

The Anatomy of Anger

1 Samuel 25:10-13

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 12-11-2011

Introduction – What is anger? Why do we get angry?

In this chapter we have a rare glimpse of David when he is angry. He was usually in such good control of his anger that we would not have guessed until this chapter that anger could get the better of him. But it did. And later in this chapter his anger almost produced murder.

Today we are going to be looking at the negative side of anger, but in the introduction I want to emphasize that not all anger is sinful. Mark 3:5 says that Jesus “**looked around at them with anger.**” Psalm 7:11 says, “**God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day.**” That verse that compares God to good judges implies that there would something wrong with a judge if he felt no anger at a man found guilty of murder, or robbing from the poor, or pedophilia. Anger is a destructive emotion that God has built in to us. It has several purposes, one of which is to alert us to goals being obstructed, and another of which is to motivate us to not be apathetic.

We tend to get angry when our expectations and goals are not met, or when things are not as they should be in our minds. Of course, since our goals, expectations, and opinions of what should be are clouded by sin, our anger can be sinful as well. And, as in the case of David, if legitimate anger gets expressed in illegitimate ways or is mixed with illegitimate motives, even a righteous anger can become sinful. So it is very important that we understand how anger works.

In the New Testament Greek, there are two words that describe anger. The first one is *orges*, which refers to the swelling up of the emotion of displeasure. It's primarily the feelings that you have from those hormones and chemical exchanges inside. Animals have these hormones and they can have the *orges* kind of anger. For example, when you attack a bear or you attack her cubs, she will become enraged and attack you. When you attack a dog, or the dog's house or master, the dog that is possessive will have this swelling of emotion within. But unlike humans, animals only seem to have this when being attacked. It is self-preservation. Humans can have *orges* swelling within even when a principle of politics is being violated, or a candidate is being unfairly attacked, or thugs have raped a woman, or God's

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name is slandered. God designed Adam and Eve to have the godly emotion of anger. And it should have been used to motivate Adam to protect Eve and to protect the Garden from Satan.

The other Greek word used for anger is *thumos*, which refers to the breaking forth of that emotion. Animals almost always break forth in anger when the orges hormones are being stirred up inside. For them there is no division between orges and thumos. Humans however have the capacity to control the breaking forth and to even control the *thinking* that led to the inward orges in the first place. There is no need for a human to just instinctually break out with anger (thumos) simply because of the emotions of anger (orges). Humans can control both. It's one of the things that distinguish us from animals.

And they *need* to control both to ensure that the anger is neither destroying themselves (through clamming up) or destroying others (through blowing up). Anger is a good thing if it keeps you from being apathetic and motivates you to pursue righteous goals. But it is bad if you are destroying the wrong things. Proverbs 25:28 says that if you are like a beast who has no control over that anger, you are like a city whose walls are broken down. You are defenseless against the attacks of Satan because Satan will use that anger as a tool for his purposes. And Scripture indicates that if you are like a beast and unable to be God-centered in your anger, your anger will be detrimental, not helpful. Now I can't give a whole theology of anger today, but I wanted to at least give this much so that you can to some degree distinguish between the animal impulse of anger and a God-given anger.

James 1:19-20 is a key verse that you need to memorize. It doesn't forbid you from having anger, but it says, "**let everyone be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.**" Only God's wrath produces His righteousness, and it is very rare that our anger is stirred up purely by God's Spirit. The vast majority of references to anger in the Bible are references to sinful anger. And the reason that our anger is almost always sinful is that anger tends to close down our reasoning processes. Study after study has shown that when an animal or a human gets angry, their vision almost immediately becomes tunnel vision focusing in on the adversary and we become oblivious to anything else except for what is within that vision. Your reasoning powers become very limited. That is why it is critical to control your anger and to think before you allow that anger to motivate you. And police reports show some pretty crazy stuff that can happen when people get angry.

Let me give one example. It's the news report of Diane Fittipaldi. The short story makes no sense whatsoever. The short story is that her husband yelled at her about where the fork was supposed to go when she was setting the table. She was so outraged at his micromanaging of how she set the table that she went out and rented a pneumatic tire forklift and drove it threw the front wall of their one-story frame house. According to the neighbors who witnessed the incident, she used the machine to repeatedly smash the dining room table, yelling that if he wanted a fork on the table she was going to give him a fork. And her husband was scared to death. He took refuge in the kitchen while she tore the place apart.

