

PROVERBS – Lesson 14

Anger

By Beverly McKey

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. When we open the book of Proverbs and begin studying, we see very quickly a book that is written from a father to his son.
1. Solomon writes: **Proverbs 4:1-4** – "*Hear, my children, the instruction of a father, and give attention to know understanding; For I give you good doctrine: Do not forsake my law. ³ When I was my father's son, tender and the only one in the sight of my mother, ⁴ He also taught me, and said to me: "Let your heart retain my words; Keep my commands, and live."*
 2. Solomon addressed a broad array of topics as he instructed his son on the wise course to pursue.
 3. It begins with the fear of the Lord (**Proverbs 1:7**), which is also the thought that Solomon uses to end the book of Ecclesiastes.
Ecclesiastes 12:13 -- "*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all.*"
- B. Solomon also included teaching regarding the emotions of those receiving these Proverbs such as happiness, sorrow, contentment and anger, which is our topic today.

II. THERE ARE MANY THINGS TO CONSIDER ABOUT ANGER

- A. One of the strongest emotions men possess is the emotion of "anger."
1. Not only is anger a strong emotion, but there are many passages we can study as we examine Biblical that teach on anger.
 - a. Let's look at the example of Jonah in **Jonah 4**.
 - 1) Jonah was commanded to go to Nineveh to preach.
 - 2) Because of Jonah's reluctance, Jehovah was moved to persuade him by preparing a great fish to swallow him.
 - 3) Finally, Jonah did that which he was commanded. He went to Nineveh and preached a message of destruction unless they turned to God.
 - 4) When Jonah saw that the Lord decided to spare Nineveh because of their repentance, he was "*very angry.*" **Jonah 4:1**
 - 5) Oddly, it was God's grace and mercy combined with the fact that He is slow to anger and shows abundant loving kindness that frustrated and angered Jonah; so much so that he begged God to kill him.
Jonah 4:2-3
 - 6) Then the Lord asked Jonah, "*Is it right for you to be angry?*"
 - 7) Then God proceeded to teach Job another lesson.
 - a) Job left the city and made himself a shelter and sat under it to see what God would do with Nineveh.

- b) Overnight God caused a plant to grow up high enough to provide a shade for Jonah. **Vs. 6** Jonah was grateful for this.
- c) But as the morning dawned, God sent a worm to damage the plant so that it withered. **Vs. 7**
- d) Finally, God sent a strong east wind and the sun beat on Jonah's head so that he grew faint and he wished for death. **Vs. 8**
- e) Again, God asked Jonah if it was right to be angry about the plant. **Vs. 9**
- f) **Vs. 11** – *"The Lord said, 'You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. Should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left – and much livestock.' "*

2) Let's analyze Jonah's reaction:

- a) Jonah expressed very strong anger when Nineveh was spared, yet God was slow to anger.
 - b) God questioned the wisdom of Jonah's first complaint about sparing Nineveh.
 - c) Yet, Jonah became angry again when the gourd withered and his shade was removed.
 - d) Again, God questioned the wisdom of Jonah's anger about a plant that he did not plant nor tend.
 - e) But Jonah was not ashamed of his childish anger and he insisted that he had a right to be angry.
 - f) What a sad, sad commentary! Jonah was angry when his personal comfort was disturbed, but he showed no concern for the thousands lost in Nineveh.
- b. Since Jonah's anger is spoken of in a negative light, should we draw the conclusion that anger is wrong?
 - c. Note that Jonah admitted that he knew that God was "*slow to anger*", a trait that Jonah could not claim for himself.
 - d. This implies that God also gets angry sometimes.

B. Is anger right or wrong?

1. If Jonah and his attitude were all we had to go by, it would be easy to conclude that it is wrong to be angry.
 - a. Jonah most certainly was wrong in being angry
 - b. He was also wrong thinking that his anger was justified.
2. We find another good example where anger was completely out of place .in **Luke 15**.
 - a. When the prodigal son returned, the father rejoiced and threw a big party.
 - b. The older son, **Luke 15:28** was angry and would not go in to the party.
 - c. In this passage we see the father questioning the anger of his son much like God questioned the anger of Jonah.

