sup>

This proverb closely links anger with jealousy or envy, which Pastor Jeremy talked about a few weeks ago. If I struggle with envy, it's almost certain that I also struggle with anger. Because envy means someone else has something that I want for myself, and I resent them for it—it makes me angry.

But what I want you to notice in our verse is the effect that all of this has on the body. If *a peaceful heart leads to a healthy body* then *anger-filled envy is like cancer in the bones*.

When anger lingers—when it becomes a habit—when we get good at anger—all kinds of medical research shows that it weakens the immune system, and leads to a variety of health problems from headaches to high blood pressure to heart disease.

But anger doesn't only harm the body—it also disintegrates community. **Anger harms relationships.** Proverbs 15 says:

A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare... A hot-tempered person starts fights.<sup>3</sup>

Anger so often leads to relational tension and conflict. In our anger, we often use words like weapons—harsh words that make tempers flare, says the proverb, as anger begets more anger and leads to the breakdown of relationships.

Furthermore, **anger blocks wisdom**—your ability to make wise choices. To go back to the verse we looked at in Proverbs 14:

People with understanding control their anger; a hot temper shows great foolishness.<sup>4</sup>

In the Bible, foolishness is the opposite of wisdom.

When you finally cool off after you've been angry, and then look back on some of the things you thought, said and did in your anger, do you ever feel kind of foolish?

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<sup>2</sup> Proverb 14:29-30 (NLT)

<sup>3</sup> Proverbs 15:1, 18a (NLT)

<sup>4</sup> See again Proverbs 14:29 (NLT)

I can't even count the number of times when that's been me. All too often, anger distorts our view of reality to the point that we make unwise, even harmful choices.

But not only is anger destructive to your health, relationships, and wisdom. The more anger becomes a habit in your life the more it takes a destructive toll on your will. **Habitual anger handcuffs your will.**

Proverbs 19 says:

Hot-tempered people must pay the penalty. If you rescue them once, you will have to do it again.<sup>5</sup>

Angry people tend to be repeat offenders, because anger is like an addictive substance. The more you get angry, the more you feel the need to be angry, and it becomes a vicious cycle until you no longer control your anger—it controls you.

So there you have a quick survey of the destructive power of anger. It leaves paths of wreckage in the lives of individuals, in marriages and families, in societies and nations, and all too often, even in churches.

Because of the destructive power of “blow” anger, we might think that anger is something we should avoid altogether. But—and this may surprise you— that would be mistake. Let's talk about:

## **2. The misguided expectation of *no* anger.**

It's clear enough that *blow* anger is sin. But so is having *no* anger.

You might hear that and think, “What? Never getting angry is a sin? I thought good Christians aren't supposed to get angry!” But that's not what the Bible says.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13 that in this fallen world, love is *not easily angered*, not that love *never* gets angry. Indeed, Paul tells us in Ephesians to:

Be angry but do not sin.<sup>6</sup>

Because that's how God does anger. As followers of Jesus, we're supposed to reflect God's likeness, and **God's anger always flows from God's love.**

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<sup>5</sup> Proverbs 19:19 (NLT)

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 4:26 (NRSV)

Many people would have a lot of trouble with that statement. They say, “I believe in a God of love, not in a God who gets angry.” But consider this: If God never got angry about the suffering and injustice in this world, then he wouldn’t be, he couldn’t be, a God of love.

Because in its pure and holy form, anger is a righteous response to something that threatens someone or something you love.

When a few years ago Jan and I discovered that one of our children had suffered a very serious and harmful injustice, we didn’t just say, “Oh well, whatever.” We got angry—precisely because we love our child so much. Had we been *indifferent* about it, our love for our child could rightly be called into question.

Our anger motivated us to intense prayer, and to constructive, sacrificial action on behalf of our child. This included facing the people and the system that perpetrated the injustice, using every legitimate means at our disposal to call them to account. It was a very personal experience of what is often referred to as righteous anger.

Now, in my case and yours, even our righteous anger can go south in a hurry. It can so easily turn into destructive “blow” anger. But whenever the Bible speaks of *God’s* anger, both his reasons for it and his response to it are always unfailingly rooted in his perfect, *agape* love.