Anybody who had walked into that room when she blew up would have thought, "What in the world is wrong with her? All the guy said was that the fork should go on the other side of the plate. Sure he was angry when he said it and he didn't say it respectfully. But his remark was trivial compared to what she did."

But you know what? That rage did not happen in an instant. When you read the long story you realize that it flowed out of a whole series of events that irritated her (most of which came from him micromanaging her housework), and that irritation led to underlying anger, and that finally erupted into rage. She later tried to justify herself, saying, "Oliver is a horrible neat freak, and he drives me nuts about keeping everything tidy. Oliver yelled at me about where his fork was supposed to go, and I figured I'd fix it with a forklift."

Well, to some degree that was probably what was going on with David. He is going to go out and commit murder because he hasn't received hospitality??! Of course, that anger didn't start in this chapter. Remember, last week we saw that in chapter 23 David had rescued all the sheep, goats, and other things that the Philistines had captured from the Jews in this area. At tremendous risk to their own lives, these men had defeated the Philistines and had returned the goods to Judah. But did he get a thank you from Nabal? No. No doubt, many other people had given David and his men some produce out of thankfulness. Any reasonable person would. And these 600 men needed help. Where else would they get their food? They didn't want to be a charity, so they went the extra mile in protecting these people. But we saw that there was not a word of thanks from Nabal. He had not given them anything when they returned Nabal's flocks. He had not given any help when they protected his flocks from ongoing attacks of Philistines. And this sense of injustice no doubt led to a rising level of irritation within David. (And remember that the orges anger has as its root meaning in swelling; it is

a swelling of emotions within.) He was no doubt already pretty irritated with Nabal, but he was trying to be godly in his responses. He was trying to return good for evil. And so there is a sense in which there was a lot of victory in David's life with regard to his anger.

On this feast day he asked for some consideration, thinking that the combination of four things would make his request seem reasonable to even a Nabal. The four things were, 1) his retrieving of Nabal's flocks, without which Nabal would have been impoverished, 2) his ongoing protection of Nabal's flocks from reprisal attacks (and he talks about that later in the chapter), 3) the fact that God's law commanded the rich to bless the poor on festival days, and 4) the fact that eastern hospitality would almost demand that hospitality be extended. Even the biggest cheapskates would do it to save face. But when Nabal not only fails to do so, but insults David, it is too much for David to bear. His orges rushes out into thumos anger. His reasoning powers have become clouded, and he commits himself to a forklift kind of irrational rage that would have ruined his reputation if Abigail had not stopped him. So that's the big picture of what is going on in this passage. But let's take a look at the details. Let's try to understand the anatomy of anger.

I. The Arrogant Contempt (vv. 10-11)

A. *Pretending to never have heard of David (v. 10a)*

Let's look first at the arrogant contempt that Nabal showed for David. Verse 10: **"Then Nabal answered David's servants, and said, 'Who is David, and who is the son of Jesse?'"** He pretends to have never heard of David. This is *not* believable. The whole nation knew about David's killing of Goliath, and it is *impossible* that Nabal would not have known about him. Secondly, chapter 18 shows that David's exploits in the army were so great and so sacrificial, that it says, **"But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them."** And that chapter ends by saying, **"Then the princes of the Philistines went out to war. And so it was, whenever they went out, that David behaved more wisely than all the servants of Saul, so that his name became highly esteemed."** Commentators point out that David was so well known (even Nabal's servants talking about him), that Nabal's statement is not ignorance; it is clearly an arrogant insult.

Why? We aren't told. It may have been because he could sense that no one respected him. His servants didn't respect him. His wife didn't respect him. He probably has his own orges anger simmering under the surface, and

feels like he has to lash out at somebody. And based on what the servant says later in this chapter, apparently he lashed out at everybody. This is the Norm for Nabal. But whatever the case, this attempt to belittle David appears to have gotten even these young men angry.

