



# WEEK 4

WRATH // PATIENCE

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### COLOSSIANS 3:8-13

*But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.*

### JONATHAN PARNELL

*Anger makes the list of the seven deadly sins because for centuries people have witnessed its destructive power and influence. Understanding anger gets much more complicated than simply looking at its effects, though. Anger isn't merely a sin that causes chaos, it's an emotion that is indicative of something deeper –something in the subconscious desires of the human heart.*

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines anger as "a strong feeling of displeasure and usually of antagonism" and wrath as a "strong vengeful anger or indignation." Whereas human wrath is sinful, what makes understanding anger complicated is that anger is not always wrong. Paul instructs the church in Ephesus to "be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger," (Eph. 4:26). What determines whether one's anger is righteous or sinful is the reason for and the object of our anger. Righteous anger is motivated by true injustice and is directed towards the sin. However, sinful anger is motivated by reasons that feel like legitimate injustices, but are actually selfish interests and it's directed not at sin, but at the person behind the sin. Anger can often be complicated and therefore, as followers of Christ, it's important to discern the motivation of our hearts when we are angry (Ps. 139:23-24).

When that anger is founded in legitimate injustice, we can allow that to drive us to seek justice, and yet we must not hold on to the anger long, since doing so can give Satan a foothold (Eph. 4:27).

To some Christians' surprise, God himself experiences anger and wrath. Even Jesus himself became angry (Mark 3:5), but God's anger is always justified and His wrath is justly deserved (Rom. 1:18). The comforting truth about God's anger and wrath is that it is partnered with His grace and mercy. When God shows mercy to the city of Nineveh, the prophet Jonah becomes angry, because he wanted God to destroy the Ninevites. But Jonah's suspicions about God's character proved true. This led to Jonah's confession of God's character: *"I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster"* (Jonah 4:2b). This description of God's character is repeated time and again in the Old Testament.

Because of God's just character and mighty power, King David challenged his readers to refrain from anger and patiently wait for God to execute vengeance (Ps. 37:7-9). In this text we see how patience is one virtue that can replace the vice of sinful anger or wrath. When we are tempted to become sinfully angry at an individual, rather than seek to take control of the situation and play the roles of judge, jury and executioner, God calls us to patiently trust Him to establish justice (Rom. 12:19).

#### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- As you reflect on the past week, did you experience any feelings of anger? What injustice caused you to feel that way? Was that injustice real, or really more of a self-centered, unmet desire?
- Was the anger you felt a righteous anger against sin, or was it wrongly directed at a person?
- As you reflect on times you've become sinfully angry, what does that anger expose in your heart? What is the root sin that causes you to choose wrath?
- How easy is it for you to release your anger and trust God's justice and work in the situation? Are you able to patiently trust God enough to forgive those who have wronged you?

## WEEKLY FAST

**Fast from Words & Actions that Tear Down rather than build up.**

**How often in your anger have you said things that you later regretted? As the saying goes: "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all."**

- Tactfully excuse yourself from the conversation, and if possible, don't come back to the conversation until you have settled your emotions and understood the injustice that is causing your anger.

**Instead Practice the Kingdom Virtue of Patience through Prayer & Reconciliation.**

- Trust in God's justice. Vengeance is His, so you don't have to seek it yourself.
- Pray for those you are angry at and notice how your heart changes toward them and the circumstances.
- Consider reaching out to those you may have broken relationships with because of sinful outbursts of anger and seek to make amends.
- As far as it is up to you, live at peace with all and overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:14-21).
- Use your words to build others up this week in meaningful and intentional ways (Eph. 4:29).
- When stuck in traffic or waiting in a long line, use it as an opportunity to practice patience.
- To avoid the practice of writing emails, texts, etc. from a place of anger, pause, and create space for reflection before sending.

## ADDITIONAL READING

James 1:19-20; Psalm 37:7-9; Matthew 5:22; Proverbs 14:29, 15:18; Jonah 4; Ephesians 4:1-2; 1 Corinthians 13:4

Edward Welch, *A Small Book About a Big Problem: Meditations on Anger, Patience, and Peace*

Gary Chapman, *Anger: Taming a Powerful Emotion*