



worldoutreach
SCHOOL OF LEADERSHIP

SERIES TWO

MODULE FIVE: MANAGING OUR TEMPER



Outline Session 1 - 2

1. Managing our temper (Part 1)
2. Managing our temper (Part 2)

SESSION ONE: MANAGING OUR TEMPER (PART ONE)

In Paul's lists of character qualities, he wrote that a leader must not be '*...violent but gentle, not quarrelsome...*' (1 Timothy 3:3), nor '*...quick-tempered...*' (Titus 3:7). A leader needs to be in control of their temper and emotional state at all times.

There are numerous examples of leaders in Scripture who lost their temper. The consequences were sometimes disastrous, e.g. Moses (Exodus 2:11-12; Acts 7:25; Numbers 20:11-12) and Saul (1 Samuel 22:6-23; 20:33). A leader who loses their temper will suffer consequences.

How, then, can leaders manage their temper? James 1:19-21 provides some answers. James does not say that we should 'never be angry' or that 'anger is always sin', but he does say to be '*slow to become angry...*' Paul also wrote, '*In your anger do not sin...*' (Ephesians 4:26). These Scriptures indicate that not all anger is wrong or sinful. Neither James nor Paul forbid *all* anger, but anger that *is* sin or *leads* to sin. This suggests that there is a distinction between righteous anger and sinful anger.

'Righteous anger' is an anger that is justified or defensible. There are a number of examples in Scripture of so-called 'righteous anger'.

Firstly, *God* himself sometimes got angry. His anger was never impulsive or erratic, but a (Richards) 'righteous response to specific human failures and sin.' Examples: Exodus 4:14; Numbers 11:1, 33; 12:9; Numbers 32:10; Deuteronomy 4:23-26; Exodus 32:7-12; Numbers 25:3; Deuteronomy 11:16-17; Exodus 22:22-24.

Secondly, *Jesus* got angry. Examples: John 2:13-17; Mark 3:1-5.

Thirdly, in the Old Testament, there were leaders who became 'righteously' angry. Examples: Moses (Exodus 32:19-20), Phinehas (Numbers 25:8) & Jonathan (1 Samuel 20:34).

Drawing application from these examples, we note that for anger to be 'righteous', it must be rightly motivated and rightly controlled. Even though a leader's anger may be righteous (justified), the *expression* of that anger must also be righteous.

So, James wrote that there is such a thing as righteous anger, but what he prohibits (in 1:19-21) is the thoughtless, unrestrained temper that often leads to rash, harmful and irretrievable words or actions.

It is almost impossible to deal with anger in a moment of high emotion, particularly if it is deep and abiding anger, so James wrote wise words about being '*...slow to become angry...*' The word '*become*' angry suggests that anger can and *must* be controlled. Most times, the expression of our anger is a *choice*. We choose to control or lose our temper.



SESSION TWO: MANAGING OUR TEMPER (PART TWO)

What is actually wrong with becoming angry? James wrote: ‘...for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires’ (1:20). Our anger is not compatible or consistent with the new life we have in Christ.

Why doesn’t anger bring about the righteous life God seeks to produce in us? Here is a list of Scriptural answers to that question:

- Because an uncontrolled temper or ‘fits of rage’ are part of the old sinful nature (Galatians 5:19-20)
- Because anger produces strife (Proverbs 30:33)
- Because anger stirs up more anger (Proverbs 15:1)
- Because anger grieves the Holy Spirit, especially if it is between believers (Ephesians 4:29-32, note v. 30)
- Because, unless we deal with anger, Ephesians 4:27 says that we give the devil a foothold
- Because anger brings the judgment of God (Matthew 5:22)
- Because anger hurts both ourselves and other people (Genesis 4:8, 15; 2 Samuel 13:22).

So, what does James teach that we should do to manage our temper?

1. Get rid of everything in our life that fuels anger

‘Get rid of’ employs the metaphor of changing our clothes, meaning that we should discard anger as we would old clothes. We take old clothes off and, in most cases, throw them aside. Paul’s use of the metaphor, writes David Williams, implies we must “take off” ‘...the old man (what, by nature, we were) and “put on” the new (what, by grace, we are in Christ).’ In non-metaphorical terms, this means getting rid of our old (Douglas Moo) ‘pre-Christian patterns of behaviour’, including our bad temper.

James is urging us to deal with the *source* of our temper. The *source* of an uncontrolled temper is the old nature, which is influenced by the prevailing culture or environment, whereas the source of a self-controlled temper is the new nature which is influenced by the Word and Spirit of God.

What does James specifically tell us to get rid of? He explicitly states that we must rid ourselves of ‘...all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent...’ (1:21). ‘Moral filth’ refers to everything that taints, soils or devalues our lives. It is anything morally questionable or inappropriate. ‘Evil’ is a broad word covering everything that might be wrong in character or conduct. It probably refers to the evils in the prevailing culture. In all likelihood, this is a call to jettison and reject every thought, practice or lifestyle that is inconsistent with God’s Word.



2. Humbly accept the word of truth

James gives us a second key for how we can control our temper. It's found in the second part of 1:21. '*Get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and **humbly accept the word planted in you**, which can save you*' (emphasis mine). The putting off (or getting rid of / unclenching) must always be accompanied by the receiving (or reclenching) with something. In this case, it is the implanted word.

Before we come to that, please note the required attitude for receiving this word: humility ('...*humbly accept the word planted in you*...'). Humility could well be defined as the absence of pride. We will never be able to receive the Word and, by implication, control our temper until we deal with our pride. Until we read, believe, apply and embrace the Scripture with (Adamson) 'self-subduing gentleness' (humility), we'll never be truly able to control our anger.

REFERENCES IN THIS MODULE:

James B. Adamson, **THE EPISTLE OF JAMES: THE NEW INTERNATIONAL COMMENTARY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT**, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000.

<http://www.goodreads.com/quotes>.

Douglas Moo, **THE LETTER OF JAMES: AN INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY**, Leicester, England, Inter-Varsity, 1993. Alec Motyer, **THE MESSAGE OF JAMES**, Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 1997.

Lawrence O Richards, **EXPOSITORY DICTIONARY OF BIBLE WORDS**, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990.

David Williams, **PAUL'S METAPHORS**, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999.

