

“Wisdom for One-Anothering, Part 5: Zeal”

Matthew 6:25-34

Proverbs (see below)

Selections from Proverbs on Zeal

Hatred stirs up conflict,
but love covers over all wrongs. (10:12)

A hot-tempered person stirs up conflict,
but the one who is patient calms a quarrel. (15:18)

A king’s wrath is a messenger of death,
but the wise will appease it. (16:14)

A person’s wisdom yields patience;
it is to one’s glory to overlook an offense.

A king’s rage is like the roar of a lion,
but his favor is like dew on the grass. (19:11-12)

A hot-tempered person must pay the penalty;
rescue them, and you will have to do it again. (19:19)

Better to live in a desert
than with a quarrelsome and nagging wife. (21:19)

Like a north wind that brings unexpected rain
is a sly tongue—which provokes a horrified look. (25:23)

Stone is heavy and sand a burden,
but a fool’s provocation is heavier than both.

Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming,
but who can stand before jealousy? (27:3-4)

Mockers stir up a city,
but the wise turn away anger. (29:8)

An angry person stirs up conflict,
and a hot-tempered person commits many sins. (29:22)

“Wisdom for One-Anothering, Part 5: Zeal”

Matthew 6:25-34

Proverbs (see below)

If last week’s proverbs were about poise—waiting to respond until you’re not annoyed by annoyances any longer; this week’s proverbs are a warning against destructive anger—the heart-habit of bitterness resulting from the distrust in God’s goodness or power concerning the righting of wrongs.

Please see your bulletin insert for our selections from the book of Proverbs on Zeal—or, rather, on the opposite of Zeal: anger.

Introduction

Is it always wrong to be angry?

I don’t know about you, but when I look around on the internet, on social media, in the mainstream media, and on the streets, I see a lot of outrage. People are *angry*. And I’m tempted to say: people. Calm down. Breathe easy. Enjoy life a little bit.

But the Bible, and the church throughout history, has always said that anger itself is not evil. One pastor (Keller) says “Anger is energy released to defend something you love.” Whenever someone threatens something that is good, true, or beautiful, anger is the force that gets us off our butts and engages us in preserving and defending it. Holy anger is one part of zeal.

The Lord Jesus was filled with zeal for the temple (John 2:17; Psalm 69:9). He loved it. It was the place that he, as God, had met with his beloved people for centuries. And when people were charging too much for doves and taking advantage of poor worshippers, he flipped over their tables and drove them away! His zeal expressed itself in holy anger.

This morning we look to the Proverbs for God’s wisdom to help us love one another. If we’re going to have zeal, we need to:

Repent of *Perverted Zeal*
Receive *Undeserved Zeal*
Release *Converted Zeal*

1. Repent of Perverted Zeal

But here’s the problem. We love the wrong things. We don’t love God’s mission to be with people. We aren’t zealous for the face of God. We don’t cherish the face of God reflected in the face of people who bear God’s image.

Our zeal has been perverted, because our loves have been perverted. What do we love instead of God and people? We love money, power, and influence. And these

“Wisdom for One-Anothering, Part 5: Zeal”

Matthew 6:25-34

Proverbs (see below)

things are good! But when we *love* them—“the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil” (1 Tim 6:10)—then we will get angry when they’re threatened.

An angry person is a person who walks around, constantly fearing that the things they love most *instead* of God and people—money, power, and influence—are going to be taken from them.

And what does someone with perverted zeal look like when they erupt in anger? When they defend something that they love too much, like money, power, and influence?

Anger is always violent, even if you never touch someone. There’s 3 types of angry violence, perverted zeal, in these proverbs:

First: There’s machine-gun anger. Some people are constantly **stirring things up**. “Hatred stirs up conflict” (10:12). “A hot-tempered person stirs up conflict” (15:18). The quarreling person (21:9) is looking for an argument— like a husband or wife or parent who’s always firing off criticisms. An angry person is stirring up cities (29:8) and acting with evil wherever they go (29:22). Sometimes perverted zeal says “I’m here to mess with you because eventually you’re going to mess with me.”

Perverted zeal actively *looks* for things to be offended about.

But second: There’s also land-mine anger. Or ticking time-bomb anger. Those with perverted zeal can also be passive, but volatile. The king is sitting on his throne (16:14) ready to put to death anyone who might threaten his power. The ruler is like a sleeping lion you don’t want to wake up, and who will roar and eat you if you do (19:12). Sometimes perverted zeal says “I’m going to sit here quietly, but if you even come close to messing with me, I’ll explode.”

