

“Gratitude and Patience”

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.”

Be patient. Don’t grumble. This is going to be hard. Hear also these wise words of Solomon from Ecclesiastes 7:9. “Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the bosom of fools.”

Anger – in and of itself is not a sin. The Lord Himself is angry at times, a righteous anger. Our anger, however, almost always is set afire by our sinful desires. The Lord is good at righteous anger – He’s perfect. We are not.

These wise words from Solomon – “be not quick in your spirit to become angry” – are like his words to us last week about Envy – that it is rottenness to the bones. Tonight we hear that Anger “rests in the bosom of fools.”

Anger has a way of sweeping over you with a flood of sinful desires. It so quickly tackles you and takes you to the ground – because – so often, it feels really, really good. When you are overcome with Anger – a physical change actually comes over your body.

Your adrenaline begins to flow – all of your senses become heightened – your attention becomes so focused on the object of your Anger that everything else is temporarily forgotten (even the chronic pain that never seems to let you go).

Because Anger actually makes you feel good – it addictive – and that’s what makes it so dangerous. For some people, it becomes like a drug that they need to have constantly flowing through their veins. In order to maintain that heightened state – they have to be angry all the time.

One of the things that makes Anger so dangerous for us as sinful children of God, is the laser-like focus on the source of that Anger. You become so focused on the object of your Anger that everything else is blocked out. Your senses are all directed towards one thing – and nothing else seems to be able to break through.

In that moment, it's Judgment Day – and you are playing God. Your judgment of the person with whom you are angry is based on your own ideas of what is right or wrong what is fair or unfair, just or unjust. If you determine that a person has done something unjust – especially if he has wronged you – then anger is an almost unstoppable emotion. But as I said before, not all Anger is sin.

You might recall that day when Jesus became angry with those in the Temple. He took a whip in hand, overturned the tables of the money-changers, and drove them and all their sheep and doves and cattle out of the temple courtyards. Even though all of this was done in Anger – Jesus did not sin.

So, what is it that determines whether Anger is a sin, or not – whether it is a righteous anger, or not?

As you may have noticed – Anger and judgment are tied together. Anger is an emotion that goes along with making a judgment against someone. You become angry because a person has acted in a way which you judge to be wrong, unfair, unjust.

At that point, however, Anger is not necessarily a sin. If the person has, in fact – acted wrongly, unfairly, unjustly, ACCORDING TO THE WORD OF GOD – then your Anger is not a sin, but rather, a “righteous anger.” But if the basis for your judgment runs contrary to God's Word – then your Anger is sinful.

Sinful Anger always involves a denial of the truth and a perverted sense of justice. It involves your own ideas of what is right and wrong – fair and unfair – just and unjust. And what makes sinful Anger even more dangerous is when it is combined with Pride or Envy.

Anger combined with Pride results in self-righteous indignation. You've decided what's right and wrong – and in your Pride you are absolutely convinced that you are right – and then you judge all others accordingly.

Filled with self-righteous indignation – filled with Anger against those you’ve judge to be wrong – nothing breaks through. When not even a Word from God can change your mind – when the Word of God will not sway you – then Anger becomes deadly.

Anger combined with Envy leads to Revenge. The person who has wronged you is too big for their britches and needs to be taken down a notch or two. You’re not going to let them get away with what they’ve done – you’ll give them what they deserve.

Filled with Anger, consumed by Revenge – you become so intent of making sure that your justice is carried out – that nothing, not even a Word from God, will change your mind. And with God and His Word shut out – there is only death.

The Lord has given you the remedy for the sin of Anger. “Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord ... Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door.”

The remedy is Patience – that which enables you to endure hardships and suffering without being sorrowful or defeated – indignant or defensive – spiteful or seeking revenge. With Patience there is meekness – not in the cowardly or weak way of the world – but in the meekness of Christ, who endured all things with a courage that trusted the Father and His justice.

You are baptized into Christ, and your patience and meekness come from Christ who dwells in you. His own patience and meekness “for you and your salvation” – quiets the Anger that seeks to seduce you – and brings forth a faith and gratitude that HE rights all wrongs.

Thanks be to God that we don’t have to decide on our own what is good, right and just – but that God alone does this – and proclaims His judgments in His Word. It is that Word alone that directs how we deal with others – not our own wisdom, not our judgments, and certainly not our Anger and revenge.

With your hearts firmly established in God's Word, you patiently announce His judgements of sin and grace – without carrying the impossible load of determining what is right and wrong. He who deals with us – works in and through us to deal with those whom He has placed around you.

Thanks be to God that Jesus is the one who meets out His perfect justice upon all people – that vengeance belongs to Him and He will repay.

And thanks be to God that He does not give us what we deserve – for our sinful Anger, our Envy and revenge, and for all our sin – but graciously, according to His Word – judges all who trust His blood to cover their sin, to be “not guilty.”

Dearly beloved, the Lord has dealt patiently with you. The Judge stands at the door. With His nail-scarred hands He says – I have taken all your sin and died their death, “for you.” You are forgiven, and free – to live with and to love your neighbor – as I have loved you.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.