

“CHARITY...IS NOT EASILY PROVOKED.”

1 Corinthians 13:5

Sermon to the Westboro Baptist Church, February 9, 2020

(First of Two Parts)

1 ¶ *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.*

2 *And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.*

3 *And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.*

4 ¶ *Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,*

5 *Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;*

6 *Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;*

7 *Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.*

8 ¶ *Charity never faileth: (1 Corinthians 13)*

Barnes reports that William Tindale’s translation of the Bible at 1 Corinthians 13:5(c), reads: “*is not easily provoked to anger.*” Having declared that charity is contrary to two deep and ever-flowing

fountains of sin and wickedness in the heart, pride and selfishness, the apostle then proceeds to show that it is also contrary to two things that are commonly the fruits of this pride and selfishness, that is an angry spirit, and a censorious spirit. The first of these points is the subject of today's sermon, and the Lord willing, next week's sermon, to wit: that charity "*is not easily provoked.*" This is the doctrine: that the spirit of charity, or Christian love, is the opposite of an angry or wrathful spirit or disposition.

Barnes: "Is not easily provoked, παροξυνεται. This word occurs in the New Testament only in one other place. #Ac 17:16: "His spirit was stirred within him when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry." See Barnes "Ac 17:16". The word properly means, to sharpen by, or with, or on anything, (from οξυς, sharp,) and may be applied to the act of sharpening a knife or sword; then it means, to sharpen the mind, temper, courage of any one; to excite, impel, etc. Here it means, evidently, to rouse to anger; to excite to indignation or wrath."

Please allow me a brief interlude. This may be the most important sermon that I have delivered to date. Granted, there is not a huge record I am competing against, so don't be too impressed. But on the other hand—be very impressed by this subject. For years (approximately 30, now) while I have had the privilege with most of you here to hold up signs of love and peace to very untoward generations across this country, and witnessed the hateful, violent response to words of truth from the Bible, I have constantly thought about the provoking that they have engaged in towards us. It is universal and it is unrelenting. What should be our response to these things? I believe this sermon will help us. Our pride and our selfishness cause us endless grief, which results in being easily provoked to anger. I believe this sermon will help us fight against them. But the most important thing is that considering this subject will help us identify how we may avoid doing each other

wrong. James identifies the issue in his simplicity: James 5:9: *“Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.”* If there is a word in the Bible which is polar opposite from “charity,” it has to be “grudge.”

What is that angry or wrathful spirit spoken against here? It is not all manner of anger that Christianity is opposite and contrary to. It is said in **Ephesians 4:26**, *“Be ye angry, and sin not;”* which seems to suppose that there is such a thing as anger without sin, or that it is possible to be angry in some cases, and yet not offend God. Therefore, a Christian spirit, or the spirit of charity, is opposite to all undue and unsuitable anger. When is anger undue or unsuitable?

Anger may be undue and unsuitable in respect to its nature. — Anger may be defined to be an earnest and opposition of spirit against any real or supposed evil, or in view of any fault or offense of another. All anger is opposition of the mind against real or supposed evil; but it is not all opposition of the mind against evil that is properly called anger. Anger that contains ill-will, or a desire of revenge is what is prohibited. There is such a thing as anger that is consistent with goodwill; for a father may be angry with his child, that is, he may find in himself an earnestness and opposition of spirit to the bad conduct of his child, and his spirit may be engaged and stirred in opposition to that conduct, and to his child while continuing in it; and yet, at the same time, he will not have any proper ill-will to the child, but on the contrary, a real goodwill; and so far from desiring its injury, he may have the very highest desire for its true welfare, and his very anger be but his opposition to that which he thinks will be of injury to it. And this shows that anger, in its general nature, rather consists in the opposition of the spirit to evil than in a desire of revenge.

We are not allowed to entertain ill-will toward others in any case, but are to have goodwill to all. (e.g., see **2 Timothy 2:25**). We are required by Christ to wish well to and pray for the prosperity of all,

even our enemies, and those that despitefully use us and persecute us (**Matthew. 5:44**); and the rule given by the apostle is, “*Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not*” (**Romans 12:14**); that is, we are only to wish good and pray for good to others, and in no case to wish evil. And so all revenge is forbidden, if we make an exception for the vengeance which public justice takes on the transgressor, in inflicting which men act not for themselves, but for God. The rule is, “*Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people; but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord*” (**Leviticus 19:18**); and says the apostle, “*Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord”*” (**Romans 12:19**). So that all the anger that contains ill-will or a desire of revenge, is what Christianity is contrary to, and by the most fearful sanctions forbids.