Then Third: There’s poison gas anger. 25:23. Gossip. Gossip is just a passive form of anger. You feel threatened, but you’re too proud to explode. So you tell friends and neighbors about this person who you think is threatening your money, power, or influence instead.

When the zeal you are meant to have for God and the things he loves most is perverted into a lust for money, power, and influence, you become a burden to everyone. Your spouse (21:9) would rather go live alone in the desert than have to live with you. Your co-workers and children and roommates, too. The people who work with you and underneath your authority (19:12) have to tip-toe around to keep you from blowing up. And if you think that carrying around a bag of sand or stones is exhausting, it’s much more exhausting to (27:3) be around you if you have perverted zeal!

“Wisdom for One-Anothering, Part 5: Zeal”

Matthew 6:25-34

Proverbs (see below)

You and I have too often been angry. We’ve been machine-gun angry. Land-mine angry. Poison gas angry. We’ve been a burden to one another. And in our perverted zeal, we’ve wrecked relationships. We’ve crushed the spirits of our children. We’ve smothered the creativity and stolen the joy of the people we work with.

And our perverted zeal has made it nearly impossible at times for us to live together in love as the church of Jesus. We’ve told the world that they can know Christians by their anger, not by their love.

All because we have loved our money, power, and influence more than we’ve loved the LORD our God; more than we’ve loved our neighbor.

2. Receive Undeserved Zeal

If it’s true—that we all have perverted zeal— then we’ve got to un-pervert it. We must re-order our list of things we love, until God and people are at the top, and money, power, and influence—good things that we’ve made essential things— are no longer at the top.

So, go ahead. Re-order the things your heart loves. I’ll give you a couple minutes, and then, when you’ve changed your heart, let me know, and we’ll move on to some practical tips.

...

It doesn’t work that way, does it? You can want to love the right things. But you can’t *make* yourself really want them. Paul writes about this in Romans 7. I love the paraphrase in *The Message*:

“I’ve tried everything and nothing helps. I’m at the end of my rope. Is there no one who can do anything for me? Isn’t that the real question? The answer, thank God, is that Jesus Christ can and does.”

God saw the problem of our perverted zeal. He saw us reaching for money, power, and influence. He saw how our hunger for those things was stronger than our love for him, and for other people. He saw that we were unable to re-order our loves. He saw the way our anger was destroying our relationships, destroying his world, and destroying our hearts.

And, you know what? He was angry. Offended. We were wrecking his world and harming people made in his image. He was zealous for truth, goodness, and beauty, and we were not.

“Wisdom for One-Anothering, Part 5: Zeal”

Matthew 6:25-34

Proverbs (see below)

You know what he did? He *was* angry. But his zeal— his burning desire to be our God and to have us be his precious children— moved him to action. In his zeal, he came to us in Christ. Not to make us pay for what we did. But to cover over our offenses with his love. Look at 10:12. Love covers over all wrongs. The love he sent to cover over our wrongs was the body of his beloved Son: Jesus.

It is only when we see ourselves as the people we really are—angry, rebellious offenders with perverted zeal—that we can begin to change. It’s only when we are gripped by his love for us in Jesus, only then will we be filled with loving zeal for God’s heart and the people around us.

Covered by his love—God’s undeserved zeal *for us*—we no longer walk around paying others back for their offenses. Because the love of money, power, and influence has finally lost its grip on our hearts.

Have you received undeserved zeal from your God? Has he covered over all your wrongs? Has he begun to change your heart? Until that happens, you’ll never get beyond perverted zeal; pathetic anger. But when it happens, your heart’s chains will be gone, and your heart will be set free to love God and people more than anything else in the world.

3. Release Converted Zeal

So our perverted zeal needs to be covered by Jesus’ undeserved zeal. What happens to our perverted zeal once it’s covered by his undeserved zeal? We begin to release converted zeal.

Our hatred gets chipped away. And as it does, we realize how foolish it is to constantly stir up conflict (10:12). We start covering over people’s wrongs with our love—with our own converted zeal.

Because love is patient and kind (1 Cor 13), we are patient with people, and (15:18) we’re able to stop fights from happening. We’re not looking for things to criticize in our spouses or children, because we’re not trying to justify our constant anger anymore. With our converted zeal, we can finally lay our machine-gun anger down. We can become passionate about spreading the aroma of Christ, the sweet fragrance of free grace, everywhere we go, so that God is delighted and people are loved (2 Cor 2:15).