B. Insinuating that David was a runaway slave (v. 10b)

The second insult in verse 10 is this: “**There are many servants** [and that should read “slaves”] **nowadays who break away each one from his master.**” Though he doesn’t say it, the insinuation is obvious. He is insinuating that David is a runaway slave. It is clear that Nabal is upset, bitter, or perhaps even envious of David’s reputation, and he puts him down. This is the way many arguments get started, isn’t it? Insinuations or even outright accusations that are off mark, and the temptation is to respond in kind, and before you know it, you have a full blown argument, with rankling bitterness following.

C. Insulting David’s intelligence by suggesting that giving food to David’s men would rob the food from his servant’s mouths (v. 11a)

The third insult is in the first part of verse 11: “**Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers and give it to men...**” etc. He’s implying that to give David food would require robbing the servants of what they needed. Well, in terms of Nabal’s wealth, that is a ridiculous statement. He’s got plenty enough so that his servants won’t need to be shortchanged. It’s like a person today who is earning \$500,000 a year saying to a poor person who needs some food, “I can’t afford it.” It’s insulting to David’s intelligence. Of course he can afford it.

D. Saying that he knows nothing of the men who had saved his property (v. 11b)

The fourth insult is that he knows nothing of the men who had saved his property. He says, “**...and give it to men when I do not know where they are from.**” If you have been guarding this guy’s property, you are going to feel insulted. If you have risked your life to rescue his herds, you are going to feel upset. This is returning evil for good.

E. Full of himself (“I...my...my...my...I...my...I” v. 11)

And the last thing that would have grated on these men is the way that Nabal is so full of himself. That one verse has seven references to me, myself, and I. It’s all about Nabal. He can’t look at life except through his own eyes. And to people who have spent months looking out for the

interests of others, this is highly offensive. Notice the references to self as I read verse 11 again. **“Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers, and give it to men when I do not know where they are from?”** Wow! You can understand why David and his men got upset? This Nabal truly was a piece of art.

II. The Response of Anger (vv. 12-13)

A. *The body language of anger (v. 12a)*

And immediately you can see the responses of anger in these young men. Verse 12 says, **“So David’s young men turned on their heels and went back.”** I think you can picture in your minds their turning on their heels. This is not just normal turning around. This was well-expressed body language of disapproval. They couldn’t hide the fact that they felt incredibly disrespected. And this body language *should* have alerted Nabal to his need to apologize. It certainly alerted the servants to the danger that they were in. But people who are full of themselves rarely see it, and they rarely care, even when it is to their own hurt.

But you are wiser than that, and you need to be very sensitive to the body language of others. This is one of the reasons why face to face handling of conflicts is usually better than emails. There is a place for written letters when you want to make sure that you say things exactly so. But you can’t read the body language of the person that you have written to. You can’t notice the flushed face, the way the countenance falls, or the fire in the eyes. And those are instant clues that you have in some way offended the other person, and you need to instantly try to rectify that. Too many broken relationships have resulted because people have failed to read body language. They were oblivious to the fact that they had offended that person. Now I doubt that Nabal was oblivious. I think he probably relished the fact that he had upset them. But we are not told.

B. *Repeating the offensive language (v. 12b)*

A second complication in the anatomy of anger is when the offensive language is repeated. This spreads the anger. And verse 12 goes on to say, **“and they came and told him all these words.”** Now of course, they needed to tell David. They were David’s messengers. They maybe didn’t need to tell David in front of all 600 soldiers. But the word for word repetition before David ensured that David responded with the same anger that the young men had. They no doubt told the words with a degree of emotion themselves. It would have been hard not to.

But this brings up the whole issue of how anger and then bitterness can rapidly spread through the ranks of a family, or church, or business. And it is spread by the repetition of offenses. If anger can spread through a legitimate repetition of words here, you know it can spread just as easily through illegitimate gossip.

But let's just lay aside the issue of gossip this morning. Even when it is legitimate to be angry and upset, we need to be very careful about *who* we talk to and *how* we talk to them about a problem. It can make the difference between solving the problem and exacerbating the problem. David was surrounded by men who later prove to be much less able to control their tempers. Several times in later chapters David has to talk his men out of doing exactly the thing that David almost did in this chapter – to take revenge into their own hands. And I'm sure that allowing these words to be repeated in front of all these men got six hundred men really ticked off. And in the midst of all that emotion, it would have been harder for David to make the right decision. That's the point.