Sometimes anger, as it is spoken of in the Scripture, is meant only in the worst sense, or in that sense of it which implies ill-will and the desire of revenge; and in this sense all anger is forbidden, as in **Ephesians 4:31**, “*Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice;*” and again, in **Colossians 3:8**, “*But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.*”

Anger may be unsuitable and unchristian in respect to its occasion. It is unsuitable because it’s being without any just cause. Of this Christ speaks when he says, “*Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment*” (**Matthew 5:22**). And this may be the case in three ways:

First, when the occasion of anger is that which is against a person who is not at fault. This is frequently the case. Many persons are of such a proud and irritable disposition, that they will be angry at anything that

is in any respect against them, or troublesome to them, or contrary to their wishes, whether anybody be to blame for it or not. And so sometimes men are angry with others for those things that are not from their fault, but which happen merely through their involuntary ignorance, or through their helplessness. They are angry that they have not done better, when the only cause was, that the circumstances were such that they could not do otherwise than they did. And oftentimes persons are angry with others, not only for that which is no fault in them, but for that which is really good, and for which they ought to be praised. So it always is when men are angry at God, and fret at his providence and its dispensations toward them. Thus to be fretful and impatient, and to murmur against God's dealings, is a most horribly wicked kind of anger. And yet this very often is the case in this wicked world. This is what the wicked Israelites were so often guilty of, and for which so many of them were overthrown in the wilderness (**1 Corinthians 10:5, 10**); and this was what Jonah, though a good man, was guilty of when he was angry with God without a cause and angry for that for which he should have praised God, that is, his great mercy to the Ninevites (**Jonah Chapter 4**). That Chapter is very instructive, and so let's read it: *1 ¶ But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. 2 And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. 3 Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live. 4 Then said the LORD, Doest thou well to be angry? 5 ¶ So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city. 6 And the LORD God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd. 7 But God prepared a*

worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. 8 And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live. 9 And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death. 10 Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: 11 And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?” Jonah is a type of Christ (Matthew 12:40); but I know that you will agree with me that this thing that Jonah became practically disabled over, is not unique to him. This is a horribly wicked anger; and we are guilty with Jonah. God is sovereign; and we must keep that ever present in our minds and fight to give it preeminence in all our thinking. And to be thankful for it; and to love it, genuinely.

Oftentimes, also, persons’ spirits are kept very much in a fret by reason of things going contrary to them, and their meeting with crosses and disappointments and entanglements in their business, when they will not own that it is God they fret at and are angry with. Such fretfulness can be interpreted no other way; and whatever they may pretend, it is ultimately aimed against the Author of providence — against the God who orders these cross events, so that it is a murmuring and fretting against him. James, again in his simplicity, helps us with these verses: **James 4:** “13 Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: 14 Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. 15 For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.”

And it is a common thing, again, for persons to be angry with others for their doing well, and that which is only their duty. There never was so much bitterness and fierceness of anger among men one to another, and so much hostility and malice, for any one thing, as there has been for well-doing. History gives no accounts of any such cruelties as those practiced toward God's people on account of their profession and practice of religion. And how annoyed were the scribes and Pharisees with Christ for doing the will of his Father in what he did and said while on earth! When men are angry with others for proceeding regularly against them for their errors or sins, they are angry with them for well-doing. We will soon enter our 30th year of street preaching entrusted to us by the Captain of our salvation, and based upon those years of experience we can testify as experts to this misplaced anger. We have experienced a tsunami of it! (But, understand, it is anger at the Lord and therefore an offense against his good will, and that is what should concern us about it primarily!) Often men are angry with others not only for well-doing, but for doing those things that are acts of friendship to them, as when we are angry with others for administering Christian reproof for anything they observe in us that is wrong. This the Psalmist said he should accept as a kindness — “*Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness (Psalm 141:5);*” but such as are angry with it, foolishly and sinfully take it as an injury.

Second, anger is unsuitable and unchristian as to its occasion, when persons are angry upon small and trivial occasions, and when, though there be something of blame, yet the fault is very small, and such as is not worth our being stirred up and engaged about. God does not call us to have our spirits ceaselessly engaged in opposition, and stirred up in anger, unless it be on some important occasions. Of him that is provoked at every little, trifling thing, it surely cannot be said that he is “*not easily provoked.*” Some are of such an angry, fretful spirit, that they are transformed to a bad mood by every little thing,

and by things in others, in the family, or in society, or in business, that are no greater faults than they themselves are guilty of every day. Those that will thus be angry at every fault they see in others, will be sure to be always kept in a fret, and their minds will never be composed; for it cannot be expected in this world but that we shall continually be seeing faults in others, as there are continually faults in ourselves. And therefore Christians are directed to be “*slow to speak, slow to wrath*” (**James 1:19**); and it is said, that “*He that is soon angry, dealeth foolishly.*” (**Proverbs 14:17**). He that diligently guards his own spirit will not be very frequently or easily angry. He wisely keeps his mind in a calm, clear frame, and does not suffer it to be stirred with anger, except on extraordinary occasions, and those that do especially call for it.

