

James 1:19-21
The Anger of Man

People of God, recently I was reminded of the helpful phrase about "the canary in the coal mine." This is a metaphorical expression that originated from the practice of taking canaries into coal mines to detect the presence of toxic gases, such as carbon monoxide. Canaries are highly sensitive to these gases and would quickly fall ill or die if they were present, serving as a warning to the miners to evacuate the area.

In a broader sense, the phrase has come to symbolize an early warning system or an indicator of potential danger.

Today, we have a canary warning signs of a toxic culture of in the church. And the toxicity which we must be aware of is worldliness. But when I say worldliness, I am not talking about clothes and tattoos or anything like that. What I mean by worldliness is directly related to the text of James.

At the end of chp. 1 James says "religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphan and widows in the affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

James 4 goes on further to describe this worldliness, saying:

Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? ²You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. ⁴Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

So the worldliness that James warns about is overflow of anger, and fighting, and warring, that takes places among the members of the church. And why are they so angry? Because they want to see the righteous kingdom of Christ established on the earth. But they are being persecuted on the one hand, and so they think that if they fight back and hurt and murder people in return, that will teach their enemies not to mess with them. They needed to inflict pain on the persecutors to teach them a lesson. That's one.

The second is that you had people in the church who were cozying up to their persecutors and compromising the faith in order to get street cred with the cool kids, so they would be left alone. Pastor's began to write introductions for books like "Woke Church." And they also said favorable things about their cultural persecutors, and refuse to openly acknowledge their sins and faults.

And, whenever someone would come along and question why they are showing much favor to these people who have compromised the faith, or are clearly enemies of the church, these leaders would criticize and attack their own people for being concerned. Today we call that phenomenon, punch right, slide left.

And what this does for ordinary faithful Christians who care about the church, who care about the faith, and who are being pursued by their enemies on the side, and see church leaders compromise with those same persecutors on the other, and even begin to join forces with them, to greater or lesser extents, what that can do is make a person extremely angry.

And this is the same problem we have today, and it is the same problem that going on in the time of the early church. But there it was significantly worse, because at that time they were actually killing one another.

So, back to the canary in the coal mine. The signs of a toxic worldliness in the church are clear: And that would be the increase of angry outbursts, hate-filled rants, and bitter rivalries that dominate much of our national conversation, but also permeate much Christian discourse in America.

This poisonous atmosphere of political hostility and cultural upheaval threatens to not only destroy the nation, but also to consume the church. And it's time we took heed of the warning signs.

We are all aware of the cultural civil war which is dividing America into two groups: one that rejects traditional values and Christianity, and another that holds onto them. The first group, driven by a secular and progressive agenda, seeks to upend the established created order and impose its destructive worldview. The second group, comprised mostly of Christians and traditionalists, is often demonized, marginalized, and attacked for its conservative beliefs, and mostly just want to be left alone. That is pretty much you and me.

But as one person aptly put it, you may not be interested in the culture war, but the culture war is interested in you.

Many peaceful, law-abiding, tax-paying Christians are waking up to the fact that they are increasingly being demonized, and they are seen as an enemy in their own country. Not only by our own political enemies, but even the church institutions and

apparatuses are being weaponized against normal Bible believing Christians.

So, they are being attacked not only by the left, but even by their own people in the so-called conservative church, who lean left and punch right to gain political clout.

And as good and ordinary Christians are being increasingly attacked, both by their enemies and their friends, we are going to notice a very predictable human response come from all this. Men are going to be getting very angry.

False accusations are being met with accusations of our own. We will be tempted to respond to our enemies' hatred, with hatred, and to respond to the attacks and slander projected against us, with our anger and wrath and slander directed against them.

And so what I am doing today is issuing another warning call about the danger of anger in the heart of a Christian during times like this. I see the problem that we are in, but I also see the anger and the hatred that is overflowing from many Christians because of this. And I know it exists because I saw it in me first.

And so to counter this downward sinful trend I preached through the Sermon on the Mount and tried to memorize it with you last year. Why was that important? Because Jesus knew the temptation that accompanies people who are undergoing tribulations and persecutions on both sides, from enemies and friends. And he was quick to teach us about the disposition of the heart during all that.

And if there is one thing that is absolutely going to destroy our souls quicker than any other, it is anger and hatred, which stew in our

heart like a deadly witches soup boiling in the cauldron of our hearts. And this anger is aimed toward our perceived enemies on the left and on the right. But we need to have nothing to do with it.