And so it really is important that we be “slow to speak” as James words it, until we can figure out who should hear, what they should hear, and in what context they should hear these words. Words will spread the anger. Sometimes that's appropriate; sometimes not. When abortions are happening routinely, yes, we want the anger spread. When the civil government is routinely robbing citizens to pay for what the Bible considers sinful and criminal acts, yes, we should spread the anger. But in personal relationships (especially among believers) there are so many times when a word spoken in anger has left people with regrets. One famous journalist, Ambrose Bierce, said, “Speak when you are angry and you will make the best speech you will ever regret.” Now I am not getting on these men's case here. I'm just observing that anger spreads through words. Those words are like throwing gasoline around a room.

C. A desire to “get even” escalates into wanting to do more than “get even” (v. 13)

The next problem we see is a desire to “get even” instantly escalates into wanting to do more than to “get even.” Verse 13: “**Then David said to his men, ‘Every man gird on his sword.’**” Why the sword? Take a look at verses 33-34. This is David speaking after Abigail intervened. He said,

1Samuel 25:33 And blessed is your advice and blessed are you, because you have kept me this day from coming to bloodshed and from avenging myself with my own hand.

1Samuel 25:34 For indeed, as the LORD God of Israel lives, who has kept me back from hurting you, unless you had hurried and come to meet me, surely by morning light no males would have been left to Nabal!"

Is that justice? No. He admits that he would have been hurting Abigail, an innocent woman. He admits that every male in the camp would have been killed. That is not justice. That is blind rage. That is the woman taking out the front of her house and pounding the table with a forklift. Even Nabal didn't deserve to die. What he deserved was for David and his men to no longer protect his sheep. "Fine, we will leave you to protect your own sheep, thank you."

But this is the way anger works if it is not carefully controlled. Anger is terribly dangerous. It is like fire. Fire is a useful thing, but if you let a fire go uncontrolled it can destroy an entire town. And I have seen families and churches destroyed because the anger of individuals was not controlled.

And this is why it is so imperative that we be slow to wrath. We need the time to think through whether our offense is a righteous offense, whether our goal is a righteous goal, whether our reason for getting angry (the motive) is a righteous motive or whether it is simply arising out of pride, and finally whether we are following the Biblical standard. When Jacob's daughter Dinah was raped, her brothers Levi and Simeon were very rightly outraged. You wouldn't expect anything less. But when they killed everyone in that city for one man's rape, their expression of anger was going beyond what the Scriptures allowed. So keep this principle in mind: anger always makes you want to do more to the other person than they have done against you. Anger is a fire that always grows if you don't contain it. You must always think through what is the appropriate expression of your anger.

So if you were in David's situation you would ask yourself these questions:

1. First, do I have the right to be angry? And the answer is, yes. I think David had the right to be angry on behalf of his men who had sacrificed so much for Nabal.
2. Second, why am I angry? Am I angry for God's sake? Am I angry on behalf of the innocent? I think in part David could say yes. But I think there were clearly sinful motives that were mixed in. I think David would have to say, "No. My motive is a sinful motive. I am angry because I've been insulted and my pride has been hurt. I have not been given what I think I deserve. But can I demand a gift? No, not really." But let's say

that his anger did have a good motive. Let's say that he was angry because this man Nabal was depriving his men of their fair salary. Let's say that it was a salary issue. Then David still needs to answer a third question:

