

THE SIN OF ANGER
Third in a Sermon Series on the Seven Deadly Sins
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“Those who are hot-tempered stir up strife, but those who are slow to anger calm contention.” (Proverbs 15:18)

The sin of pride, first of the traditional deadly sins, is self-centeredness when one thinks too highly or too often of oneself. In all cases pride does not because it cannot satisfy self. This inevitably leads to envy of another or others: their material or reputation. Both pride and envy are idolatrous as God is replaced by self. Guess what? Envy does not satisfy either, which can make the deadly sinner madder than hell.

In John 2:13-22, referred to as the “Cleansing of the Temple”, Jesus lost it upon encountering the precious gift of God’s house of mercy and prayer being turned into a cheap, easy and convenient matter for buyers and wind fall profits for sellers right in the narthex. For various reasons we quietly enjoy this account in the life and ministry of Jesus.

First of all, we can relate to it like nothing else Jesus did. None of us speak, heal, care, share or dare like Him, but we sure know what it is like to be angry like Him if for far less righteous reasons. Secondly, we need and want God to get the bad guys. The episode in the Temple was a relatively minor matter, but it showed a sense of justice and the setting of boundaries beyond which God will not sit back. Thirdly, there is in us a real respect for God’s House. Children can be children here within limits, but we still think of this place as sacred space.

There are 250 or so references to anger in the Bible. Most by far speak of God’s anger, most usually in response to idolatry on the part of His Chosen people. *Deuteronomy 29:25-27 reads: “It is because they abandoned the covenant of the Lord, the God of their ancestors, which He made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt. They turned and served others gods, worshiping them, gods whom they had not known and whom He had not allotted to them; so the anger of the Lord was kindled against that land, bringing on it every curse written in the book.” “Vengeance is mine, I will repay,” says the Lord (Romans 12:19) On the other side of the coin, we read: “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.” (Leviticus 19:18)*

God is God and may be angry. We are human and had better be careful that anger on our part not become yet another expression of idolatry. We do get angry at times and in rare instances, should be angry.

Regardless of political affiliation, are you not angry about this war we are in and waging so badly? When you think of children being abused, kidnapped and killed in our world, are you not utterly incensed? When illegal aliens receive benefits third generation Americans cannot get, does that not tilt your temper? When bills for health care come in the mail, doesn't it make you sicker still? The list is endless.

What makes you madder than hell? You may have had a knock down, drag out verbal and not physical fight with your spouse or child a while ago, still feel what it was like but not remember what the issue was. Or maybe you remember all too well!

As we get into the Christian Scriptures, not that the Hebrew Scriptures are all that different, there is, however, a mellowing expected of Christians. ***“Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil.” (Ephesians 4:26)*** Have it but get over it! Do not go to bed angry at your spouse, children, employer, employees, other relatives, neighbors, and enemies. Sleeping on it is as fertile a field for demonic delight and disruption as there is. When you get angry and stay angry over night you are God. Nothing can hurt you. You can say or feel whatever you please in your pain and no one can stop you. It is too bad that you are killing yourself and maybe the others whoever they are. How many murders were the result of cruel words that would not stop and overnight thoughts that would not heal?

“You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger for your anger does not produce God’s righteousness. Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.” (James 1:19-21) The language here is clear: life-giving or deadly things. Your choice!

Certain things are going to set us off, often because our bodies or egos have been hurt. Most often both our bodies and egos would be better served by letting it go. IN any event, do NOT feed it, enflame it, and above all take vengeance. Wars happen and always will. Not but a few years back, there were those who felt we should attack France. We had better learn better to live with those here who differ from us. Switch party affiliation, take up a just cause, and pray fervently for all enemies. Silly? Not as much so as the way the world works. Mercy trumps misery! God’s anger towards us abates not because He hates but in Christ loves us. Jesus came that we might have life abundantly and not death inevitably.