Third, anger may be unsuitable and unchristian in its occasion, when our spirits are stirred at the faults of others chiefly as they affect ourselves, and not as they are against God. We should never be angry but at sin, and this should always be that which we oppose in our anger. And when our spirits are stirred to oppose this evil, it should be *as* sin, or chiefly as it is against God. If there be no sin and no fault, then we have no cause to be angry; and if there be a fault or sin, then it is infinitely worse as against God than it is as against us, and therefore it requires the most opposition on that account. Persons sin in their anger when they are selfish in it; for we are not to act as if we were our own, or for ourselves simply, since we belong to God, and not to ourselves. When a fault is committed wherein God is sinned against, and persons are injured by it, they should be chiefly concerned, and their spirits chiefly moved against it, because it is against God; for they should care more for God’s honor than for their own temporal interests. There is no virtue or goodness in opposing sin, unless it be opposed *as* sin. The anger that is virtuous is the same thing which, in one form, is called zeal. Our anger should be like Christ’s anger. He was like a lamb under the greatest personal

injuries, and we never read of his being angry but in the cause of God against sin as sin. And this should be the case with us.

Anger may be undue and sinful with respect to its end.

First, when we are angry without considerably proposing any end to be gained by it. In this way it is that anger is rash and inconsiderate, and that it is suffered to rise, and be continued, without any consideration or motive. Reason has no hand in the matter; but the passions go before the reason, and anger is suffered to rise before even a thought has been given to the question, of what advantage or benefit will it be, either to me or others? Such anger is not the anger of men, but the blind passion of beasts: it is a kind of beastly fury, rather than the affection of a rational creature. All things in the soul of man should be under the government of reason, which is the highest faculty of our being; and every other faculty and principle in the soul should be governed and directed by that to its proper end. And, therefore, when our anger is of this kind, it is unchristian and sinful. And so it is,

Second, when we allow ourselves to be angry for any wrong end. Though reason would tell us, with regard to our anger, that it cannot be for the glory of God, or of any real benefit to ourselves, but, on the other hand, much to the mischief of ourselves or others, yet, because we have in view the gratification of our own pride, or the extension of our influence, or getting in some way superiority to others, we allow anger as aiding to gain these or other ends, and thus indulge a sinful spirit.

Anger may be unsuitable and unchristian with respect to its measure. — As to the measure of its degree, and the measure of its continuance.

First, when it is immoderate *in degree*. Anger may be far beyond what the case requires. And often it is so great as to put persons beyond the

control of themselves, their passions being so violent, that, for the time, they know not what they do, and seem to be unable to direct and regulate either their feelings or conduct. Sometimes men's passions rise so high that they are, as it were, drunk with them, so that their reason is gone, and they act as if beside themselves. But the degree of anger ought always to be regulated by the end of it, and it should never be suffered to rise any higher than so far as tends to the obtaining of the good ends which reason has proposed.

Second, when it is immoderate in its continuance. It is a very sinful thing for persons to be long angry. The wise man not only gives us the injunction, "*Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry,*" but he adds, that "*anger resteth in the bosom of fools*" (**Ecclesiastes 7:9**); and, says the apostle, "*Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath*" (**Ephesians. 4:26**). If anger be long continued, it soon degenerates into malice. If a person allows himself long to hold anger towards another, he will quickly come to hate him. And so we find that it actually is among those that retain a grudge in their hearts against others for week after week, and month after month, and year after year. They do, in the end, truly hate the persons against whom they thus lay up anger, whether they own it or not. And this is a most dreadful sin in the sight of God. **James 5:9**: "*Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.*" All, therefore, should be exceedingly careful how they suffer anger long to continue in their hearts.

Having thus shown what is that angry or wrathful spirit to which charity is directly contrary, I hope to show you next time *how* charity is contrary to this angry sinful spirit and offer some helpful practical applications for us for our daily walk as *children of light* (**Ephesians 5:8**).

I love you. Amen.