

Be Careful of anger; it can destroy like uncontrolled fire!

September 11, 2016

I was asked if I would write a sermon on “anger” as it is an area that troubles many people in their Christian walk. As I was thinking about the subject a newspaper article came to mind that I am going to share it with you. You may or may not have heard this story.

In May of 2011, a young man aged 20 named Wilbur Strout, broke into the Pentecostal church through a rear window of the church in Winterport, Maine. After pouring gasoline around the front area of the church and over the altar, he proceeded to douse himself with the flammable liquid and then set himself on fire. After running up a flight of stairs he jumped out the second story window and there he died.

Wilbur’s father had served as the pastor of this church for 17 years during the 1990’s and Wilbur Jr. had spent his childhood in this congregation. There were writings of rambling notes found in his car and a Bible laying on the front seat, but no explanation of why he destroyed the church and himself with fire. His parents had relocated to another state and were ministering in another church at the time of his death. They offered no explanation or reasons why their son would choose to burn the church down. Wilbur Jr. had been involved in youth ministry at the church in Winterport for several months and had begun to preach at the services held in that church weeks before the tragedy occurred.

The current pastor urged his congregation to forgive and to move forward and prayers were offered for the Strout family for the loss of their son.

I didn’t know the people who were involved in this story, but I do know the danger of unresolved anger. It is a feeling of disappointment that often results in a desire to seek revenge. It is a desire that the offender will feel the same intensity of pain that is being afflicted on the victim. If it goes unchecked, it escalates from hurt and the flame begins to grow and in this case, and often the case, something tragic is the result. Anger turns to rage and result often is violence. It appears that Wilbur Jr. had unresolved anger from memories brought about during the years that his father was pastor of this church. He returned to the area, tried to make peace with his past by getting involved working under the present pastor, but he didn’t face the truth of the rage that was in his soul. Satan took advantage of the situation and because he didn’t use self-control or didn’t seek godly counsel his thoughts and actions resulted in revenge being taken out on the church in the act of burning down the church and the loss of his own life.

The first time that the subject of anger and revenge is found in the Bible is found in Genesis 4:5. After Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden of Eden, Eve looked forward to God’s promise of a son that would deliver them from the curse of sin and give them another chance to enjoy the wonderful life of paradise they had before they disobeyed God. When Cain was born, her words were “ I have gotten a man from God.” Later, she gave birth to his brother, Abel. Cain was a gardener and Abel tended sheep. A problem arose when it came time to give a sacrifice to the Lord. Cain brought fruit from the

ground; Able chose a lamb as the Lord had required and offered it as a sacrifice to the Lord. The Lord accepted Abel's offering, but rejected Cain's offering. The Bible says that Cain was very angry and his face reflected his emotional condition.

The Lord confronted Cain with these words "Why are you so angry? Why do you look so unhappy? If you do things well, I will accept you, but if you do not do them well, sin is ready to attack you. Sin wants you, but you must rule over it or it will become your master."

The Bible doesn't give any indication that Cain responded directly to the Lord. Cain began to have evil thoughts against his brother. It says that he said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out into the field." Abel went with him out into the field and Cain struck his brother and killed him.

Later the Lord asked Cain, "Where is your brother, Abel?" Cain answered, "I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?" The Lord confronted him with the fact that he had killed his brother and now the ground would refuse to produce a harvest for Cain and he would be a stranger and wanderer with no place to call "home" all the days of his life. Cain felt his punishment was more than he could bear for he suffered greatly for the act that he committed due to unrestrained anger.

A prisoner who had been sentenced to life in prison with no chance for parole said to me one day, "Every day I see the victim's face before me. She is connected to my name and I will never be free of the crime that I committed in a fit of anger. I have asked God for forgiveness and I have committed my life to Christ, but the stain of her blood is forever on my hands. I cannot forget and she will forever be in my memory and dreams."

In Colossians 3, Paul warns fathers concerning their children. "Provoke not your children to wrath, lest they be discouraged", he said. The NCV version says, "Fathers, do not nag your children. If you are too hard to please, they may want to stop trying."