3. The third question is, what should be my goal? Should my goal be to take revenge? And the answer is, no. Should my goal be to kill every man? Obviously no. So what should be my goal? If it were a salary issue, he would take Nabal to court. Of course, he couldn't take him to court because they are outlaws, right? And if you cannot get justice down here below, the Bible says that you need to relinquish your anger. Otherwise your anger will destroy you inside. Keep in mind that anger is always a destructive force, so it is either destroying others, destroying the sinful problem, or it is destroying you. So if God providential hinders you from taking legitimate action (and destroying the sinful problem), you have no choice but to relinquish the anger. And David later learns how to do that. Now, I have thrown in the salary issue to answer a question that is really not addressed in the text. But, back to the text, the text would *not* give David the right to go to court or to demand remuneration. What would the court ask? It would ask, "Did you have a contract with Nabal?" No. "Did Nabal ask David to rescue his sheep?" No. "Did Nabal ask David to protect his sheep later?" No. "OK, then since there is no contract here, you can't demand anything from Nabal." We saw last week that David did that on his own initiative. He was going the extra mile. So the only legitimate goal that David could have would be to tell Nabal, "From now on you will have to find your own protection. We're out of here. There are other people who will appreciate our services." That's about the most he could do. And he does exactly that after Abigail intervenes.

But you have to think through motive, goal, standard, and situation to be able to come up with a proper expression of anger. That is why James absolutely insists that you *must* learn to be slow to anger. But I guess the point I am trying to get across under C is that thumos anger almost always ends up doing more than it should if you have not thought through the issues. It's a key, critical point. It's what makes it so dangerous.

D. Making a snap decision (v. 13)

But that same phrase that I read shows that David made a snap decision. **“Then David said to his men, ‘Every man gird on his sword.’**” He made a snap decision in the heat of the moment. And once he had committed himself in front of 600 men, it would be very hard not to follow through.

And this is what has gotten so many people into trouble. They get mad at their boss and they quit their job in a moment of heat. Of course, once they have said, “I quit,” it is really hard to reverse that decision, isn’t it?

And people might say, “Well, this really wasn’t a snap decision. David’s irritation has been building for some time. That’s true, but *this decision of what to do about it* was indeed a snap decision. Snap decisions of anger have brought ruin to so many. In the heat of the moment a man decides, “I’m leaving the church.” And once he’s made that decision in front of others, it’s hard to reverse it. Once he has said, “I’m getting a divorce,” his pride is at stake. In the story I started with, the husband had been irritating the woman with perfectionistic micromanaging for a long time. She had been angry with him for a long time. But when she made the decision to rent that forklift she had at least an hour to calm down and change her mind. What was the reason that she didn’t calm down? She made a decision of what she was going to do, and anger automatically kept her focused on following through on that decision. It’s the way anger works. This is why I say that you shouldn’t make snap decisions when you are angry, no matter how rational those decisions may appear. Hold your tongue, pray about it, offer up thanks to God, and refuse to make a decision until you have carefully thought through motive, goal, standard, and appropriate situation.

E. Others take up David’s offense (v. 13)

But let’s read the rest of verse 13. **“Then David said to his men, ‘Every man gird on his sword.’ So every man girded on his sword, and David also girded on his sword. And about four hundred men went with David, and two hundred stayed with the supplies.”** Others took up David’s offense. And of course, because they were just as injured as David was, it was easy for them to take up the offense.

But this happens even when people have not been injured by the offending party. A friend has been wronged (or at least claims that he has been wronged) and as he spreads his story, others take up his offense and get angry too. And before you know it, the whole church can be poisoned. Every church needs servants like we will see in the next verses who are

peacemakers. Every church needs Abigails who are peacemakers. It is so important that we not take other people's offenses *without thinking for ourselves* to make sure that we *know* the situation, that we *really understand that the Bible allows us* to pick up the offense, and that we really *know* the proper motive, goal, standard, and situation. It takes time to think through those issues.

F. Anger can lead to murder (vv. 13ff)

The last thing that we see in the following verses is that anger can lead to murder. There are many cases of men murdering friends over an argument. Somebody told me this past Friday about a man who shot his brother. There are many cases of spouses being murdered during a hot quarrel. The first example of anger in the Bible was Cain's. Cain got angry that God accepted Abel's sacrifice and not his own. And that's an interesting situation because he is angry with God, but he takes it out on Abel. What's with that? Well, that happens all the time too, doesn't it? The boss gets angry at the man, he takes it out on the wife, and in her anger she takes it out on the kids, and the kid takes it out on the dog. When I was in first, second, and third grade I used to get beat up all the time. And one day I was so angry at having gotten beat up that I took it out on a smaller kid than me. I repented of that right away, and to this day it makes me sick to even think about it. But that's what anger can do. It can lead you to harm the innocent. Now I didn't harm that boy very much. I just did something mean to him. But I can see that it is the same downward spiral that Nabal got into, and the same downward spiral that David was on in hurting the innocent. Listen to God's warning to Cain:

Genesis 4:6 So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? [That's a question we need to ask ourselves. Cain's anger flowed from a sinful motive – hurt pride. "So the LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you angry?'] And why has your countenance fallen?

