

Sermon - 8-30-20 - Love Is Not Easily Angered
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The other day, I was seated at my desk, working on this message and thinking about love, when an old song popped into my head. Perhaps you remember it. It was made famous by Tina Turner. The lyrics go:

What's love got to do, got to do with it
What's love but a second hand emotion
What's love got to do, got to do with it
Who needs a heart when a heart can be broken

No disrespect to Tina Turner, but love has everything to do with it. And love is so much more than a second hand emotion. Which is why we have spent the past six weeks unpacking Paul's description of love found in 1 Corinthians 13. More than just hearing the words, we have been seeking to memorize the passage and live it out in our lives. Would you join me in reciting the passage that we have been working on:

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous, it does not brag, and it is not proud. Love is not rude. — 1 Cor. 13:4-5

Let me ask you a question: Would you like your relationships to be better and healthier? Do you want the world to know that you really are a follower of Jesus? Do you want to do the only thing that the Bible says will cover a multitude of sins? Do you want to make God smile by obeying the second greatest commandment?

I know that I do. Which means that the time has come for us to get serious about moving beyond just studying about God's love and start living it out in our lives. We can do this by following Paul's instructions to love by pursuing patience, demonstrating kindness, refusing to envy, pursuing humility, and putting aside our rude ways, and instead show respect to everyone we meet.

Today, we are going to add yet one more descriptor to the kind of love God asks us to demonstrate. Let me read on in 1 Cor. 13:

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous, it does not brag, and it is not proud. Love is not rude. Love is not easily angered.— 1 Cor. 13:4-5

That three word phrase, “not easily angered”, is actually one word in the original Greek. It is Paroxyno, which means to sharpen, to rouse to anger, to exasperate, to be easily provoked.

It was often used in referring to sharpening an edge so that it could be used to cut something. It brings to mind an image of my young daughter, when I caught her **running with a pair of sharp scissors**. Guess what I told her? I told her not to run with scissors. Why? Because there is a very good chance that she could hurt herself or someone else.

It is no less dangerous when we run around with a sharp edge of anger. Why? Because someone could get hurt. Which is why Paul tells us that love is not easily angered!

Does this mean that we should never be angry, that anger is always wrong? Of course not. Anger is a God-given emotion. It is an appropriate and natural reaction when we, or someone else, is wronged. The bible does not tell us not to get angry, rather it instructs us to **“Be angry, but do not sin.” — Eph. 4:26**

Which means that the issue is not anger. The issue is the way in which we express our anger. There is nothing wrong with anger. In some situations, we should be angry. We should be angry when: a child is abused, a violent crime is committed, vulnerable people are taken advantage of, or when our Christian brothers and sisters are persecuted and killed. There are times when anger is appropriate.

Certainly, God gets angry. There are 256 verses in the Bible that refer to God’s anger. When Jesus saw the money lenders in the temple using the church to take advantage of people, he made a whip and **drove them from the temple**. Jesus was angry. God gives us the same capacity to get angry. But it must be controlled. It should never be allowed to get out of control or be destructive.

That said, when anger is managed and under control, it can be an incredible asset. You may remember the story of Candance Lightner and what her anger led her to accomplish. On May 3, 1980, her 13 year old daughter was walking home with a friend from a church carnival when a drunk driver hit her from behind literally throwing her out of her shoes and

killing her. The driver of the car had just been released from jail after his 4th DUI offense.

Candance was angry. But, rather than submit to the desire to do something destructive, she channeled her anger to make a difference. She founded the **organization MADD**. According to their website, Mothers Against Drunk Driving has saved 380,000 lives since 1980. In 1980, there were 25,000 deaths connected to drunk driving and today there are about 11,000 (a 56% reduction). By controlling and channeling her anger in constructive ways, Candace saved almost 400,000 lives. Anger, in and of itself, is not wrong.

But anger must be controlled. If anger is not controlled, it can be extremely destructive. I do not need to tell you that we live in an angry world, in an angry country. If you doubt that just turn on the news, scroll through a news feed, go to social media and read some comments on any even slightly controversial post. Too many of us have let our anger get out of control.

What's more, with the elections coming up, it seems to be getting worse and worse. Don't get me wrong, as God's people, we are to fight for justice and stand against lies. However, we are to do it in God-honoring ways, which means we must not allow ourselves to be easily angered. It is not wrong to get angry, but we must control and channel that anger in useful ways. Which is why we will be looking at ways to appropriately manage our anger.

Yes, we can learn to manage our anger. Of course, when we are angry, I mean really angry, it feels uncontrollable. I am sure that we have all done things we regret in times of anger. I will be the first to admit that managing anger is easier said than done. But, it can be done, and it is very important we learn to do it. Indeed, the Bible tells us that, **“Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.” - Proverbs 16:32**

Hear that? We can rule our anger. We have far more control over our anger than many care to admit. I once had a parishioner tell me, “But pastor this is just the way I am. I was born with a temper. I’m Irish.” Others have told me, “I can’t help it. It’s the way I was raised.”

That is not what we read in the Bible. The gospel message is that we can change, that we can be transformed, that in Christ we are a new creation, that we don't have to be the person we were born to be or raised to be. I don't know about you, but I don't want to be the same anymore. One of the reasons I decided to do this series on what Paul teaches about love is because I want this to be in a season in which God brings about changes in my life that will help me to love as Christ loved. I hope to learn to love in ways I have never lived out before.

Paul is telling us that a part of living that transformed life is learning to control our anger, to not deny our anger, or stuff our anger, but to channel and control our anger in ways that are constructive not destructive. So, where do we begin? Paul says that the first step is to not be easily angered, and when we are angry to learn, with God's help, to control that anger.

