

Sunday A.M.
June 18, 2006

Being Slow to Anger:
Communicating God to Our Children
James 1:19-21

Text:

James 1:19-21 (ESV)

¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires. ²¹ Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

Introduction:

There is not a parent in the world that judges his /her success apart from considering the product. Parenting is one of the strongest types of outcome-based assessment there is. If you have well behaved children, you feel like a success. If you have out of control children, you feel like a failure – it all seems to rest on the product. While there may be some truth to out-come based assessment in parenting, it is not the ultimate way of judging success in parenting. But having said that, the Bible does speak of product assessment. A product is that which results at the end of the producing process. This text that I have just read is all about product assessment. Listen, “The anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires.”

My question for those of us who are fathers is this: Are you producing in your children the kind of righteousness that God requires? Now at one level, that is impossible because only the HS can produce righteousness in the heart of another. But at another level, the question is legitimate because you and I as fathers’ can squelch that production process. By our anger, we can thwart the work of righteousness in our children’s life. We know this to be true from passages that deal directly with parenting. For example, Paul says, “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger” (Eph. 6:4). Angry fathers produce angry children.

So I begin this morning with a common presupposition: fathers portray an image of God for their children. That is to say, our children begin to develop their view of God by their view of us as fathers. Dads, how are you doing at communicating God to your children? What should you communicate to your children about God? I believe that one of the hardest and most important elements that we must portray in our fathering is the attribute of patience and longsuffering. These are truly attributes of God.

Take a quick survey with me of how the Bible portrays God.

In the beginning of salvation history, Moses was alone with God on Mt. Sinai when he saw the glory of God pass by. As he wrote about the incident years later, he said this:

Exodus 34:5-6 (ESV)

⁵ The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. ⁶ The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness...”

Do you see how God describes his name? His glory? Jehovah is a God who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger [“longsuffering” in KJV] and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. This quartet of mercy, grace, longsuffering, and love appears throughout the Scriptures.

Psalm 86:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

Psalm 103:8 (ESV)

⁸ The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

As we survey the Bible and accumulate all the evidence we can about the nature of God, we find that this quartet fits into a broader category known as the goodness of God. In other words, God demonstrates his goodness by being merciful and gracious, slow to anger and steadfast in love.

Furthermore, as we assess all the evidence about God we find that this attribute of goodness is expressed to all mankind without distinction. The Bible informs us that God's goodness comes upon all men.

Psalm 145:8-9 (ESV)

⁸ The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. ⁹ The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.

Read v.9 carefully and think through it. As John Reisinger has said, God is good – specifically, God is longsuffering to saints and sinners. God demonstrates His longsuffering to both Pharaoh and Paul; to the Jews as well as to the citizens of Ninevah; even to the citizens of the earth in the days of Noah.

Notice some of these passages with me. Compare Paul with Pharaoh.

1 Timothy 1:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

Do you catch what Paul is saying here? Paul knows at the time of his writing this verse that God had demonstrated a massive amount of patience as He watched Paul rebel against the gospel and wreak havoc on Christ's church. Why did God put up with so much rebellion from Paul? Why didn't God just crush him or thump him when he resisted time and again? Paul says God was displaying his perfect patience, his longsuffering. He was allowing Saul of Tarsus to stack up offense after offense so that once grace came to convert his heart, glory would shine!

Peter says this was the case in the days of Noah. Remember that story? All the time Noah was building the ark – 120 years worth of time – the people of planet earth were ridiculing and mocking Noah. What did God do as they stacked up offense after offense? He endured their rebellion for 120 years. Then, and only when He was ready, did God send the flood to destroy them as he said he would. God had purposed to destroy the humanity of the world in a flood save the eight individuals who entered the ark. If he was going to destroy them anyway, why endure their rebellion for 120 years? Notice Peter's answer:

1 Peter 3:20 (ESV)

²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.

God was simply displaying his patience – His longsuffering. Think about God's dealing with Pharaoh. Paul told us in Romans 9 that Pharaoh was created as a vessel for dishonorable use. He was created to become a vessel of destruction. Why did God endure with Pharaoh for 10 plagues? Why did he not crush him after the first mark of rebellion and hardness of heart? The answer is in Romans 9:22:

Romans 9:22 (ESV)

²² What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,

Do you see why God endured, put up with Pharaoh? The answer is to make known his power. But his power was not displayed in the crushing of Pharaoh. God's power was not in the plagues. God's power was in the ability of God to endure such slander and rebellion. The power was in God being able to stick to his original plan and purpose and goal. The display of God's power is in his patient endurance with sinners! He prepared Pharaoh for destruction and then endured him for 10 long plagues as planned instead of nine or seven or three or one like you and I would have done.

The longsuffering, patient, enduring attribute of God is not only connected to his goodness but to his power. We see that clearly here in Romans 9; but what about other occurrences?

Nahum 1:2-3 (ESV)

² The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies. ³ The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.

Although the Lord is certain to avenge his glory upon his enemies, his power is on display in his being slow to anger. More important to God than the avenging of his glory is his carrying out everything he has purposed and planned in the process.

Listen to how Moses prayed in Numbers 14:17:

Numbers 14:16-18 (ESV)

¹⁶ 'It is because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land that he swore to give to them that he has killed them in the wilderness.' ¹⁷ And now, please let the power of the Lord be great as you have promised, saying, ¹⁸ 'The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, to the third and the fourth generation.'