Genesis 4:7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it." [He likens sin to a beast crouching at the door trying to destroy Cain. And God said that if Cain did not learn to rule over his anger, his anger would devour and destroy him. And it did. And it didn't just ruin Cain's life, it literally destroyed Abel. The text goes on to say,]

Genesis 4:8 Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

This is the end result of uncontrolled anger. It is a destructive force, designed by God to motivate us to destroy sin in ourselves, to destroy sin in

others, and to destroy sin in society. But instead of allowing anger to a motivation to destroy sin, we destroy people. We tend toward either clamming up (in which case anger destroys us with ulcers, arthritis, heart disease, cancer, and other problems) or by blowing up and attacking others verbally (which destroys relationships, impacts the spirits of our children, and sometimes even destroys people).

Conclusion – further lessons learned from Nabal

1. Don't exaggerate (Eph. 4:25)

But very quickly, let me conclude with some further lessons that we can learn from Nabal and David. First of all, we should never exaggerate. This was what Nabal was doing. We are not told why Nabal was bitter and angry, but with a name “Fool,” which is what Nabal means, you can guess. And irritation fuels anger, and anger turns to bitterness, and bitterness blinds us to reality and gives us a tendency to exaggerate the problem. And if you are a person who exaggerates when you get angry, you need to confess this sin to the Lord and to others. Exaggeration is a form of lying. And in connection with destructive speech and anger, Ephesians 4:25 tells us to put off all lying.

2. Build up, don't tear down (Eph. 4:29)

Second, build up, don't tear down. Ephesians 4:29 says that when you get angry with a fellow believer make sure that you don't let any words come out of your lips that tear down. It says, “**Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.**” Every word that came out of Nabal's mouth was the opposite. He had nothing constructive to say. He had gotten into the habit of ripping and tearing. If you do that, automatically your anger is not godly. It doesn't matter how godly it started out, it became ungodly when it started violating Ephesians 4:29.

3. Try to look at life from the other person's perspective

Third lesson from Nabal: try to look at life from the other person's perspective. Try to figure out how the other person will perceive your words. Secondly, try to figure out why the other person is upset. Maybe they have a legitimate gripe.

In the heat of the moment it is hard to react to another person sympathetically or to look at what they are struggling with from their perspective. Emotions close down those reasoning powers. You will learn to

control your anger if you ask yourself, “Did they have a legitimate gripe against me? Lord, please open my eyes to see it if that is the case. Am I at least partly in error? Lord, please show me. Are they angry over the content of my speech, or over the *way* I said it, or is it over the timing of my speech? Have they had a hard day? Have they lost sleep?” Nabal was immature in that he only knew how to appreciate his own situation.

4. Be sensitive to timing (Eph. 4:29; Prov. 15:23)

Ephesians also tells us to be sensitive to timing. Proverbs says that a word fitly spoken in due season is a good word. It needs to be in due season. Nabal was completely missing the spirit of the season.

Conclusion – further lessons learned from David

5. We must recognize anger as dangerous (Gen. 4:7; Prov. 22:24-25; etc.)

OK, let’s quickly look at some lessons from David. The first lesson I won’t belabor because we have dealt with it already. But it is critically important that we see anger as dangerous. Do not excuse it. Even with *legitimate* anger you are handling fire around gasoline and dynamite, and you better walk carefully. It’s dangerous. This chapter illustrates so well how dangerous it is.

6. We must not allow our position to make us careless in controlling our anger.

Next lesson, we must not allow our position to make us careless in controlling our anger. Nabal thought that because he was wealthy, he could get away with unkind words. David thought that because he headed a militia of 600 men who followed his every command that he could get away with murder. Just because of our position as a parent does not mean that we can blow up.

