

The Merciful Life, Part 5 | withhold wrath

I. The Definition of Wrath

- The Greek word used here refers to fierce indignation — passionate heat that quickly boils up. Wrath describes a quick-tempered response — an explosion that seems to appear from nowhere. It refers to an individual who appears to be at complete ease who — moments later — erupts like an ancient volcano. And often, this same passionate explosion can dissipate as quickly as it appeared.
- We're all born sinners with an inherent proclivity to sinful self-worship, and wrath is one of the natural outpourings of that belief system that doesn't require any new knowledge or understanding or a well-thought out plan of action.
- Now, let's stop here and consider the wrong belief system underlying these spurts of emotion.
- If you believe that a good life is one that goes your way, and you believe that it's appropriate to experience and communicate passionate dislike when things don't go your way, then it will be completely appropriate for you to flare up at such times.
- Couple all of that with the wrong belief that the person who caused your discomfort deserves a wrathful response from you, and you have the perfect recipe for eruptions of Vesuvius proportions.
- But when you recognize the biblical truth about your life and the fact that God expects you to be merciful, then you will be far less prone to losing control in those moments.

II. The Nature of Wrath

- Colossians 3
- Wrathful responses are animalistic in a way. This observation is extremely revealing.
- Sinful short tempers should never be named among Christians. It's the product of a darkened heart informed by emotional chemicals not submission to God. If you respond to inconvenience with annoyance or aggravation or what most call anger, then there is a significant problem.
- Christians don't easily respond to life that way, and they definitely don't do it with never-changing consistency.
- A born again believer who's being transformed into the image of God is going to be moving away from uncontrolled explosions. Unrepentant and consistent wrath in a person's life is a fruit of a life disconnected from Christ.
- So, you can know right off the bat that if your knee-jerk, first response is often uncontrolled, unintelligent fury, you are more spiritually immature than you realize.

III. The Relationship between Anger and Wrath

- It would be unwise for us to exclusively lump ourselves in either the angry or wrathful categories.
- It's true that a wrathful person may not be perpetually angry, but most people who struggle with anger do have wrathful responses that involve clamor, slander, and malice.
- The differentiation we're making between reasoned anger and unreasoning wrath may be a little superficial, so I want to make sure we're not being too strict in our application.
- However, these two Greek words did provide a valuable opportunity to investigate the amount of thought that goes into our merciless responses.

IV. The Cure for Wrath

- **You need to discern whether your angry outbursts are reasoned or unreasoned.**
 - Wrath doesn't have the market cornered on emotion. Delusional emotion with no clearly reasoned response is just usually the identifying feature of wrath.
 - This is why it's not happenstance that wrath is the second on the list. Bitterness is wrong thinking, but the moment your thinking goes astray, your emotions are tanked.
 - In order to distinguish between an angry response and a wrathful response, you need to discern if it has any reasoning behind it or not.
 - Some people sinfully explode on others with laundry-lists of reasons that were clearly thought-through and mulled-over beyond all appropriate measure.
 - But others when pressed about why they're so angry have a very hard time elucidating their reasoning. And this has rarely to do with the fact that they are poor conversationalists. It has to do with the fact that their outburst was instinctual and generally mindless.
- **You need to understand your emotions.**
 - Emotions are a gift from God. They're a gift to the individual, the body of Christ, and spiritual authorities. Romans 12:15
 - Emotions are a tool.
 - God gave us emotions to use in our worship of Him. I Corinthians 10:31
 - Emotions make it easier to accomplish tasks. Engaging our emotions in a Christ-honoring way can help us respond better to the situation before us.
 - Emotions are a gauge. In the same way that a smoke detector in your house is there to warn you of a problem, your emotions can help you see when there's a spiritual problem in your life.
 - If you are experiencing strong emotions in line with God's will . . . all is well. Do you enjoy what God says is good? Are you angry about sin? Are you jealous for God's glory? Then God is pleased.
 - But if you're experiencing strong emotion out of sync with God's will . . . there's a problem. Do you enjoy your sin? Are you angry about what God has brought into your life? Are you jealous for your own way? If so, your emotions are being used to worship yourself and need to change.
- **You need to control your emotions.**
 - Luke 12:48; Ecclesiastes 3
 - We should never tolerate a meltdown simply because we believe it's uncontrollable or not our fault or because the other person deserves it.
 - Once we understand what emotions are, why God created them, how they're to be used, and how to control them, we need to put those truths into practice. And the best time to practice reigning in our emotions will be when they start to get away from us.
- **You need Bible, not pragmatism.**
 - Genesis 4:1-16
 - We don't know much about Cain, but we do know that he was an emotional person given to bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice.
 - Cain's response was obviously the result of wrong thinking and mindless emotion. The perfect God of the universe had very good reason not to regard Cain's offering. Had he given it an ounce of thought, he wouldn't have been angry.
 - We can't know for sure if Cain's malicious murder of Able was an explosion of mindless rage. I think it's better to assume that this initial wrathful response gave way to quiet stewing and that the murder was premeditated.
 - Cain was a malicious person because he was angry, and he was angry because he was wrathful, and he was wrathful because he was immature and delusional.