

**Recycling Anger**  
**John 2:12-17, James 1:19-22**

Well brothers and sisters, we about halfway through this series on the seven deadly sins and I hope you are starting to get into the habit of recycling them...

So far we've looked at recycling pride into power, gluttony into pleasure, and envy into identity and most importantly how we can use power, pleasure and identity to help build Christian community.

And this morning we are looking at how anger can be recycled into justice.

Now the idea of recycling pride and gluttony into power and pleasure can certainly seem to be an innovative way of dealing with those deadly sins...

But brothers and sisters the idea of recycling anger – or perhaps more accurately redirecting anger is not a new one.

The great protestant reformer Martin Luther - not to be confused with Dr. Martin Luther King... once wrote *"when I am angry I can write, pray and preach well, for then my whole temperature is quickened, my understanding is sharpened, and all mundane vexations and temptations depart"*

And truly any great reformer, or advocate for change in a corrupt system, especially the likes of Dr. King, would certainly agree with that statement. You might agree with it as well.

Because anger can motivate us to take a stand for what is right and fight against injustice.

However the philosopher Aristotle once said *"Anybody can become angry - that is easy, but to be angry with the right person and to the right degree and at the right time and for the right purpose, and in the right way - that is not within everybody's power and is not easy."*

And you only need to go on Facebook and read what people have posted about politicians, or pipelines, or protesters or

whatever hot-button issue is trending, to see that Aristotle was absolutely correct.

So in theory anger can be used constructively - but in practice it's not an easy thing to do. In fact I would wager that we tend to experience anger as something negative far more than we do as something positive.

Take these last verses of another poem on anger that I was considering using in our confession time....

*Anger you have messed up my life*

*Anger you have destroyed who I am inside and out*

*Anger you are the devil*

*Anger you are all that is bad*

*This anger I have in me has made me fight*

*A fight that was not worth it*

*Anger you made me hit the wrong person*

*Anger you made me do the wrong things*

*Anger you are the feeling that I would never miss*

*Anger you have caused me so much sorrow*

*Anger you have caused nothing but grief.*

*Anger just go away*

This was written by someone who has done some things in anger that they will regret forever... which seems to have destroyed a relationship that was important to them...

Resulted in consequences that can't be undone...

Have you ever said something or done something in anger that you wished later on you could take back later on because it's damaged a relationship? I know I have...

And I think if we're honest with ourselves, our experience with anger produces more of these kinds of moments than the kind where we are motivated to stand up against injustice...

And even in those times where we are standing up against injustice, fighting for what is right... it can be easy to get caught up in the moral outrage of the moment, and forgo a careful examination of the situation so that we fully understand what is going on...

Again – just look at how social media blows up when someone accuses a public figure of abuse and harassment – with no

formal legal proceedings or police investigation or evidence put forward...

So friends, I think the overall experience would be weighted on the negative side of things – and this is why Anger – in spite of the fact that it can be used constructively – is listed as one of the seven deadly sins.

But since it is also true that Anger can be used constructively, and since we are aware of the damage which repressing anger can cause us psychologically and physiologically, and because anger will always find a way to be expressed – even indirectly through passive aggressive behavior...

Anger is that Deadly Sin which really highlights the need for the “recycling” approach that we’ve been learning about.

So we need to ask “what is Sin twisting which makes anger so destructive?”

And I think Jeremiah 10:24 is helpful in this regard. Jeremiah writes *“Correct me, LORD, but only with justice— not in your anger, lest you reduce me to nothing.”*

So here we see the terms anger and justice being contrasted and I think that is helpful for us to consider that it is our desire for Justice that gets twisted into destructive anger.

Now I don’t mean to suggest in any way that God is affected by Sin – in this context Jeremiah realizes that his sin and Israel’s covenant unfaithfulness are so offensive to God that it makes God angry and He would be completely justified in destroying them.

We may not understand why this is so offensive to God and why it would make God want to destroy people... but that’s because ***we aren’t God***... feeling and understanding what God is feeling in this situation is a bit beyond us.

We might have a little glimpse of it when we are wronged by someone and we want to see them hurt in return or see them

reduced to nothing because of what they have done – but again... even that glimpse is touched by sin – whereas God is not.

So this is why scripture warns us that *“man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.”* (James 1:19)

And the apostle Paul encourages us by saying *“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. ”* (Rom 12:18-19)

So friends, while we may not fully understand God’s anger, and in fact it may frighten us to know that God can eventually get that angry, and it might terrify us to realize that in His anger God is justified in bringing destruction...