If we are in charge, we help people breathe easy. Like my boss in Korea, who said to everyone that reported to him: “You have permission to breathe, permission to fail, and permission to be human.” No more of this land-mine anger (16:14; 19:12).

“Wisdom for One-Anothering, Part 5: Zeal”

Matthew 6:25-34

Proverbs (see below)

Instead of anxiously clinging to power, with your new converted zeal, you can use your authority to serve people—even becoming their bondservant (Matt 20:27).

And finally, we’re freed from the need to tell people how awful other people are. We don’t need to attack people indirectly, secretly, with gossip, because our perverted zeal has received undeserved zeal—grace!—and has become converted zeal. We can stop with the poison gas anger of gossip, and use our mouths to say only what is useful for building others up (Eph 4:29).

Now imagine. What if every one of us— before we walked into a church service, before we showed up for a committee meeting, before we walked into our homes after work, before we came through the office doors — stopped.

What if we stopped, and said:

“Lord, I’ve been a fool. I’ve been full of zeal, but for the wrong things. But you, God, have been full of zeal— to have me as your child, and to give me a zeal like yours. So you covered over all the offenses of my perverted zeal by your undeserved zeal. When I walk in here, Lord, I need a converted zeal. Because I want to love as you have loved, and serve as you have served.”

Conclusion

You know what would happen? We’d *really* start to love one another. Deeply. Sincerely. From the heart (Rom 12:9; 1 Peter 1:22).

We would begin to fulfill Jesus’ great desire: that we love one another (John 15:11).

The *world* would realize that we have been compelled by the love of Jesus (2 Cor 5:14), and they’ll be able to tell that we are following Jesus (John 13:35). And they’ll ask how we got such a radically converted zeal— such hope — and we’ll be ready with a kind, zealous answer (1 Pet 3:15).

Friends, let’s be wise enough to admit we’ve been fools. And let’s allow the wisdom of God — Christ sent to cover our foolish offenses — to give us a new and converted zeal.

Trust him. He who calls you is able. He will surely do it (1 Thess 5:24).

10:12 Hatred stirs up conflict,
but love covers over all wrongs.

Stager:

“Wisdom for One-Anothering, Part 5: Zeal”

Matthew 6:25-34

Proverbs (see below)

- God came to us in Christ not pay us back for our sins— cause we didn't merely annoy him, but rebelled violently against him— but came to us to cover over our sins with his love. The love he sent to cover over our wrongs was the body of his beloved Son: Jesus.
- It is only when we see ourselves as the people we really are— unjust offenders— that we become thankful that God came to us not to get us back, but to cover over our sins. When we are gripped by his love for us in Jesus, only then will we be zealous for his kingdom and his righteousness. In other words, covered by his love and secure within it, we no longer walk around paying others back for their offenses. Instead, we push ahead to play our role in advancing God's kingdom, and we push further in to the heart of Jesus with a relentless zeal to see our own hearts become more and more like his.

15:18

[New International Version](#)

A hot-tempered person stirs up conflict, but the one who is patient calms a quarrel.

[New Living Translation](#)

A hot-tempered person starts fights; a cool-tempered person stops them.

[English Standard Version](#)

A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.

Longman

Hotheads stir up conflict, but patient people quell accusations.

Longman comments:

- Emotional intelligence
- You might have actions taken against you, even attacks. Your best chance of deflecting them, ultimately, is to remain cool.

16:14

[New International Version](#)

A king's wrath is a messenger of death, but the wise will appease it.

[New Living Translation](#)

The anger of the king is a deadly threat; the wise will try to appease it.

[English Standard Version](#)

A king's wrath is a messenger of death, and a wise man will appease it.

“Wisdom for One-Anothering, Part 5: Zeal”

Matthew 6:25-34

Proverbs (see below)

Longman:

- Probably counsel to those who spend time at court.
- The king usually had the power of the sword, and could make life-or-death decisions.
- Wise people anticipate the king’s reaction. There’s no wisdom in needlessly angering the king
- Ecclesiastes 10:20: “Do not curse the king even in your thoughts; do not curse the rich even in your sleeping chamber; for a bird may carry the message or some winged creature may tell the matter.”