Many adults who are angry and full of rage had the seeds of discouragement planted in their hearts at a young age. ~~They couldn't measure up and they felt unloved, with very little praise to motivate them towards goodness.~~ God has a view of us different than mans.

Ecclesiastes 7:9 says for people not to become angry quickly for getting angry rests in the hearts of fools. Anger is appropriate in certain circumstances but the Bible warns to "be angry and sin not." Ephesians 4:26. The rest of the verse says, "Do not let the sun go down on your wrath." Don't let it simmer in your heart! Don't allow it to linger or tuck it down deep in the soul for eventually it will cause you to sin against your Lord and your brother.

Cain tried to hide his sin by lying to the Lord. He said he didn't know where his brother was. When we are tempted to lie about our behavior and our lifestyle, that should be a red flag to us that we need to make some changes in our lives. We are our brother's keeper and when we take our anger out on others, God takes note of it.

Cain was angry at God, but took it out on his brother. I have observed people who have misguided anger. They are angry at people who had abused them, shamed them, or

showed partiality in favor of their siblings over them and I guarantee that they take their fragmented emotions out on innocent people. If they are confronted, they deny it; they cover it up; and they isolate the family so others will not discern the truth of what is taking place in their homes.

Forgiveness is the only antidote for anger and rage. Jesus Christ is able and willing to give us a new heart, a new outlook on life, and peace within the inner being of our souls.

Matthew 11:28 says to come to Jesus, all of us who are tired and are carrying heavy loads and he will give us rest. He guides us towards freedom with these words. He invites us to accept his teachings and learn from him because he is gentle and humble in spirit and we will find rest for our souls. The teaching that he asks us to accept is easy; the load that he gives us is light.

Are you willing to take those painful memories, the heaviness of spirit and soul that causes you to be so unhappy and sad, and give them to Jesus Christ?

Would you be willing to trust him with the outcome of the situations that have caused so much pain and sorrow; maybe even tears that wet down your pillow at night when you are alone and no one is around to share your pain?

Jesus loves us and he wants heavens best for us. Anger drags us down where sin can take advantage over us. If you don't overcome it; it will put you in bondage and you will be destroyed.

It doesn't matter whether you are highly educated or uneducated; whether you are a king ruling over God's people or a pastor of a small congregation; the outcome is the same. Allowing anger and bitterness to take root in your life and you will cause you to reap a harvest of sorrow and failure in your life and you will suffer loss when you stand before the Lord. Allow him to create a new heart in you and a right spirit within you. Psalms 51:10.

King Saul, in 1 Samuel 18, had won the hearts of the Jewish people. He was in the highest position of the land and his word was the law of the land of Israel. However, he allowed anger to take root in his life in verse 8 when he heard people praising the young lad, David, above his name. They attributed success in battle to David ten times over King Saul. From that day on, King Saul watched David with suspicion. The anger turned to rage and the rage caused him to seek an opportunity to kill David because he looked at him as a rival for the throne. His priorities became personal and his thoughts were continually on ways to hunt David down and destroy him. Because of his attitude towards God and God's servant, David, Saul lost his kingdom and his family suffered also. In verse 14 it says that David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the LORD was with him."

Regardless of how people treat us and what they do to tear us down, the Bible tells us how to handle it. See Matthew 5:44. "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; that you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." He goes on to say

that you will receive no reward for doing good to those who do good to you and if you just love those who love you, there is no reward in that. Even people who don't know Jesus Christ do that. He commands us to allow his spirit to fill us so that what others do to us will not affect our relationship with God and our fellowman. Jesus loved us even while we were sinners and he died for us. If we are to be mature and perfect in his sight, we must allow our light to shine in darkness so others will see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven. It is a great testimony to the power of God when people reach out in love and mercy to those who have wronged them. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

As you continue to seek God to help you overcome your temper, you will be blessed with peace and joy every time you respond in a quiet spirit when confronted with angry words. The blessing is worth the effort that we make to be more like Jesus Christ.