- d. The point here, however, is that the older brother's anger was truly inappropriate. It was born of jealousy.
- 3. On the other hand, there are times when anger is certainly warranted as children of God.
 - a. In **Psalm 7:11** we read, "*God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day.*"
 - b. **Psalm 30:4-5** – "⁴*Sing praise to the LORD, you saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name. ⁵For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life;*"
- 4. Our God may be slow to anger, and His anger may be short-lived, but at times He gets angry.
- 5. Let's look at **Mark 3:1-6**
 - a. Jesus entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and met a man who had a withered hand.
 - b. The Jews watched Jesus closely to see if he would heal the man on the Sabbath, so they would have a reason to accuse Him.
 - c. Jesus asked the Jews, "*Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?*" But the people were silent.
 - d. **Vs. 5** – "*And when He had looked around them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' and he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other.*"
- 6. Consider these two verses regarding Jesus.
 - a. **Hebrews 4:15** – "*For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.*" He even experienced anger.
 - b. **I Peter 2:21-22** – "²¹*For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ²²Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth.*"
 - c. If Jesus, who is equal with God (**Philippians 2:6**), could be angry and yet "*committed no sin*", then we cannot conclude that all anger is always wrong.
 - d. Even in the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus warned against anger, he qualified the statement in this way: "*But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.*" (**Matt. 5:22**).
 - e. Jesus is not saying here that ANY cause justifies anger; as we saw, Jonah rationalized that he had cause to be angry. But his cause was not just. He was angry because God showed mercy to Nineveh.

III. ANGER AND THE PROVERBS

- C. When we turn our attention to Proverbs concerning anger, we see the same points stressed. Let's note just a few of the passages from Proverbs:
 - 1. **Proverbs 14:17** – "*A quick-tempered man acts foolishly, and a man of wicked intentions is hated.*"

2. **Proverbs 21:19** – *“Better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and angry woman.”*
 3. **Proverbs 22:24** – *“Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go.”*
 4. **Prov. 29:22** – *“An angry man stirs up strife, and a furious man abounds in transgression.”*
 5. When we consider the general focus of these four passages, we could very well conclude that anger is an emotion that we should avoid completely.
 6. With the exception of **Proverbs 14:17**, where the writer qualifies the anger of a *“a quick-tempered man,”* we get the idea that anger is a negative attitude in our lives that will be punished.
- D. We must not be hasty to conclude that all anger is wrong. Let’s consider some other passages:
1. **Proverbs 14:29** – *“He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, but he who is impulsive exalts folly.”*
 2. **Proverbs 15:18** – *“A wrathful man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger allays contention.”*
 3. **Proverbs 16:32** – *“He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.”*
 4. In these passages, we see a person can be angry, but he must not be quick-tempered.
 5. In fact, the ability to control our anger shows great understanding and power. **Proverbs 19:11** – *“The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, and his glory is to overlook a transgression.”*
 6. These passages do not forbid anger, instead it praises the person who has developed the self-control to react slowly and wisely.
 - a. Anger is wrong if it easily comes to the surface with little provocation and lashes out with little or no restraint.
 - b. When anger is slow in coming and is bridled, it reveals great understanding and spiritual maturity.

IV. ANGER’S DESTRUCTIVE POWER

- A. A quick-temper causes division.
1. One who has not tried to develop the virtues that promote peace and unity will cause strife in all areas of his life.
 2. Uncontrolled anger is a destructive force which can only lead to quarrels and then to division.
 3. It is predictable that a *“wrathful man”* will sow the seeds of strife instead of unity.
 - a. **Proverbs 27:3** – *“A stone is heavy and sand is weighty, but a fool’s wrath is heavier than both of them.”*
 - b. **Proverbs 19:19** – *“A man of great wrath will suffer punishment; for if you rescue him, you will have to do it again.”*

4. When a person is known to have a quick temper, he can expect it to lead to conduct that will deserve and demand punishment.
 - a. **Proverbs 30:33** – *“For as the churning of milk produces butter, and wringing the nose produces blood, so the forcing of wrath produces strife.”*
 - b. It is simply the natural course of things; anger, when not kept in check, will lead one to destruction.

B. Christians are taught in the New Testament to develop attitudes that would promote unity in the church and in the world. This is the opposite of the division that anger can cause.

1. In **Ephesians 4:1-3** Paul wrote to the brethren that they should *“endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”*
 - a. However, prior to that directive, he listed the virtues that are required to be able to achieve unity.
 - 1) With all lowliness and gentleness
 - 2) Bearing with one another in love
 - b. The same is true as Paul encourages the Philippians to be *“like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.”* which describes unity. **Philippians 2:1-4.**
 - c. The virtues required to accomplish this are:
 - 1) Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit.
 - 2) In lowliness of mind (humility)
 - 3) Esteem others better than himself
 - 4) Look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.
 - d. Paul also warned the Galatians the danger of strife in the body of Christ: **Galatians 5:15** – *“But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!”*
2. Unity is essential in the church and it is preferred in the world as well. Paul encouraged the church in Rome to live in peace with all men.
 - a. **Romans 12:18** – *“If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.”*
 - b. We may not be able to control the behavior of others, but we are required to control our own behavior in the world so that we are never the cause for division, but we display self-control that will be seen by the world as “godliness”.
 - c. Jesus taught, in the Sermon on the Mount, that the children of God should be “peace makers”.
 - 1) **Matthew 5:9** – *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”*
 - 2) Remember, Jesus did not say “peace lovers” but “peace makers” which implies a responsibility on our part to promote peace in our example and in our teaching.