We see this in Jesus, who is the sinless, human face of God. Jesus would sometimes get angry.

For example, Mark’s gospel speaks of how Jesus “looked around angrily” at the Pharisees for their resistance to his healing of a man with a deformed hand on the Sabbath.<sup>7</sup>

Why was Jesus angry at these religious leaders? It was because they valued their religious traditions more than they did the life and well-being of this man who was precious to God, and should have been to them as well.

At the end of the message, we’ll look at another instance when Jesus got angry. But at this time, let’s move on to look at anger from a third angle:

### **3. The biblical call to *slow* anger.**

The Bible’s ideal is not *blow* anger or *no* anger, but rather *slow* anger. This is what Paul means when he says that love *is not easily angered*. The book of James puts it this way:

Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See Mark 3:5

<sup>8</sup> James 1:19 (NLT)

As I said earlier, as followers of Jesus, we are to reflect God's likeness, and *slow* is the way God does anger.

Many people picture fire and brimstone—they think about “blow” anger when they think about God getting angry. This is a common misconception.

Professor Rebecca DeYoung describes how she has her theology students look up a long list of scripture passages about how God gets angry. They comb through verses in Exodus, Numbers, Nehemiah, Psalms, Jonah, and so on, and:

A recurrent theme quickly emerges. A single verse is repeated time and time again as if to pound the idea into the reader's heart. “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Psalm 103:8).<sup>9</sup>

And so, we are called to do anger the way God does anger—not blow anger, or no anger, but *slow* anger.

Before we celebrate the Lord's Supper together, we're going to look at several practices that can help us apply today's teaching.

I'd like to encourage you to zero in on just one of these practices—the one that, when you hear it, you sense God saying, “That's the one I want you to work on now.” So here are several practices – zero in on one. Alright?

The first practice is to **pray your anger**. To be angry well, you need to admit and own your anger. You have to be in touch with it. The safest and healthiest way of doing that is to pray your anger. Tell God about it in prayer. You're not going to take God by surprise, because he already knows how you're feeling. And I guarantee you, he can handle it. There are many passages in the Bible—particularly in the psalms— where God's people express their anger to God in prayer. Those passages are God's invitation to you and me to do the same.

The next practice is to **listen more, speak less, and answer gently**. We've heard God's call in the book of James. We'll be slower to become angry when we are quick to listen, and slow to speak.<sup>10</sup> So this week, maybe God is calling you to make a point of listening more, and speaking less. And when you do speak, answer people gently, because it helps prevent the escalation of “blow” anger. Remember, Proverbs tells us that:

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.<sup>11</sup>

Another practice is to **shred your list of petty grievances**. Proverbs 24 says:

Don't testify against your neighbors without cause; don't lie about them.

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<sup>9</sup> Rebecca DeYoung, *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies*, p. 131.

<sup>10</sup> See again James 1:19.

<sup>11</sup> Proverbs 15:1 (NIV)

And don't say, "Now I can pay them back for what they've done to me!"<sup>12</sup>

Who is this person talking to? This is self-talk. He is stewing internally about how he's been offended by his neighbours. He's going over and over it in his mind, to the point that he wants payback so badly that he's willing to give false testimony against his neighbours to get them in trouble.

But today's passage in 1 Corinthians 13 says that love "keeps no record of wrongs." It doesn't nurse resentments. When we fixate on how we've been wronged, our anger takes on a life of its own, and becomes disproportionate to the original offense. Instead, Proverbs says that:

Sensible people control their temper;  
they earn respect by overlooking wrongs.<sup>13</sup>

Maybe today God is calling you to take your list of petty grievances, and shred it, so to speak. As a tangible exercise, you may even want to write out your list on paper and literally put it through a shredder.

However, the source of our anger often goes much deeper than mere petty grievances. Some of us have been very seriously wronged. If you struggle with anger related to past traumas, deep wounds, and challenging forgiveness issues that you need to work through, it may be critical for you to **get professional counselling**.