Stager:

- Yes, it’s prudent to avoid infuriating a person in power. But this proverb also points out how awful it is when someone in power is emotionally volatile. Everyone must tip toe around, always afraid they will awaken the beast.
- The New Heavens and New Earth will not be a world in which no one exercises power except Jesus Christ. Rather, it will be a world in which those who have more power and authority have perfect gentleness, are constantly learning how best to love and serve the people around them, and who never create an atmosphere of fear.
- So many prominent pastors have ruined their ministries as a result of sexual sin. But many, many pastors have ruined their ministries as a result of a culture of fear and intimidation that they have created within their churches.

19:11-12; 19

11A man’s insight gives him patience,
and his virtue is to overlook an offense.

12A king’s rage is like the roar of a lion,
but his favor is like dew on the grass.

19A man of great anger must pay the penalty;
if you rescue him, you will have to do so again.

Longman:

- Dew on the grass causes the vegetation to flourish in arid Palestine.
 - ARS: this doesn’t mean that we never speak truth to power. It means that we are stupid if we needlessly piss off a powerful person, whereas winning the favor of a king can benefit everyone. Think of the OT examples.

“Wisdom for One-Anothering, Part 5: Zeal”

Matthew 6:25-34

Proverbs (see below)

- The angry “contain the seeds of their own punishment.” (19:19)
 - Keller: “The characteristically angry person ‘carries around punishment’. This means that one one has to slap some kind of penalty or fine on the angry man or woman. Their loss of temper always entails natural consequences that they can’t escape. For example, it leads the people who see the blowup to not trust hte person as much as they did before.”
 - “But we should not imagine that a hot-tempered person is necessarily always someone who is melting down in rage
- Advice is to those who have to clean up after angry people.
- - Point may be not to do the bidding of an angry person, for it is habitual and futile, and cannot be changed without a change of heart.

Stager

- A good king has seen a lot, and is not surprised when broken people in a broken world break things. It gives the king patience with people, and the ability to stop constantly being offended by everything. And when a king has this kind of emotional maturity and wisdom, he is so refreshing to those he governs. Instead of roaring like a lion at every person that steps on his toes or over-cooks his steak, he can save his lion’s roar for the real enemies who threaten the peace of the people he governs.

21:9

[New International Version](#)

Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and nagging wife.

[New Living Translation](#)

It’s better to live alone in the desert than with a quarrelsome, complaining wife.

[English Standard Version](#)

It is better to live in a desert land than with a quarrelsome and fretful woman.

Longman:

- Several other “avoid a difficult woman” proverbs.
- The land is like the wilderness between Sinai and Canaan. It’s not a happy place of flourishing. You’re wandering, always, with this kind of angry woman.

“Wisdom for One-Anothering, Part 5: Zeal”

Matthew 6:25-34

Proverbs (see below)

- It's stupid to have a supermodel wife if she's just going to grieve you your whole life long.

Stager:

- If you look at your life as a conquest of career and sex life, you're going to spend your life frustrated and angry. Even if you earn a big pile of money and have a trophy wife or trophy husband, if you're the kind of person who clings to superficial signs of success like this — you're going to attract the kind of people who are going to use you for the superficial benefits you can give to them.
-

25:23

[New International Version](#)

Like a north wind that brings unexpected rain is a sly tongue--which provokes a horrified look.

[New Living Translation](#)

As surely as a north wind brings rain, so a gossiping tongue causes anger!

[English Standard Version](#)

The north wind brings forth rain, and a backbiting tongue, angry looks.

Longman:

- If this is about gossip, then the message is that gossip in secret may come back soon to result in someone's fierce anger.

Stager:

- Gossip is just passive anger. Can you believe that this person did that? Just go to the person! Nothing sucks like finding out that someone has been confessing your sins to someone else without your knowledge!
- Unhinged angry people walk around yelling at people for not doing things their way. Savvy angry people are too proud to yell, so they go around telling other people how dumb people are instead. Both people are trying to control the world, and they can't do it. So they're angry.
- What happens when your passive, proud, gossipy anger reaches the ears of the one you're ing about? Their anger, and your shame.

“Wisdom for One-Anothering, Part 5: Zeal”

Matthew 6:25-34

Proverbs (see below)

27:3-4

3

Stone is heavy and sand a burden,
but a fool’s provocation is heavier than both.

4

Anger is cruel and fury overwhelming,
but who can stand before jealousy?

Longman

- “Jealousy is the angry desire to keep what we possess and are afraid someone else wants.”
- “Jealousy and envy create a destructive energy decimating all who fall into their path.”

Stager:

- You go around creating burdens for people if you are an angry person. “Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you” (Heb 13:17).

29:8

Mockers stir up a city,
but the wise turn away anger.

29:22

An angry man stirs up dissension,
and a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression.

