

SEVEN

Deadly Sins - #6 WRATH

This is week #6 in our series on the *Seven Deadly Sins*. The list was first presented 1500 years old and has been basically unchallenged as a list of the major sins that people today struggle with the most.

Let me remind you that the list itself doesn't appear in the Bible as a list, but that the evidence for all of these sins can be found deeply rooted in the Bible. Here's the list, PRIDE, LUST, GREED, ENVY, SLOTH (Apathy), WRATH (Anger) & GLUTTONY.

Today we're going to talk about WRATH or what most modern lists of the seven sins call ANGER. Now let's understand the kind of anger we are talking about. The original word WRATH implies something a little different from simple ANGER. WRATH implies fury, or rage. So let's not forget that side of ANGER as we think about this sin.

ANGER, as we all know, has a lot of different sides to it and we can experience it at different levels. Sometimes we get angry because we're just annoyed or irritated by someone or something. Sometimes our anger is rooted in a resentment or a strong dislike that we feel towards someone. Sometimes our emotions just boil over and we lose our cool and our anger is like a flash flood – quick, intense and then it's over. Sometimes our anger leads to an uncontrolled feeling of hatred, and a desire for revenge. Sometimes we experience what we call "righteous anger", when we see someone treated unjustly or unfairly.

But there's one thing I can say with complete certainty. Every one of us has felt the emotion of anger within ourselves and every one of us has been on the receiving end of someone else's anger. So we all know what anger does to us – internally and externally. We all have experienced the need to vent, which sometimes is what our anger is about, and we all have seen how damaging anger can be when it is acted out. We have all seen anger displayed in healthy and unhealthy forms, and we have all been guilty of both.

So let's start by looking at framework for anger that you already know. It's in the Lord's Prayer. **"Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."** You know what a debt is, don't you? It is an obligation. You owe your credit card company or you owe your mortgage company, and you are obligated to pay off your debt. If you do not, there are consequences.

Well anger has a debt and debtor relationship. When we get angry we often feel that someone OWES US something. You hurt me by what you said, YOU OWE ME an apology. I did all the work on that project, AND you got all the praise. YOU OWE ME. You were always mum and dad's favourite child, YOU OWE ME. My spouse deserted me and the children. HE/SHE OWES ME. When we feel someone OWES US something it is easy for us to become very angry. And sometimes we can carry that anger around with us for a very long time, sometimes for a lifetime, unless we learn to let it go.

The bigger issue, the issue Jesus addresses in the Lord's Prayer and in his other teachings on anger, is what our anger does. Jesus points out that anger can damage us personally through a loss of self-control. It can damage our relationships with other people, and often the people we care for the most. Isn't it true that our anger often hurts the ones we love the most because we know exactly what buttons to push to get to them and hurt them? And, of course, our anger, especially when it shows itself in a failure or a refusal to forgive, or when it damages our relationships with others, also damages our relationship with God.

There's a phrase we hear all the time and have probably used more than once ourselves. *"I don't get mad, I just get even"*. It's almost a joke! But the truth is that this is exactly how some people play out their anger. After all, why would you want to get even? Isn't it because you feel that the other person OWES YOU something.

We live in a world where, sadly, we all understand what it means for someone to be taken "hostage". Well, that's what our anger does. It takes us hostage. It confines us. It controls us. It limits us. Listen to what James the brother of Jesus wrote (1:20 (NLT), **"Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires."** Why? Because anger can lead us into sin. Proverbs 29:22 (NLT) says this, **"An angry person starts fights; a hot-tempered person commits all kinds of sin."**

Don't we all know people like that? People who pick fights about almost everything? People who always seem to be angry about something? People who seem to be angry about everything and at everyone? People who troll social media just looking for a fight?

Do you remember the story of the Hatfield's and McCoy's, the two rural families in West Virginia-Kentucky? Their feud, which led to a number of murders, began in 1863 and became all about family honor, justice and revenge. Here's the interesting thing about that feud. An "official truce" wasn't formalized until June, 2003, a hundred and forty years after the feud

started. And you think that your family has issues!!! Just saying! Reo Hatfield said at that time **"We're not saying you don't have to fight because sometimes you do have to fight, but you don't have to fight forever."**

Now listen to what Proverbs 17:4 says, **"Starting a quarrel is like opening a floodgate, so stop before a dispute breaks out."** In other words, if you let your anger fester. If you refuse to forgive those who sin against you. If you lose your perspective and get into an "I don't get mad I just get even" mentality, you open the floodgates, and when that happens you honestly don't know what the end result will be.