V. ANGER AND TRANSGRESSION

- A. We have already noted that anger can be right, and anger can be wrong.
1. We have also seen that anger is a very intense emotion, which can be very volatile.
 2. Paul's statement in **Ephesians 4:26** is a great challenge for those who want to obey it.
"Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath."
 3. The wise man will understand just how easy it is for sins to multiply when he is angry.
 4. Solomon said, **Proverbs 29:22** – *"An angry man stirs up strife, and a furious man abounds in transgression."*
 5. It is easy, if we are not careful, to be angry for the wrong reasons.
 - a. Jonah was angered because God showed mercy upon his enemies.
 - b. In **Matthew 5:43-47** – Jesus' taught that loving our neighbors was not good enough, we must also love our enemies (which is far more difficult).
 - c. When we look at Jonah in the light of this teaching, his anger was motivated by a sinful attitude.
 - d. In **Luke 15**, the older brother's anger was motivated out of envy and jealousy.
 - e. Too often, our anger is motivated by jealousy or selfishness, rather than righteous indignation.
 - f. Sinful attitudes which motivate our anger are just one area in which sin can be multiplied in our anger.
 6. How one responds to anger must be a constant concern for the righteous person.
 - a. There is no honor in being angry for the proper reason if we respond in a sinful way.
 - b. The truth is that there are some things in our society that should truly anger us.
 - 1) Consider the multitudes of innocent infants who die, because of a hard-hearted mother, at the hands of murderous abortion doctors.
 - a) This should anger righteous people who believe life is in the hands of our God and we have no right to terminate it.
 - b) Anger would not be out of place here. Yet if my response is to bomb the clinic or murder the participants, then I have added sin to my anger.
 - c) If we are not careful as children of God, we could very well allow our anger to become a seedbed for sin.
 7. Another consideration, on a slightly different note, is *"Will I get angry when the situation demands it?"*
 - a. We have noted, *"God is angry with the wicked every day."* **Psalm. 7:11** and that Jesus was sometimes angry while here on earth. **Mark 3:5**
 - b. From this we can conclude that there are appropriate situations when anger should be felt.

- 1) For example, consider the threat that we face from madmen in the middle east in the name of their false religion.
 - a) Their objective is to conquer the world for Islam and they are making great strides in accomplishing this.
 - b) When we see our government accommodating Muslim religious practices everywhere, while at the same time they are encroaching more and more upon the religious freedom of Christians that are guaranteed in our constitution, it should make us angry.
- 2) It should sicken and anger the children of God that the wickedness of abortion is protected by social liberals who proclaim that it is an important "women's health issue". That should make us angry.
- 3) There are some situations that warrant anger, and the child of God should respond with anger.
- 4) In such cases, we must make our voices heard with courage using peaceful and legal methods.
- 5) Certainly, we should be extremely careful when we are angry, that we do not respond in a sinful way. However, anger is sometimes necessary.

VI. ANGER, SELF-CONTROL AND TEMPERANCE,

A. Of course, we must understand the necessity of self-control and temperance when it comes to anger.

1. Consider for a moment how often the inspired writers admonish Christians to be the people who bring glory to our God.
2. Even when Paul stood before Felix as a prisoner, he never forgot that Felix (his enemy) was lost without God, so Paul shared the gospel message with Felix and his wife. Paul truly practiced loving his enemies. **Acts 24:25** – "²⁴ And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. ²⁵ Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, 'Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.' "
3. Paul taught them these principles:
 - a. Righteousness - **Psalm 119:172** – "My tongue shall speak of Your word, for all Your commandments are righteousness." There is an objective standard given by God that must direct our steps. This standard instructs us on anger also.
 - b. Temperance – we are responsible for bringing our lives into subjection to the commandments of God.
 - 1) God's Word tells us that we must not be swift to anger.
 - 2) James said, in **James 1:19** – "So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath,"

- c. Judgment to Come – Apparently speaking of the judgment to come frightened Felix. Those who have not obeyed the gospel should be fearful of this judgment.