Some of our anger issues are too profound and too complicated to work through alone. A skilled Christian counsellor can come alongside you, help you analyze and process your anger, and guide you in your journey toward healing and freedom in Christ.

Cornerstone partners with several excellent Christian counsellors who can help you work through your anger issues. You'll find a list of them on the webpage noted on the screen: <https://www.cornerstonechurch.ca/counsellors>

Finally, **pray to share in God's righteous anger**. Pray that God would make you passionate about the things he is passionate about, remembering that God's anger always flows from his perfect, *agape* love.

As followers of Jesus, there are issues in this world which are appropriate for us to be angry about.

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<sup>12</sup> Proverbs 24:28-29 (NLT)

<sup>13</sup> Proverbs 19:11 (NLT)

For example, to feel *no* anger about evil of systemic racism against black people is to be out of alignment with the heart and love of God. The US is the epicentre, but the issue is at the very forefront of the world's attention right now.

I've dialogued for hours this week with several black Canadian sisters and brothers from this church. I've listened as they've told me about their exhaustion, pain, fear, and anger. They have shared with me that this particular moment in history is a breaking point for them—a moment like no other—and needs to be for all of us, as well.

Those of you who know my story know that God has given me a huge heart for racial reconciliation, and these past couple of weeks my heart has burned and my hands have literally trembled as I've watched events unfold day after day. I've wrestled and agonized and dialogued and have lost sleep about how to even speak about it in the context of this message at such a raw and tender moment for so many.

But this isn't about me. Surely, much prayer, listening, learning, and ongoing constructive dialogue is ahead of us.

Racism of any kind is in complete and utter opposition to God's goal to create a diverse community of loving persons in and through Jesus Christ, and together, we must join God in his righteous anger toward the evils of racism in all forms.

It's all the more meaningful for me to be a part of Cornerstone at such a time as this, because from its inception, God has called this church to be and become a loving community of unity-in-diversity— of people from different races, cultures, countries of origin, socioeconomic statuses, ages and abilities.

Together, we share in God's righteous anger about racism. By God's grace and the power of his Holy Spirit, we will stand together against racism by channeling our very best efforts into continuing to build this loving community of unity-in-diversity called Cornerstone. We do so with the prayer that this church will be a shining example to the world of the kind of community that Jesus died to make possible— a community of equality, inclusion, and interdependent *agape* love.

Through Jesus and his church, God is working to make the whole world like that one day.

To our black sisters and brothers, your church family loves you, I love you, and we stand with you, in Jesus' name.

### **The Lord's Supper**

With that, it's time to prepare our hearts for the Lord's Supper.

Chapter 11 of John's gospel says that "a deep anger welled up within [Jesus]" when his friend Lazarus died.<sup>14</sup> The original Greek term conveys furious anger.

Who or what was Jesus so angry at? He was enraged at death itself, which had taken his friend, and caused such heartache in the lives of those who were mourning his loss.

So what does Jesus do? He calls Lazarus forth from the grave. This foreshadows the next and ultimate move Jesus would make in his love-driven rage against death. Only then, Jesus would be the man in the tomb, experiencing death himself, in order to break death's hold on you and me.

No greater love has ever been shown. And God's righteous anger is always rooted in this love, and justice and reconciliation are its objects.

Through the cross of Jesus, God breaks down the walls that separate people, and he unites diverse people together into one loving family, into one body—the body of Christ.<sup>15</sup> The bread that we share in the Lord's Supper—the one loaf—is an emblem of the loving unity we share in Jesus as his church.

The bread is also an emblem of Jesus' physical body. And on the night he was betrayed, Jesus took bread, broke it, and gave it to his friends, saying:

This is my body, broken for you.

In the same way, after the supper, he took a cup of wine, and said:

This is my blood shed for you, for the forgiveness of sins.

Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, remember me.

At this time, let's celebrate Jesus, who laid down his life for us in sacrificial, *agape* love, and who calls us, in the power of his Spirit, to live a life of *agape* love for the sake of others, in his name.

Let's take a moment now to eat and drink together...

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<sup>14</sup> See John 11:33, 38

<sup>15</sup> See Ephesians 2:11-22