7. We must be slow to make any decisions that flow out of anger, because anger affects our reasoning powers.

We’ve already dealt with application seven.

8. We must learn to submit our expectations to God’s Lordship

Application 8 is that we must learn to submit our expectations to God’s Lordship. It’s usually because our expectations have been thwarted that we get angry. So we need to ask ourselves, is God making the

fulfillment of my expectations impossible? Has He permanently closed the door? If it is God who is doing that, then I need to submit.

One time when the umpire Babe Pinelli called two strikes on Babe Ruth, the crowd booed, and Babe Ruth turned around and said, “There’s 40,000 people here who know that the last pitch was ball, tomato head.” The coaches braced themselves for Ruth to be ejected for calling the umpire “tomato head.” But the umpire simply said, “Maybe so, Babe, but mine is the only opinion that counts.” I don’t care how many people you can find to justify your anger, if God sees it differently you need to quickly adjust. His is the only opinion that counts. David learned that on this day. Don’t justify your anger with your umpire, God.

9. David’s different responses to Saul and Nabal illustrate the truth of Abraham Lincoln’s aphorism that “Most folks are as happy as they make their minds up to be.”

A ninth application can be made when you contrast David’s non-angry responses to king Saul and his angry response to Nabal. Now that’s interesting. Saul treated David far worse than Nabal did, so why didn’t he get just as angry with Saul as he did with Nabal? We see this all the time with spouses. They tell me that they can’t help it that they get angry with their spouse. But somehow, when the boss is meaner than a snake to them, they are able to bite their lip and not respond the same way that they would have to their spouse. It’s a choice. Abraham Lincoln once said, “Most folks are as happy as they make their minds up to be.” And I think there is a lot of truth in that. Anger can be contained. You might have to work at it for quite some time, but it can be conquered. It is a choice that we make. You’re not an animal that has no choice but to erupt in thumos when you have orges. God says that you can control your anger, and you must control your anger. And the principles of this sermon show how.

10. Allowing resentment to fester between chapters 23 and 25 may have provided the weak point through which anger could spring up.

Point 10 is actually a guess. My guess is that David had allowed resentment to Nabal to build between chapters 23 and 25. But it is certainly consistent with his behavior here. If you don’t learn to give your expectations to the Lord when irritating behaviors of other people can’t be changed, your irritation with those behaviors will become a weak point for an eventual blow up. So even at the irritation stage, you need to take remedial action of either dealing with the problem, or if that is not possible,

turning problem over to the Lord and turning the irritation over the Lord. Don't let irritations continue to simmer. Sometimes you need to confront the person who is irritating you. But you know what? That's not the first place that I recommend that you go. Most of us just need to develop tougher skin, and not be constantly having to confront people. I recommend that you learn how not to get irritated so easily. You may not be able to control the other person, but you can control whether you get irritated or not. And Romans 12:9 to the end of the chapter tells you how. It gives a long list of actions you can take that keep people from being able to irritate you. It shows you how to not be overcome by evil, but how to overcome evil with good. It's conquering the reactions of your heart that is more important than conquering your friend. So see irritations as a warning sign that anger is not too far away. You need to take appropriate actions at the irritation level, not simply at the anger level.

11. Anger is sinful when it grows out of hurt feelings or pride rather than out of God's law being violated.

Point 11 has already been dealt with.

12. Anger is sinful when it is expressed in unbiblical ways such as blowing up (Prov. 29:11; 25:28; Eph. 4:31) or clamming up (Lev. 19:17,18; Eph. 4:26) rather than motivating you to work on the problem (Eph. 4:29)

Point 12 has already been dealt with.