Thus Jesus said in Matt. 5 – *You have heard it was said, ‘You shall not murder.’ But I say to you whoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.”*

38 *“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ 39 But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.*

43 *“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven;*

As Christians, we must be aware of the temptation to let anger grow in our hearts. We must turn to the teachings of Jesus, such as the Sermon on the Mount, which James calls the perfect law, and the Law of Liberty, to learn how to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, and how to use our tongues for righteousness, and not for expressing sinful anger.

Now after that long introduction, let us look at our passage in James.

Picking up on the same thoughts found in the Sermon on the Mount, James calls out the behavior of his angry persecuted

brothers who were responding to their tribulations by sinning with their tongues.

But James is also concerned to bring these Christians into greater conformity to the person, work, and word of Jesus Christ, which is what will eternally change them and the world for good. And this is why he has to warn them that the anger of man will not produce the righteousness of God. And so he gives some basic but helpful teaching that should begin to guide us toward at least not sinning with our words.

James concluded his last section telling us that God has brought us forth by the word of truth. Knowing that God has brought you forth by the Word of truth, should affect the way you behave, but most especially, the way you use your words.

James therefore says: **let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.**

To be swift to hear means that you are willing to listen first and talk second. It means that you render yourself teachable, and not automatically assume yourself to be the teacher. Being swift to hear requires humility. It says, “I am willing to learn from others, I do not assume to know everything, I don’t have everything figured out. I need instruction.”

Do you desire to be that kind of person? Or are you content to correct a person, or tell them how wrong they are before they can even finish speaking? Are you careful to listen, in order to understand? Or are you a person who is listens only to find what

you want to hear so you can pounce on others and justify yourself in your anger and combativeness?

We all need to develop the kind of character which is quick to observe, hear, listen, and learn before we make rash and hasty judgments about people. If that is how we want people to treat us, then that is the way we need to treat them.

Being quick to hear also implies that you are eager to listen and learn so that you are even more quick to obey.

Ps. 119:60 - *"I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commands."*

James says that you were brought forth by the Word of Truth, therefore you need to be the kind of person who is quick to hear that word, and once it is heard and understood, quick to obey it.

James also says we are to be slow to speak. The best way you can swiftly listen to the commands of God with your ears, is by being just as quick to shut your mouth.

Prov. 17:28 - *"Even a fool is considered wise when he holds his peace; when he shuts his lips he is considered perceptive."*

We should not spend the bulk of our time and energy venting our anger and disapproval with people online. We should not be people who delight to argue and disagree with people, and who are quick to say *raca* and *fool* to our brothers in Christ, or worse to our enemies. This only provides us more opportunities to sin.

As Prov. 10:19 says: *In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise.*

Instead, we need to be **Slow to wrath**. It is not without significance that a person who is slow to speak is also slow to wrath. For the two go together.

People who are slow to hear and quick to talk, easily and frequently find themselves degenerating into fierce controversy and argument.

The man who is slow to hear, and quick to speak is also the man who is quick to wrath. They quickly engage in wild denunciations and hate filled accusations of those who oppose them, foolishly thinking that they are doing God's service by doing so but are too fool hearty to see that they are doing more harm than good. Don't be like that.

And when you do come across a person like that, beware of the canary who is gasping for breath amidst the fumes of his hate-filled angry diatribes against his fellow Christians, and enemies alike.

We need to recognize that words soaked in the gasoline of bitterness and anger are easily ignited by the fire of the tongue. While throwing verbal Molotov cocktails is a quick way to respond to the troubles that ail us, it will not bring in the righteous kingdom of God, nor fix any of the problems we have. It will only make things worse.

For the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. We are not going to change the world and bring in the righteous reign of God on earth by cursing, slandering, and insulting one another. That is not how our Lord Jesus told us to behave in the world.

Instead, we are to **lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness...**

Just as the Lord Jesus laid aside his burial clothes when rising from the dead, you also are to lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, since you have been raised with Him.

Those angry hate filled words are nothing less than the burial clothes of the old dead man Adam. Lay them aside, beloved, take them off, for you have been clothed in the robes of Christ's resurrection righteousness.

Let the word of Christ dwell in us richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalm, hymns, and spiritual songs to one another, with thanksgiving in your hearts to God. You are clothed with Christ, so speak like it, Beloved.