So listen to Paul writing to the Church in Ephesus, Ephesians 4:26-27 (Msg). This is in *The Message* translation, **"Go ahead and be angry. You do well to be angry—but don't use your anger as fuel for revenge. And don't stay angry. Don't go to bed angry. Don't give the Devil that kind of foothold in your life."**

Now understand this. As far as I know, nowhere in the Bible does it say that it is a sin to be angry. Anger is, in fact, one of the emotions God gave us. And some things should make us angry. We should be angry when someone is treated unjustly. We should be angry when children in some parts of the world die a needless death because vaccinations that cost less than a dollar are not available to them because of drug company monopolies. We should be angry when billions of dollars are spent to buy weapons while millions of people die of hunger.

Anger isn't the issue. Inappropriate anger is. Anger that becomes fury, and rage. Anger that becomes vindictive and goes out of its way to hurt others. Anger that is used just to win a point. Anger that is destructive of relationships. Anger that is harmful and hurtful and unhealthy. The Scriptures say, **"And don't stay angry. Don't go to bed angry. Don't give the Devil that kind of foothold in your life."**

I wonder what would happen if we all lived this way? But don't miss the key point here. If you still are angry about something that happened to you yesterday, then you are already giving the Devil a foothold in your life. You are in dangerous spiritual territory. You are at spiritual risk. You are guilty of this deadly sin.

Let's keep reading Ephesians 4:29-32 (Msg). Because our anger is so often expressed in our words here is some great advice, **"Watch the way you talk. Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word a gift. ³⁰ Don't grieve God. Don't break his heart.**

His Holy Spirit, moving and breathing in you, is the most intimate part of your life, making you fit for himself. Don't take such a gift for granted.

-32 31 Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, profane talk. Be gentle with one another, sensitive. Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you.

The New International translation translates the last part of that passage this way:

"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God 31 forgave you."

OK. Let's go back to that line in the Lord's Prayer where Jesus taught us to pray, ***"Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."*** When we are angry. We think someone OWES US something. Scripture says, let it go. Don't carry your anger and bitterness into another day. Give it over to God. Why? Because God has forgiven you in Jesus Christ when he could have stayed angry with you because of your sin.

Forgiveness doesn't say "You owe me". It says, "You did owe me but I cancelled the debt." And God says to us, I want you to think and act the way I think and act, that's why I made you in my image. How does God think and act? Psalm 103:10, 12 (Msg):

God is sheer mercy and grace;

not easily angered, he's rich in love.

He doesn't endlessly nag and scold,

nor hold grudges forever.

He doesn't treat us as our sins deserve,

nor pay us back in full for our wrongs.

As high as heaven is over the earth,

so strong is his love to those who fear him.

And as far as sunrise is from sunset,

he has separated us from our sins.

Now as you know by now every one of the seven deadly sins was associated with a holy virtue, a positive corrective. Guess which one was associated with wrath and anger. It was forgiveness! Being a Christian isn't just about accepting the forgiveness that God offers you in Jesus Christ. It is also about forgiving others their sins against you. And it is certainly about dealing with those issues in your life, like anger, that can lead you into sin. "*Forgive us our debts/our sins*" is only one side of the IOU ledger. The other side is, "*As we forgive our debtors/those who sin against us.*" You need both to keep the ledger balanced and your life whole. Let us pray:

PASTORAL PRAYER

Merciful God:

In a moment of silence we name before you:
The people we are angry with.
The people who have hurt us.
The people we have become alienated from.

(Silence)

God, may we strive never to go to bed angry.
May we always be generous in forgiving those who have sinned against us.
May we reach out to heal broken relationships, as much as it depends on us.

(Silence)

God, we live in a world of much anger, much hurt and much alienation.
We confess that forgiveness is not always easy.
It is difficult to forgive terrorists for their acts of violence and for the innocent lives taken.
It is difficult to forgive those who have wounded us deeply.
It is even difficult to forgive ourselves when we have messed up and acted wrongly.

Lord, help us to hear again the words of assurance. That in Jesus Christ our sins are forgiven.

With that good news firmly in mind, grant us the courage to forgive as we have been forgiven – without condition or limit and always with amazing grace.

These things we pray in Jesus Name. Amen.