

Proverbs 19:3: Angry at God

OUTLINE

The blame for our sins
The destructiveness of our sins
The irrationality of our sins

INTRODUCTION

Angry at God! Have you ever been angry at God? No one ever has the right to be angry with God, yet so many are. Even some Christians think that it is ok to be angry with God. They justify it saying things like 'God is big enough to handle it.' They think that the Psalmists cry of 'How Long?' is a criticism instead of an earnest plea for God to fulfil His promises. They think that Jonah's and Job's complaining against God is an example forgetting that Jonah was rebuked and Job repented. Anger against God can span from those situations that we would classify as more 'understandable' to that anger which has no basis whatsoever and is based on selfishness and ignorance. For example, I read of a story about a 21 year old woman whose husband was caught in a house fire, 80% of his body was covered in burns. They already had to amputate his arms before they announced to her that he had died of cardiac arrest. In this situation questions about God's goodness and power and wisdom naturally arise. The verse we want to look at today is looking at the irrational side of our anger against God. Proverbs 19:3, 'When a man's folly brings his way to ruin, his heart rages against the Lord.' I find this verse to be especially insightful and helpful. It shines a light on the obvious irrationality of our anger and the destructiveness of sin. The problem I want to address is not just anger at God but anger in general. Proverbs 19:11 tells us that 'Good sense makes one slow to anger....' We are going to allow this verse to expose our hearts and bring the truth of God, ourselves and the gospel to bear to help us analyze and overcome our anger against God and in general.

This verse can be taken in two ways. Some have understood it to mean that when a man sins he blames God for his sin. In other words, the question of God's providence and temptation comes into view and the verse is addressing the problem of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. The second way it can be taken is way I understand it. This verse is showing how we sin, and even though we bring the consequences of our sins upon our own heads our anger is so irrational we lash out at the most innocent person there is who can do no wrong. We will try and cover both views in our exposition. We will divide our message up into three parts. In the first part we want to deal with the view of God's providence over sin talking about who gets the blame for our sin. In the second point we will be exploring the way in which sin brings about ruin and destruction. And in our third point we will consider the irrationality of our anger.

The blame for our sins

'If God didn't want me to sin, then He shouldn't have made me with these desires.' Those are the words of a young girl I remember who shortly after went on to fall pregnant outside of marriage. What these words, as well as the words of our verse reveal is a real ignorance to the way in which sin works in our hearts. God made man upright, then on account of sin we are now born with a sinful nature. God did not put evil desires within our hearts, desires for those things that are against the law of God are not God given but flow from us. James 1:13-15, 'Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴ But each person is tempted when he

is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.' So in the first place temptation does not come from God but from our own hearts.

But some might want to say, 'Yes, I am not disputing that the desire for sin comes from me, but isn't God the one who is sovereign over my situation, and I have prayed 'Lead me not into temptation,' and God led me into a difficult situation and I sinned and am now sitting with the consequences. Can I not blame Him now?' the answer is still no. 1 Cor. 10:13, 'No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.' If you are a child of God, God as your Father leads your every step. He always does it according to His good purposes to you, a relationship which has been established by the righteousness of Christ. We are told by Paul that God always gives us a way out of every tempting situation, it is always the way of obedience. We never have to sin. We always choose to. We do see that God allows situations where strong temptations take place, for example the sifting of Peter. But God is with us to strengthen us, He gives us His word marking out the clear path of obedience so that we always know to choose obedience and not sin in every situation, He gives us prayer as a means of leaning upon Him, He has broken the power and hold of sin over us so that we are no longer slaves of sin but are able to offer obedience to God, He has won our hearts by the revelation of His perfect love in Christ. Sin is always our fault not His. You will never be able to bring yourself to a place of true repentance unless you know this. For as long as you think that you are not sinning, or have a good enough excuse to sin, you will not be ready to agree with God about your sin and repent. And if you are not repenting of your sins then you are continuing in sin and run the further risk of hardening your heart and God having to intervene with His loving discipline.

Now our verse is looking at the person who is angry at God because of the consequences of their sins, but what about the type of person we spoke about earlier, that Widow who is just suffering, and not necessarily because of her own sin, and is thinking thoughts of anger towards God? There are wrong ways to view this. Firstly, many are looking at it through the therapeutic lens. Emotion that is bottled up inside is bad for you, so if you are feeling it, let it out because pent up emotions can fester. There is some truth in this, however, does my emotional health give me the right to make God my punching bag? The answer is no. Another lens that people are looking through is the modern assumption about emotion, John Piper speaks of it this way, 'many assume that feelings are not right or wrong; they are neutral. So to say that anger (whether at God or anybody else) is "not right" is like saying sneezing is not right. You just don't apply the labels right and wrong to sneezing. It just happens to you. That is the way many people think about feelings: they just happen to you. Therefore, they are not moral or immoral, but neutral. So for me to say that it is never right to be angry with God is to put the feeling of anger in a category where it doesn't belong, the category of morality.'¹ Today people are talking about same sex attraction as a legitimate non-sinful way to identify as a Christian. This is another symptom of a biblically deficient view of sin that limits sin to volitional choices and not to thoughts and desires as well.