Ironically this is what can help us recycle our own anger to recover our desire for Justice and use it in a way that honors God, and restores relationships rather than destroys them.

You see while we like to think about God and dress God up according to our modern sensibilities, to make him more attractive to people and so we downplay his eventual anger, his wrath and vengeance... which works well in trying to sell him to polite middle-class society...

But if you’ve been abused, raped, beaten... if you’ve been forced out of your home, if you’ve been screwed over in court, if you’ve been falsely accused, if you’ve been harassed, if you are the underdog and you are oppressed...

If you have experienced even a little bit of the consequences of what how these deadly Sins wreck relationships and destroy community... if you see the consequences of what Sin does to our world... then the nice, friendly, chummy God that we’re trying to sell people on comes up very short!

Because a friendly chummy God isn’t really someone we can appeal to, He isn’t someone who will take up our cause and fight for you and bring about justice... he’s a nice friendly god who doesn’t rock the boat.

But the true God of the scriptures is someone you can appeal to – precisely because He does get angry and He does take vengeance.

So one of the first steps in recycling our anger is to bring it to Him and cry out to Him about the consequences of sin and the evil that affects this world and how it has affected us.

It is God's perfect anger, his wrath, his judgment, his vengeance allows us to take whatever wrongs we have experienced, or will experience in this life and through prayer, entrust them in his care.

*Psalm 64:11-12 says "One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that you, O God, are strong, and that you, O Lord, are loving. Surely you will reward each person according to what they have done."*

God in his perfect knowledge and goodness can sort through them, and will sort through them, and determine what these

wrongs are deserving of, and do so in perfect fairness and equality – and that is important friends.

Because when pay someone back in anger for offending us – we often realize that in doing so we have become far more of a monster than they had ever been to us.

Brothers and sisters the good news is that God will sort out all the wrongs that have been done in perfect fairness according to what they deserve- according to His justice.

King David knew this and so He brought his anger to God many times in the Psalms... listen to what he writes in Ps 69:22-29: *"May the table set before them become a snare; may it become retribution and a trap. May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever.*

*Pour out your wrath on them; let your fierce anger overtake them. May their place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in their tents.*

*For they persecute those you wound and talk about the pain of those you hurt. Charge them with crime upon crime; do not let them share in your salvation. May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous. I am in pain and distress; may your salvation, O God, protect me*

And that last line struck me – I’m sure David was asking for protection from his enemies, but I also think David was asking for God to protect him from reacting in anger in his pain and distress in ways that he would regret later on.

You see brothers and sisters, before he became the King - David endured a whole lot of injustice – yet later on as King he was never characterized by anger or vengeance nor did he have regrets about how he took the thrown. Because friends He could take his anger to God and vent it to him in prayer, in the Psalms he wrote, and left it with God to deal with the injustices.

And that’s what we need to do as well if we are going to recycle the deadly sin of Anger. Maybe it helps to do this simply by reading the Psalms that express anger to God...

So friends... up to this point we’ve talked a whole lot about anger, destructive anger and we’ve pointed out that anger happens when Sin twists our desire for Justice.

So we need to talk about how God has created us with a desire for Justice.

Now justice is a hot-topic these days, we hear a lot about “social justice, natural justice, restorative justice, retributive justice” and which is really true justice, which is the better kind of justice, and all that sort of stuff...

But I like the word used for justice in Jeremiah 10:24 - “*Mishpat*” and that sort of justice it’s all about God’s laws, God’s rulings, God’s decisions, and when your starting point for justice comes from God - as opposed to public opinion, or what people call the natural world, or relationships or

punishment – I think you're getting off to a much better start...

So When Jeremiah appeals to God to deal with him according to his justice, his *mishpat*... He is asking that God be guided by the Covenant terms and conditions that God had set-up between himself and Israel.

So friends, we can take from this that our desire for justice needs to be guided by God's laws, God's decisions, God's Kingdom, God's Word and God's Holy Spirit – all of which we become more intimately acquainted with through the reading of and the study of the scriptures.

This is why James 1:22 says *"don't merely listen the word and so deceive yourselves... do what it says."*

When we have to right a wrong, when we have to stand up for what is right, or for others rights, when we have to deal with systemic injustice or corruption, this is where the rubber meets the road – scripture gives us guidelines to pursue

justice, and if we are going to co-operate with the Holy Spirit to recycle our anger into justice we need to know what God's law and will from scripture and we need to actually follow it.