How do we follow Paul's advice to not get easily angered. A good place to begin is to remember the cost attached to losing our temper. I am reminded of this past NFL season and what happened to Myles Garrett after he let his anger take control. Garrett is an All-American edge rusher who became a star with the Browns of the NFL. In the game in question, the Browns were having their way with the Steelers. The Steeler quarterback had been sacked two plays running and was about to get sacked a third time by Garrett, when he got rid of the ball by tossing a shuttle pass to a back. However, Garrett wanted the sack so much that he broke the rules, taking the quarterback, Rudolph, down. We do not know exactly what happened next. But we know that Garrett lost his temper and let's watch what he did. (1:09-1:27)



In punishment for his angry attack, Myles Garrett was suspended for the rest of the season without pay, the second longest suspension in NFL history. It cost him 1.4 million dollars in lost wages. And we do not know what effect it will have on his future career. Yes, his anger cost him dearly. It cost him a bunch of money, his reputation, the respect for fans and teammates, and maybe even his career. Not only did he pay a price for his anger, his whole team suffered. Losing control of our anger can be costly.

I have seen uncontrolled anger cost jobs, families, and yes, even lives. I once did the funeral for a man who lost his temper when he believed a neighbor was stealing his water. He killed his neighbor and then killed himself. No good comes out of uncontrolled anger.

How about you? Has your uncontrolled, ungodly anger ever cost you anything? We are less likely to let our anger get out of control if we remember that anger comes with a price tag.

Perhaps, worst of all, anger can damage our relationship with God. James tells us that it is not what God desires:

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. — James 1:19,20

Do you hear what that verse is saying? It is saying that anger will never lead to the life that God desires for us. If we want to honor God, if we want to live righteous lives, we must learn to control our anger.

So, how can we bring our anger under control? A good place to begin is by simply refusing to respond right away. Don't act on impulse. I am not talking about burying your anger and stewing for days or even years. That is called resentment and it is as bad as impulsive anger. Do not hang onto and nurse your anger. Indeed, Ephesians counsels us "**Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.**" — Eph. 4:26

Nor should you try to bury your anger under the carpet. If you do, you are not only internalizing your anger, which hurts no one but you, you are giving the spiritual forces of wickedness a place to stew and fester.

Still, it is a good idea to pause and reflect before reacting. It gives us a chance to calm down and think about why we are angry. It also keeps us from saying something reckless that we really don't mean and will certainly regret later. Before you speak, before you respond to that text or email, before you post on social media, pause and give your mind a chance to catch up with your emotions. Ask what is the wisest not the quickest response to this situation.

Then ask yourself why you are angry. That question is harder to answer than you might think. Anger is a crazy emotion. It can be slippery and hard to get a hold of. Anger is actually a secondary emotion. It is often the result of unmet expectations. When we expect that something should or will happen and those expectations don't match reality, we become angry.

Or we may grow angry because we are afraid. What happens when we are afraid? Well, what happens when you push an animal into a corner? They become afraid, and eventually they will strike out in fear and anger. People are the same way. When we get backed into a corner, when we feel threatened or are afraid, when something long hidden might be exposed, we get angry.

Know that when we get angry, it is probably because of because of unmet expectations or fear, because anger is a secondary emotion. Which also means that if someone is angry with us, it is probably caused by unmet expectations or fear. So rather than focusing on their anger, it is far more productive to ask what really lies behind their anger. Are they hurt? Are they frustrated? Are they afraid? Unless you know what really lies behind their anger, or yours, you will never be able to address it.

Once you understand your anger, release it appropriately. Again Ephesians 4:26 instructs us **“If you become angry, do not let your anger lead you into sin.”** From which it follows that we need to release our anger in healthy ways. Sadly though, we too often do not.

I once had a parishioner who could not throw anything away, even trash. They kept stuffing and stuffing it in a back room. Do you know what eventually happened? It started to leak out and stink. That is what happens if you stuff things away. It is going to leak out on everyone round you.

Others do just the opposite. They just spew their anger out on anyone or anything that is near. They curse God, they curse people, they slam doors, squeal tires. They kick cats and little dogs. However, God says, **“Don't be quick-tempered, for anger is the friend of fools.”**

- Ecclesiastes 7:9

A far better approach is to be aware of your anger. Admit it to yourself. Then look behind it (because anger is a secondary emotion). Ask yourself, "What am I angry about? Is it because I'm hurting or afraid or frustrated?" Admit it to God. "God, I'm mad. I don't like this situation." But then add, "I don't want to be this way. God, I feel like I am about to lose it, but I know that my anger will not achieve the righteous life you desire, please help me."

Then admit it to the one you are mad at. Just level with the one you are angry at, "I am starting to get upset. I'm feeling hurt or frustrated" or "I'm afraid. Would you please give me some space before I say or do something stupid?" If we are going to love like God asks to love, we must learn to deal with our anger. It helps to begin by remembering that our anger always costs, so it is best to deal with it upfront. Then we should stop and reflect before reacting, and finally, we must release our anger appropriately.

Then we should ask God for help. In John chapter 5, Jesus was in Jerusalem, at a pool called Bethesda. Many sick people gathered there every day, hoping to be made well. On this particular day, Jesus saw a man lying by the pool who had been paralyzed for 38 years. Jesus walked up to the man and asked him a question. Do you recall what that question was? He asked him, "Do you want to get well?" There is a great truth here. In order to get well we have to want to get well.

So, let me ask you that same question. Do you want to get well? Do you want to live out God's kind of love? To be more patient? To unleash kindness? To stop envying? To overcome your pride? To be someone who shows respect for other people? To be a person who is not easily angered? To get well? Then ask God to help you get well. God has the power to change us but we have to want it and ask for it!

Will you pray with me. Let us ask God to make us well...