Longman:

- “Proverbs recognizes that some people are angry. They are not angry about anything in particular, but if something arises that ‘sets them off,’ the conflict is on.”

“Wisdom for One-Anothering, Part 5: Zeal”

Matthew 6:25-34

Proverbs (see below)

Stager:

- When God’s people are carried off into exile by their enemies, Jeremiah (29) tells them to run through the city stirring up conflict; sabotaging the government; turning husbands and wives against one another; turning brother against brother; mocking those pagan, godless people and calling down God’s wrath on them.
 - Um, no.
 - They are called to go through the city, seeking its peace and prosperity. These are the idolatrous enemies of God; this is the capital city of the evil empire, Babylon. Even when you are a deported captive or a prisoner of war, the call of God is not to be angry, but to bless and not to curse. This is easy for me to say as a privileged man. But history is full of examples of people who blessed their enemies and refused to react to violence and anger with more violence and anger.

Keller:

- Anger should be “a passing thing, directed without excess to solve a problem, resulting in calm at the end.”
- “Uncontrolled anger is a ‘gateway drug’ for man other sins (29:22). No other sinful emotion has led to so much violence and, literally, to so many dead bodies.”
- Harrison Scott Key says that the things we should be funny about and laugh about are *precisely* the things we feel most defensive about. We care about them. Sometimes we feel that they are under attack, or vulnerable to loss. Good— instead of being touchy about them, learn to laugh at them. When we take a good thing that we care about and are defensive about, and learn to laugh about it, what we are doing is taking the golden calf that we are wrongly worshipping— wrongly elevating to the level of an idol— and we are melting it down to the gold.
- Rebecca deYoung: Having a sense of humor about the things we care about is “the opposite of wrath’s reaction, because the one who can laugh at himself has enough distance from what he wants to be able to deflate his own claims and see them as comically excessive” (DY).
- Keller: “When anything in life is an absolute requirement for your happiness and self-worth, is essentially an ‘idol,’ something you are actually worshipping. When such a thing is threatened, your anger is absolute. Your anger is actually the way the idol keeps you in its service, in its chains. Therefore if you find that, despite all the efforts to forgive, your anger and

“Wisdom for One-Anothering, Part 5: Zeal”

Matthew 6:25-34

Proverbs (see below)

bitterness cannot subside, you may need to look deeper and ask, ‘What am I defending? What is so important that I cannot live without?’ It may be that, until some inordinate desire is identified and confronted, you will not be able to master your anger.”

- Keller: We want to be “slow to anger, not *no* to anger, and not *blow* to anger”
- Ben Franklin: “Whatever is begun in anger ends in shame.”
- Spurgeon: “You cannot carry a bad temper with you into heaven. You must either kill it, or it will kill you.”
- Augustine: “What good is it to abstain from wine if you are intoxicated with anger?”
- Billy Graham: “Hot heads and cold hearts never solved anything.”

Keller: “Anger is energy released to defend something you love. God is angry toward the evil that dishonors him, and ruins that which he loves. But the problem with human anger is this— we tend to overlove the wrong things.”

God has anger and does not sin. Jesus too. We are sinners, though, and our anger is usually misplaced, wasted, destructive.

DeYoung : “Wrath is the love of justice when it has been perverted into revenge.”

Need to discuss her Anger Journals.

Anger is the “fight” animal instinct when there is danger or anxiety.

Zeal is the wisdom and commitment to seek first God’s kingdom and righteousness, and to trust that sooner or later, everything we need to flourish will be given to us. Instead of being anxious and defensive about money and power, which will make us get angry whenever we start to fear we’re losing a little bit of it here and there, zeal is a vigorous pursuit of what really matters.

FCF: Because we deeply fear the loss of our money, power, and influence, we anxiously guard them, and angrily retaliate whenever we feel that they are threatened in big or small ways.

Imperative: We must be so loving toward one another and so zealous and determined to see King Jesus reign in the world and in us, that angry attitudes, words, and actions have no place in our lives.

Indicative: Even though God had every right to judge us in anger for threatening his world and harming women and men created in his image, he came to us in love to

“Wisdom for One-Anothering, Part 5: Zeal”

Matthew 6:25-34

Proverbs (see below)

cover over all our offenses by his Son Jesus, enabling us to follow hard after him and cover the wrongs of others.

Proposition: Because God covered our offenses in the love of his Son, we are freed from anger, and therefore free to zealously follow Jesus, loving one another and the world that God so loved.