And this doesn't mean that our pursuit of justice will always be polite, passive, non-confrontational, or even non-violent... sometimes following God's guidance will mean having to confront things and getting up in people's faces about things.

Remember, being a Christian is not about being nice to other nice people – that is a bad misunderstanding of Christianity.

I get a chuckle out of the E-card that's going around these days on Facebook which says *"When someone asks 'what would Jesus do?' Remind them that freaking out and kicking over tables is a viable option"*

When Jesus saw that the Jews had violated God's command that certain courts of the temple be left open for the Gentiles to come and seek God in prayer, especially around the Passover celebration, He pursued justice for the Gentiles who

were being denied access to God – and cleared that space for them.

And later on in the early church, when the Apostle Peter regressed into old distinctions between Jews and Gentiles the Apostle Paul says *“When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong.”* (Gal 2:11)

Brothers and sisters there is a time and a place where justice requires confrontation, getting in people’s faces, and perhaps even getting physical.

And if that makes us uncomfortable – perhaps that’s good – we shouldn’t be so quick to want to go to these places if righting wrongs can be accomplished in a peaceful manner.

And so we are back to James 1:19 *“My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.”*

Or to put it in more recycled terms *“Maintain **justice** and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed – says the Lord”* Isaiah 56:1

Friends, let me tell you a story of someone who could have been very angry and used that anger for revenge but chose instead to pursue justice according to God’s laws.

It’s the story of Nelson Mandela, a name that many of you are familiar with – and whatever you might think of the events and his actions which lead to his spending twenty seven years in prison, the fact is that he had many reasons and a lot of time to build up anger sitting in jail.

But when he was released and the apartheid system in South Africa came to an end... he was given the opportunity to lead the country and his goal was not to take revenge... but to work for healing, to work for justice.

To restore relationships and rebuilt community.



And I doubt this would have been possible for him without the influence of the Christian faith which he credits for sustaining him during his time in prison.

Now brothers and sisters, we all struggle with anger from time to time and so it is helpful to be reminded that *“man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.”*

But – some of us find that anger is constantly simmering just below the surface, because everywhere we look we find things that make us angry. We struggle to keep it under control because we know all too well that if our anger gets out – nothing good comes from it.

Friends, if you struggle with anger in this way, I have some good news for you. You are someone who is wired to pursue justice and you have an important role to play in building authentic Christian community.

You need to co-operate with the Holy Spirit and recycle that anger into a desire for God’s justice. Those who are created

with a high desire for justice are our corporate consciences – you are the ones who will point out the ways in which these other deadly sins are wrecking relationships and destroying community and bring those injustices to our attention.

You see brothers and sisters true Christian community – for all its wonderfulness which we’ve ascribed to it thus far in this series – true Christian community also deals honestly with the reality of how Sin is affecting it, it doesn’t ignore it and sweep it under the rug.

That isn’t true community that’s pseudo-community, shallow - its’ nice people being nice to other nice people.

And as I mentioned before, anger is the deadly sin which really highlights the need for recycling. But not just so that you can have the Holy Spirit transform it into a desire for justice – but so that in your desire to pursue justice you do not cause more harm than you seek to prevent.

As Proverbs 19:2 says *“Desire without knowledge is not good— how much more will hasty feet miss the way!”*

If you do not understand the deep nature of sin – how it is parasitical, how it is a state of being... if you do not understand how the Holy Spirit works in us to recycle our sin and undo the warping and twisting effect of sin...

If you do not understand that behind each one of these sins and the injustices they cause that there is something essential to the building and creating of Christian community...

Then in your desire for justice you will throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater. You’ll be like an overly aggressive immune system that ends up attacking Christ’s body instead of fighting the infection – as you try to destroy the injustice that comes from pride – you’ll also destroy the proud person.

But knowing the biblical truth about how the Holy Spirit works to sanctify us and undo the warping effects of sin on how God

created each of us allows you to focus your desire for God’s justice to see a proud person transformed into powerful person, a glutton reformed into pleasurable person, an envious person recycled into someone who knows who and whose they are – and all these people are able to contribute who they are into building a Christian community.

Brothers and sisters – our anger is makes people uncomfortable and its destructive, it needs to be recycled...

God’s justice is still uncomfortable, but it is constructive and it is the only way to build honest true community.

So brothers and sisters, may our ears hear and our hearts receive what Jesus is speaking to us about recycling our anger this morning. Amen

Let’s Pray.