Moses pleads with God to let his power be shown by being slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and mercy, by forgiving their iniquity.

Two more examples come to us in the prophets:

Malachi 3:6 (ESV)

⁶ "For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.

Notice the force of the word "therefore." It is because the Lord does not change that he endures with the rebellion of Israel.

Hosea 11:9 (ESV)

⁹ I will not execute my burning anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.

Aren't you glad that God is not a man? Aren't you glad that God has such power to endure with the sin of both saints and sinners? Listen to the Puritan theologian, Charnock:

It is want of a power over a man's self that makes him do unbecoming things upon provocation. A prince that can bridle his passion, is a king over himself, as well as over his subjects. God is slow to anger, because great in power; he hath no less power over himself than over his creatures; he can sustain great injuries without an immediate and quick revenge; he hath a power of patience, as well as a power of justice.

God's patience, or longsuffering, is a power or ability in God that enables him to endure everything that's necessary to accomplish all that he has planned or purposed. God's longsuffering is tied to both his sovereign power and his sovereign purposes. Nothing will cause God to act contrary to his plan. He will never go off half-cocked.

But not so with us – not so with man. Dad, how are you doing at displaying a power over yourself when your children cross your will or challenge your plans and purposes for them?

Parents establish great plans for their children, goals that are certainly in the child's best interest, for their good. For example, parents want their children to be happy and healthy. So in carrying out this goal, they establish a plan and purpose to feed their children vegetables as opposed to chocolate. Then one day the child comes to them with a candy bar in hand, "Dad, can I have this?" Your answer is, "No, honey it's too close to dinner. It will ruin your appetite for vegetables." That response, of course is not acceptable to the child who proceeds to make that crystal clear to you. Here you go, Dad. Here is your chance to be God to your children? What will you do? Will you demonstrate your power over yourself and show an attribute of longsuffering? Will you be weak or strong? Will you be god-like or will you be a mere man? Will you abort your plans and purposes and bow to the will of the child – give-in? Will you be a wimp and go off half-cocked and storm down on the child for challenging your authority and disrespecting you? Or, will you patiently endure their rebellion and administer discipline and instruction that is keeping with your plans, purposes and goals?

There are a lot of worthwhile goals that go unaccomplished because we throw up our hands at the first resistance or obstacle in the path. We say all too easily, "I don't need this hassle." We all too easily lose our resolve.

Have you ever sat down to have a rational conversation with your teenager only to find that one of the principle players in the conversation is saying, "You stupid jerk! You don't have a brain in your body!" And it isn't the teenager? What happened? You're acting like a man and not like God. Our emotions change like the weather. God does not change; therefore, we are not consumed.

There is one more very important thread of evidence for us to consider. Why is God longsuffering to saints and sinners? We have already hinted at the answer by contrasting Paul and Pharaoh but there is an application that has to be teased out.

Paul said that God had demonstrated longsuffering, the quality of being slow to anger, upon him so that he might be a shining example to other sinners coming to Christ. Peter says this exact thing.

2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)

⁹The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

Romans 2:4 (ESV)

⁴Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

Once sinners learn that God has been slow to anger against them, longsuffering toward them; once they see that although they deserved instantaneous destruction but instead received patience and slowness of wrath; they will turn in repentance. That is, they will have a backdrop for understanding the mercy and grace of God that brings a response of faith.

Every father wants to see his children come to faith in Christ and because we have such high and lofty goals, we get impatient with the process. We want immediate results. We get more and more angry or are more easily provoked when our older children and teenagers still display hearts of unbelief. We

forget that all is in God's timing according to his plans; therefore, we act and react toward them as men and not like God.

If only we could have the power to change our kids hearts. If only we could get through to them. What story could I tell? What analogy could I give? What picture could I paint to get through to my teenager, my child? We get so impatient. What miraculous work could I perform? Even the Apostle Paul, who had miraculous gifts at his disposal makes an astounding assertion in 2 Cor. 12:12

2 Corinthians 12:12 (ESV)

¹²The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.

Listen to theologian John Frame:

A true apostle is, among other things, one who does not expect instant results (even with spectacular divine attestations), but sticks to the work God has given him, patiently waiting for the fruit of his labors.

God exercised great patience enduring the rebellion of Ninevah and sent a preacher of repentance to them named Jonah. As a result of God's longsuffering and patient endurance, they repented. Jonah saw their repentance and knew that God was no longer going to destroy them and he got angry. He thought they deserved destruction. But listen to his words when he describes to God why he is angry.

Jonah 4:1-3 (ESV)

¹But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. ²And he prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster. ³Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."

Jonah knew that God was slow to anger and merciful to sinners. Jonah knew that God's longsuffering actions were designed to lead sinners to repentance. And it did.

Conclusion:

Why does God exercise patience? Because patience leads to repentance? Father's if you want to produce the righteousness that God requires in your children, then communicate the attribute of God's longsuffering to them.

Proverbs 16:32 (ESV)

³²Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

Fathers, we are the strongest warriors to our kids when they see us as patient and longsuffering.

Oh that we would be better than the mighty as we paint a portrait of God's patience before our children that will lead to their repentance and produce the righteousness that God desires.