13. If anger has gone to bitterness, it sometimes takes daily walks to the cross before the bitterness is uprooted.

Point 13 has been touched on. It says that if anger has gone to bitterness, it sometimes takes daily walks to the cross before the bitterness is uprooted. Don't get discouraged. Keep at it. Corrie ten Boom told of her struggles with forgetting a wrong that had been done to her. She had forgiven the person, but she kept rehashing the incident during the day and at night and was tempted to get angry again. Finally, she cried out to the Lord for help in putting the problem to rest. She said, "His help came in the form of a kindly Lutheran pastor, to whom I confessed my failure after two sleepless weeks." He responded,

Corrie, up in the church tower is a bell which is rung by pulling on a rope. When the sexton pulls the rope, the bell peals out 'ding-dong, ding-dong.' What happens if he doesn't pull the rope again? Slowly the sound fades away. Forgiveness is like that. When we forgive someone, we take our hand off the rope. But if we've been tugging at our grievances for a long time, we mustn't be surprised if the old

angry thoughts keep coming for a while. They're just the ding-dongs of the old bell slowing down.

In other words, don't be discouraged if you don't lick it overnight. It wasn't much longer before Corrie licked her bitterness. As you daily refuse to pull on the rope, and daily go to the cross thanking God for His forgiveness of you, and the forgiveness that He has given to that other person, and God's love for the other person, over time those thoughts will not cause you to grab the rope again. They will remind you of the sweetness of God's grace, and peace will come. But it takes time to get over the habit of anger. So be patient with those who are trying to do so.

14. Sometimes intervention is needed when people are angry (vv. 14ff)

But the last lesson that I see in this story is that sometimes intervention is needed with an angry person even if he is a godly person like David. The hurt can sometimes be so great, and the anger so strong, that nothing but intervention can stop the person from doing something stupid. And like Abigail, you likely will need to do it very tactfully, humbly, and wisely. Lord willing, we will look at what such intervention can look like. But don't reject the loving interventions of your friends in this church. If a David needed them, we can too.

And I will be in prayer that God will give you more and more victory over your anger, and you can be in prayer that God will give me continued victory. May we be a people who are angry over the right things and in the right way, but who can totally control our anger so that God's righteousness is achieved, not simply our satisfaction. May God give us this victory. Amen.

Hymn of response: Psalm 37

The Anatomy of Anger

1 Samuel 25:10-13

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 12-11-2011

Introduction – What is anger? Why do we get angry?

- I. The Arrogant Contempt (vv. 10-11)
 - A. Pretending to never have heard of David (v. 10a)
 - B. Insinuating that David was a runaway slave (v. 10b)
 - C. Insulting David's intelligence by suggesting that giving food to David's men would rob the food from his servant's mouths (v. 11a)
 - D. Saying that he knows nothing of the men who had saved his property (v. 11b)
 - E. Full of himself ("I...my...my...my...I...my...I" - v. 11)
- II. The Response of Anger (vv. 12-13)
 - A. The body language of anger (v. 12a)
 - B. Repeating the offensive language (v. 12b)
 - C. A desire to "get even" escalates into wanting to do more than "get even" (v. 13)
 - D. Making a snap decision (v. 13)
 - E. Others take up David's offense (v. 13)
 - F. Anger can lead to murder (vv. 13ff)

Conclusion – further lessons learned from Nabal

1. Don't exaggerate (Eph. 4:25)
2. Build up, don't tear down (Eph. 4:29)
3. Try to look at life from the other person's perspective
4. Be sensitive to timing (Eph. 4:29; Prov. 15:23)

Conclusion – further lessons learned from David

5. We must recognize anger as dangerous (Gen. 4:7; Prov. 22:24-25; etc)
6. We must not allow our position to make us careless in controlling our anger.
7. We must be slow to make any decisions that flow out of anger, because anger affects our reasoning powers.
8. We must learn to submit our expectations to God's Lordship
9. David's different responses to Saul and Nabal illustrate the truth of Abraham Lincoln's aphorism that "Most folks are as happy as they make their minds up to be."
10. Allowing resentment to fester between chapters 23 and 25 may have provided the weak point through which anger could spring up.
11. Anger is sinful when it grows out of hurt feelings or pride rather than out of God's law being violated.
12. Anger is sinful when it is expressed in unbiblical ways such as blowing up (Prov. 29:11; 25:28; Eph. 4:31) or clamming up (Lev. 19:17,18; Eph. 4:26) rather than motivating you to work on the problem (Eph. 4:29)
13. If anger has gone to bitterness, it sometimes takes daily walks to the cross before the bitterness is uprooted.
14. Sometimes intervention is needed when people are angry (vv. 14ff)

