
Prayers

To God

Pray to honour the God who has made the world and who knows each part of it, including you. Honour Him as the author of language itself, the inventor of all things, the supreme visionary who has a complete and effective plan for the whole world. Honour the Lord your God in this and so many more ways.

For myself

Glory be to You Lord God, for you have made us all with such variety and diverse characteristics! We are all so different! We rejoice in the extraordinary variety you have created within humanity, and we wonder at the powerful way You have provided for all of us by saving us from our sins through Your Servant Jesus Christ. You have done all things, Lord God, and You have done all things well. We praise You, Lord God. AMEN

For others

Weekly theme: the environment

Pray about the waste that is created within society. Consider the waste you generate, or=f food, wrapping, paper, and general abandonment of what is old and worn out. Ask the Lord God what He thinks about waste. Reflect on the life of Jesus and imagine what He might think of this, and pray accordingly.

Meditation

Do not bear the pain alone;
Let Christ the healer lead you on,
And bring you to His peace and light again.

Do not foster un-forgiveness;
Let Him who loved even those who killed Him
Show you how to love where once you failed.

Do not be quick to blame;
Let the One who would not cast a stone
Reveal to you love's truth that conquers all.

Do not let sin drag you down;

Let God's Holy Spirit stir you now
To spot the traps of Satan waiting all around.

Do not forget the Lord your God;
Give Him freedom within your soul,
To challenge, heal, then mould and change you –
Yes, to save you!

Bible Passage

James 1:19-21

¹⁹ You must understand this, dear friends. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry; ²⁰ for your anger does not make for righteousness which is of God. ²¹ Therefore rid yourselves of all filth and evil excess, and accept in humility the Word implanted within you which has the power to save your souls.

Review

What an extraordinary letter! In these three verses, James continues to address major issues of Christian discipleship. He moves on from yesterday's subject of the eternal value of salvation (1:17,18) to address some problems of human behaviour including anger. He writes about sinful behaviour because this can creep into the life of the church and prevent both fellowship and the work of the Gospel. He therefore appeals to his readers to replace such things with godliness, as found in Christ.

James is right to focus on the problem of anger, but there is more in this passage. He begins by asking his readers to be '*quick to listen and slow to speak*' (1:19), which amounts almost to a definition of selflessness. Certainly, those who do their best to listen to others and hold back on their own comments are in the best place to resist the temptation to be angry at other people for the things they do. Anger is however a difficult problem, and as a basic human response, it is sometimes appropriate. Jesus was appropriately angry at the moneychangers in the Temple, and we will sometimes be angry at the unjustness we find in this world.

But James is clearly not speaking about righteous anger here. He is concerned about anger that comes from evil deep within the heart, which can be based in selfish attitudes and an inability to be generous-hearted to others. As far as he was concerned, such anger could destroy not just the work of a Christian community but faith itself. So his advice about dealing with it is appropriate for both the individual and the Christian community.

Everything James says here is closely linked with Jesus' teaching about anger in the Sermon on the Mount, so these verses continue our general impression that James' teaching is built on close firsthand experience of Jesus and His ministry. Below is a sample of Jesus' teaching about anger:

'You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, "Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment." But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment ... therefore, if you are offering your gift at

the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar; first go and be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift.’ (Matthew 5:21-24)

In this teaching, Jesus points out that personal attitudes and feelings lie behind people's words and actions, so anger arising from a sense of personal grievance and injury can lead to insults, aggression, and sometimes even the crime of murder. His general teaching in the Sermon on the Mount is that anger is destructive of human relationships, and must be dealt with head on. He says categorically that anyone who is angry in heart must deal with this by real and practical forgiveness before they can come into God's presence again! This is straight and clear advice that cannot be ignored.

James makes the same points here, but in a slightly different way. He observed that the problem of anger was compromising the early church and creating problems for the Christian community. He knew, as we know, that once people are angry with each other, emotions rather than spiritual wisdom rule the day, and true godliness quickly disappears. James puts it like this; *'anger does not make for righteousness which is of God'* (1:20). But the problem goes deeper, because anger makes for other problems as well; it can often lie behind spiritual blindness, hasty judgement, lack of humility, and more.

James perceptively observes that anger and presumption are the evidence of evil's grip on the human soul (1:20), which can even compromise the soul's salvation. So he appeals to the Christian to accept this, and acknowledge that anger is inappropriate. Each one of us knows what anger is because it is a basic human emotion, but the believer should not merely accept anger as a part of life. It is something to be dealt with, and the first step in dealing with it is to acknowledge that it is a problem. Too often we continue allow ourselves to be angry and we justify it to ourselves; but this must stop, and we must put effort into riding ourselves of this *'evil and excess'* (1:21).

But how can the human heart change, and how can it be turned from the habit of anger to godly righteousness? To answer this, we should take a hint from what James has already said, about being *'quick to listen'* (1:19). This can be hard, but it involves putting ones own feelings to one side and focussing on the feelings of others (1:19). Certainly much of our anger will dissipate if we are willing to listen to the opinions of others instead of insisting on our own ways. The second course of action is to *'accept in humility the Word implanted within you ...'* (1:21). Now the Word of God reveals those things that separate people from God, and James believed that anger did just this. Those who are humble before God's Word will make every effort to rid themselves of the curse of anger.

To this day many people struggle with anger, and some find that the Bible's teaching only makes them feel guilty about the anger that seems to them to be firmly rooted within their souls. There may be many reasons why anger takes root inside, but James begs his readers to *'accept ... the Word ... which has the power to save your souls'* (1:21). In saying this, he implores the Christian to have faith that the Word of God within them is more powerful than any spirit of anger, personal ill-discipline or personality trait. The presence within of Christ the Saviour and the Holy Spirit is the means whereby the evil of anger is overcome, whatever its origins.

Discipleship

Application

Facing what it means to get rid of anger

This study has highlighted Biblical teaching about anger, which is easy to ascent to but very hard to accept and put into practice. However, James reminds us that if we will not rid ourselves of this evil and live in humility then we place our salvation at risk. There is no way for us to get rid of anger except by the power of God implanted within us, the Word of God which convicts the soul and leads us to better things. This is a sharp word which needs to be heard, but it is not impossibly difficult. Those who have a problem with anger can begin the road of taking action against it by keeping close to Jesus and trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Ideas for what to do

- Begin by asking yourself whether you have a problem with anger and discuss it with other people who know you well. Do your best to be honest with yourself, and if necessary, ask someone else about whether they perceive anger in you.
- Pray about how you can deal with any anger you may have locked up inside you, and ask the Lord to help you with the will power and the faith required.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Is anger a problem within your church community? How does it show itself; outwardly or in secret ways?
2. Is it possible for the human heart to change? Is it possible for God to change some of the characteristics with which we believe we are born?
3. Discuss how humility and the 'Word within' can help us deal with anger when it arises in our lives.

Final Prayer

Thank You, Jesus, for the love we receive from others even when we do not know it. Help us respond well when people help us or demonstrate care, and give us the grace to show love in return. In so doing, may we fulfil your call to 'love one another', and do it both in spirit and in practice. We ask this in Your name; AMEN