2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 "... when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, ⁸ in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,"

- B. We can never be effective ambassadors for Christ if we can't control our anger.
1. We must apply what we learn from God's word in a practical way because, one day, we will give an account before God.
 2. It would be hard to over-emphasize the import of temperance and self-control when it comes to anger in our lives.
 3. Paul listed the attitudes that Christians must develop in **Galatians 5:22-23** – "²² *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* ²³ *gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.*"
 4. Peter also explained how to grow spiritually in **2 Peter 1:5-8** – "⁵ *But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge,* ⁶ *to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness,* ⁷ *to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.* ⁸ *For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

VII. Anger And The Tongue

- A. One of the major themes in Proverbs is the use of the tongue and we had a lesson just on that topic a few weeks ago.
1. Solomon wrote in **Ecclesiastes 3:7** that there is "*a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.*"
 2. It is the wise person who can distinguish the difference.
- B. In the book of James, which has been described as the "*Proverbs of the New Testament*", James addresses the topic.
1. James wrote, **James 1:19** – "*So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.*"
 2. Again in **James 3:2** – "*For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.*"
 3. Learning to bridle our tongue is very difficult and James admits that by saying that if one can totally control his tongue, "*he is a perfect man*".

4. Paul showed the close relationship between anger and the tongue when he wrote to **Ephesians 4:31** – *“Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.”*
 - a. In the progression of things, bitterness evolves into wrath, and wrath grows into anger.
 - b. The word “clamor” means to shout. When we become angry our voice seems to automatically intensify until we are shouting.
 - c. When our anger goes unchecked, we are likely to say unkind things which Paul calls “evil speaking.”
 - d. Learning to control anger is essential to a Christian because one outburst can ruin our good influence with all who hear it.

VIII. Dealing With Angry Men

- A. While a lot of energy must go into regulating our own anger, it is also valuable to learn how to deal with those who are angry.
 1. Solomon does not leave us out in the cold concerning this matter.
 2. Our first rule to note is that we should avoid angry people, if possible.
 - a. Solomon wrote, **Proverbs 22:24-25** – *“²⁴ Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, ²⁵ Lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul.”*
 - b. We have already noticed the troubles that follow the angry people. If we continually associate with them, we can expect to share in their troubles.
 - c. Yet, there will be times when we simply have no choice but to deal with those who are angry.
- B. As much as we may try to avoid angry people, there will be times when it will simply be impossible. In that case, how should we respond?
 1. Solomon had some excellent advice, although it may be difficult to accomplish.
 2. **Proverbs 15:1** – *“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”*
 3. Jesus also taught on this subject: **Matthew 5:38-42** – *“³⁸ You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ ³⁹ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. ⁴⁰ If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. ⁴¹ And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. ⁴² Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.”*
 4. Avoiding conflict when it is possible is the method Jesus advocated.
 - a. The world has a hard time understanding this teaching.
 - b. It is common for worldly people to quickly react by striking back.
 - c. It seems to be a weakness of our fleshly nature that causes us to want to strike back or to “get even” at some later date.

- d. Even the Law of Moses taught against retaliation: **Leviticus:19:18**
"You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord."
- e. Paul continued this same teaching in **Romans 12:19** – *"Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord."*
- f. While these verses do not speak directly about anger, they provide a principle that will help us in dealing with angry people.
- g. To react to anger calmly and kindly will be unexpected by and disarming to the angry person.
- h. If we follow the example of Jesus, who faced angry people on many occasions, we will be able to disarm volatile situations when we are confronted with angry people.

IX. CONCLUSION

A. The Wise Man And Anger

- 1. The wise man will not be easily angered.
- 2. Solomon proclaimed the benefits for those who were slow to anger.
 - a. **Proverbs 14:29** – they have *"great understanding,"*
 - b. **Proverbs 15:18** – *"allays contention (calms strife)"*
 - c. **Proverbs 16:32** – *"better than the mighty."*
- 3. The wise person will be able to be angry without committing sin.
- 4. The trivial matters that so often anger other men will not stir the wise person to anger.
- 5. His anger will be reserved for those matters that are worthy of the righteous person's anger.
- 6. When he is angry, he will maintain control, being careful not to let his anger to cause him to sin.

B. The Foolish Man And Anger

- 1. The foolish man's anger will reside on the surface and may quickly come boiling forth.
- 2. His anger is aroused swiftly and fiercely.
- 3. Because the foolish man does not practice self-control, his actions will often be sinful.
- 4. He will find himself suffering punishment because of his anger.
- 5. He will not learn to avoid the consequences of anger and repeats his offense over and over again.
- 6. The foolish person who has an anger problem will also find that wise men will avoid him.

C. Christians Beware And Be In Control

- 1. As children of God, we will be expected to control our anger.

2. In most situations we must not allow our anger to arise, while there will be only a few circumstances when we will be justified in our anger, as long as we remain in control of it.
3. We must all be wise enough to carry out our justified anger in a way that brings honor and glory to God.
4. In doing so, we will be following the example of our Jesus Christ.