

Today we are continuing our sermon series called, *Why the Seven Deadly Sins Are so Deadly.* Do you remember the last time you got angry? Are you proud of what you did? Are you proud of how you acted?

One man was talking to another. "My wife and I," he exclaims, "We had a fight last night. We got real angry with each other and had it out."

His friend asked him, "Really? How did it end up?"

"How did it end up? Why she came crawling to me on her hands and knees!"

"Wow, what did she say?"

"She said, 'Come out from under that bed you coward! I want to knock you into next week.'"

Anger! Do you remember the last time you were angry? How did you act?

This deadly sin is sometimes called Anger. At other times it is called wrath. Personally, I like the term wrath better, because for me it conjures up images of why anger can be so deadly.

When we talk about anger, we need to understand right away that anger in and of itself is not necessarily a bad thing. There are many times from the bible where righteous anger causes the religious leader to act in a way that speaks out on behalf of the poor or the oppressed of the land. This type of anger exposes a larger sin of oppression that is going on in the world. One could say that the type of anger Jesus expressed when he cleared the temple of the money changers is an example of righteous anger. That is NOT the type of anger I am talking about today.

Anger is also a feeling. It is a natural reaction to when we have been hurt or mistreated. That is also NOT the type of anger I am talking about today.

What I want to talk about today is when our anger causes hurt. When we become so enraged that we lose control of ourselves and hurt

ourselves. When we become so enraged and lose control of ourselves and hurt others. When we become so enraged and lose control of ourselves and damage things around us. That is when anger or wrath becomes a problem.

Losing control in anger is a problem in our world right now. The violence that is being exhibited in our world through wars is out of control. The violence being exhibited through such things as road rage is ridiculous. I read about a bicyclist in Illinois, who got mad at a driver of a car for cutting him off. He yelled and expressed his anger. The driver of the car slowed down, let the bicyclist catch up to him, pulled out a gun and shot him, killing him. We have a problem with anger. The violence that is being exhibited in our world through domestic abuse is off the charts.

Losing control of our anger, is not only destructive to other people, it is also destructive to our own health. People who continually blow up and blow out in anger have significantly higher health risks.

Anger, when we let it go unchecked does exactly what our scripture for today tells us that God hates. Anger, when it goes unchecked sows discord in the family. It causes hands to shed innocent blood. It causes wicked plans to be devised, all in an attempt to "get even" with someone.

The challenge for us is when someone has it out for us. When we have been hurt. When we feel anger beginning to well up within us, what can we do? How do we take the energy from the anger we feel and channel it differently? Is there a way we can use that energy for good, for acts of justice?

The first step in dealing with our anger is to be aware of it. You might say to me. "Gee Scott; of course I am aware of my anger. What on earth are you talking about? I can feel when I am getting angry."

What I am really talking about here is doing some self talk. When I begin to feel my pulse quicken and my breath to shorten, when I feel my blood pressure begin to rise, when I pause to say, "Why? What is going on here?" I find that I am able to begin looking at the situation from a healthier standpoint.

If I can pause long enough to ask, why am I feeling this way? I give myself a chance to begin to deal with my anger, instead of letting my anger lead me to out of control actions. I can begin to ask the questions like, Are my rights being trampled upon? Do I feel like I am being mistreated? Is this other person really trying to take advantage of me?

For those times when the answer is yes. This process of asking about my anger can lead me into positive ways of dealing with that anger.

However, I am also aware that there are times when I have misread the situation. This process of becoming aware of my feelings and identifying them actually helps me to not make a bad situation worse. Debbie has a terrific saying that she likes to use when we have a disagreement. It is so helpful to me when she says, "Look Scott, I am not the enemy here. I am on your team." It is so helpful because I understand that simply because we have a disagreement, we don't have to get into a battle. We can begin to work together to solve the issue.

The second step in dealing with anger in a healthy way is not bottling it up. We need to name it. Because in naming it, we begin the process of letting it go. Sometimes we can name it to the person who has offended us. Sometimes we can name it in a letter that may or may not be sent. Sometimes we should name it in our time of prayer or in journaling. But naming it begins the process of letting it go, so it doesn't have power over us.

If we bottle it up, then it has control over us. There were once two Buddhist monks that were walking from one city to another. These monks were of the strictest order. They were not to talk to women or even look at women.

As they were walking along, they arrived at a place where the path was interrupted by water running over the path. Beside this water was a beautiful young woman who wanted to cross. But she was afraid of being swept away by the water.

The monks surveyed the situation and decided what they would do. Then one of the monks went over to the young lady. He asked if he could carry her across. She said yes. And so he carried her across and put her down on the other side and they continued their journey.

At the end of the day, the one monk who had carried the woman noticed that his friend seemed upset. When he asked why? His friend said, "You know who we are. We are monks of the strictest order. We are not supposed to talk to women. We are not even supposed to look at women. And we are certainly not supposed to touch beautiful young women like you did to day. What is wrong with you?"

The one who had carried the woman looked at his friend and said, "I set the woman down beside the water a long time ago. Why have you been carrying her all day?"

Anger, if we can't let it go, stays with us. It eats away at us like a burden. It causes us to act in ways that are out of control. It causes us great pain.

But if we can learn to be aware of it and identify it and not bottle it up, we can learn to trust God and let it go. May God help us live faithfully, and let go of the anger in our lives.

Amen