James uses another interesting phrase when he says lay aside all filthiness, **and overflow of wickedness...** This overflow of wickedness flows out of the heart. Luke 6:45 - *"A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance (overflow) of the heart his mouth speaks."*

A Christian who is overflowing with wrath and anger, spewing forth vile, hate-filled words towards his brothers or his enemies, works contrary to the purposes of God in the world, and more importantly, in himself.

If your soul is not built up, comforted, encouraged, strengthened, through the use of sinful, angry words, then neither is God's kingdom advanced, built up, supported, or defended by the sinful

words of angry men. For the kingdom of God is a matter of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. And the two are as far from each other as Heaven is from Hell.

Cursing, anger, malice, bitterness, insulting, slander, and the like, these are fruits which come from a bad tree. They demonstrate that the treasure chest of man's heart is filled to overflowing with evil, and that the word of truth has not been planted or taken root there. Therefore we cannot overlook and dismiss our sinful anger. We must pay great attention to it, for it is evidence that a man is at enmity with God.

And thus, the clearest evidence that a person might not be born again is a man filled with anger, wrath, bitterness, and cursing, and the rest. A man who is quick to speak his own filthy and wicked words toward others, and who is slow to listen to God's holy word about sanctified speech, is not a man who has been born again by the word of truth. He is a man who loves his sin, and who hates God.

So lay aside all that filthiness and overflow of wickedness...

And receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

Significantly, James says we are to receive with *meekness* the implanted word. Jesus said, "*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*"

Jesus teaches us that dominion of the earth is received by inheritance. And only those who are meek will inherit the earth.

What does it mean to be meek? It is quite the opposite of trying to implement the righteousness of God through the anger and wrath of man.

Meekness was recently on display by Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel from the Syrian Orthodox Church in Sydney, Australia. While he was preaching during a church service just a couple weeks ago, Emmanuel was attacked by an angry knife-wielding Muslim.

Bishop Emmanuel survived the attack and responded from his hospital bed after surgery thanking God for what happened to him. The good bishop also told his people to respond to this incident like Christians and law-abiding citizens.

He said, “The Lord Jesus never taught us to fight. The Lord Jesus never taught us to retaliate. The Lord Jesus never said to us, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ The Lord Jesus said, ‘Never return evil with evil, but return evil with good.’ He said they ought to respond not in the street with violence but in prayer.

He then went on to speak to his attacker expressing love and forgiveness for him, calling him his son, and telling him that he would always pray for him.

Christians are called to win the world in this way. For we have been called by the Lord Jesus Christ to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves, and to even love our enemies, and to pray for those who persecute us.

This is the meekness of wisdom. This is receiving the implanted word with meekness. For this is the very teaching that will save your souls, Beloved, when the angry Christ hating world has

gathered itself to attack you, and when your fellow Christians are in complicity with the spirit of the age. There is no other way for us to inherit the earth, except through meekness.

And yet there are so many Christians who want to preserve our culture, heritage, nation, and future, that are filled with wrath and anger in their hearts. But what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul?

If one's heart is overly filled with anger and wrath and malice and hatred and strife and boasting and pride, it will flow out of the mouth, condemning your soul.

Notice also when James says that we are to receive with meekness the *implanted word*, that is able to save your souls.

This image of the implanted word comes from the parable of the Seeds in Matt. 13:20-23 -

20 But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.

Notice the parallel with the context of James. A person receives the word with joy. But they do not receive it with meekness, because tribulation and persecution arise on account of the word, and immediately he stumbles.

How does he stumble? He could stumble by responding to persecution by completely falling away, and abandoning faith in Christ. He could stumble by cozying up to his persecutors and compromising the faith. Or he could stumble by responding to tribulation and persecution with anger, and wrath, and

vengeance. James says that we save our souls when we hear the word and understand it. We receive the implanted word with meekness. This one perseveres in this kind of godliness, bears fruit, 30, 60, and 100-fold.

But if we respond to tribulation and persecution with anger, murder, slander, insult, defamation, cursing, and hatred, you will lose your soul., Beloved! This is what I am warning you of today.

The person who has been brought forth by the word of truth, is the same who is swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to be angry. He is the one who receives with meekness the implanted word. And this one will produce the righteousness of God in the world, and this one will save his soul alive. May you be found to be this kind of person, and not found to be an angry enemy of Christ. Amen.