We need to bring the biblical doctrine of God front and center to help us negotiate this issue. We need to contemplate the perfection of God, that He is holy, that He cannot deny Himself, that all of His actions are good and wise and all His judgements are just. Anger is legitimate when it is against sin, but it is illegitimate and sinful when it is against good. God cannot err, He never makes a mistake, He never needs to apologize, the problem will always

¹ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/it-is-never-right-to-be-angry-with-god>

lie with our understanding and willingness to accept the goodness of God by faith. For those who are struggling with the goodness of God and feel their pain pushing them towards questioning God you must place yourself before the cross. Look up at Christ and see who dies. God has given His most precious Son, how will He not with Him, gladly, freely, superabundantly give us all things. He is for us, He has proven His love in the lengths of His sufferings and sacrifice.

The destructiveness of our sins

Now our verse focuses our attention not on those who are struggling with God's providence which allows suffering but those who because of sin are suffering. 'When a man's folly brings his way to ruin.' In the book of proverbs, folly and wisdom are polar opposites. Wisdom is the fear of the Lord and a life of living as if God is real walking in the wisdom of the ways of the one who created you and blesses you for your obedience. Folly is the opposite, folly is to deny God as Lord and to make yourself God, it is to live by your own authority, your own rules, following your own desires and ways, and the book of proverbs shows this to be a path of judgement from God and self-destruction.

What does this look like? In our minds we always think of ourselves as the good guy and the one who does right and only the worst examples as the ones to whom this verse applies. This verse is describing every single one of us who have gone our own way and not God's. Every one of us has a number of different kinds of wounds. We have wounds from Adam. We have wounds from loved ones. We have wounds from spiritual enemies warring against us. We have wounds from strangers. We have wounds inflicted by our governments. The wounds spoken of here are those wounds that are self-inflicted, we all have these. We do damage to ourselves physically reaping the fruit of our actions. We damage our relationships. We harm our work and vocations. We experience emotional collateral damage, we know mental anguish because of our choices, and all sin ultimately affects us spiritually as well hardening our hearts and distancing us from the source of all good—God.

19:2 is probably intended to be taken with v3, 'Desire without knowledge is not good, and whoever makes haste with his feet misses his way.' This proverb is painting the picture of someone who is following their desires and feelings but not thinking out their actions based on the truth of God's revelation. They have desire but no knowledge to lead them and help them discern the best path. And so they rush headlong without stopping to view their situations in light of God's word. They make haste with their feet and miss their way. They get lost and getting lost in the Middle East meant wild animals and robbers and desert regions without water.

The connection we all need to remember from this verse is the connection between sin and pain. God made us and God made the world, and He has made the consequences of nature follow the consequences of His justice. When you step outside the bounds of His law you experience pain. The book of Proverbs multiplies the examples of the fool who does not walk in the light of God's word, the ways of the wise and as a result reaps ruin. Prov. 18:6-7, 'A fool's lips walk into a fight, and his mouth invites a beating. A fool's mouth is his ruin, and his lips are a snare to his soul.' And the righteous are those who pursue righteousness and reap good things, Prov. 16:17, 'The highway of the upright turns aside from evil; whoever guards his way preserves his life.'

How needy the world is for this light. They need to hear the story line of the Bible. God is God and not us. He created us we do not create ourselves. We are made according to His

purposes and reality agrees with what He has made. We are servants not Lords, we are worshippers not to be worshipped, we are stewards not owners and made for holiness not sin. Self-made, self-determining, self-directing, self-defining are the paths to ruin and unhappiness. How many are sitting with these self-inflicted wounds because they believed the lie that they could be god. How many are sitting in the confusion and pain of trying to define their own sexuality and not accept the way God made them? How many are experiencing confusion because they refuse to hear God's narrative about themselves as human beings made in God's image but who are sinful and so experience contrary desires that ought to be suppressed not a so called truth by which they try to live by. How many have thought that by coming out, by undergoing reassignment surgery, by getting into a certain type of relationship they would find fulfillment and happiness and they did not. When we reject God's lordship, His standards, His narrative, His purposes and we sin by being God ourselves. Not only do we pile up judgement for ourselves, this text warns us that we will experience ruin.

Is this you? Are you someone who is not a Christian who has attempted self-rule and know from first-hand experience the weakness of our own ability to rule our own lives? You have seen how your emotions have led you astray, you have seen how your opinions are nothing more than hot air, your best intentions cannot remake reality to fit what you want, you are left with wounds and emptiness and a boiling pit of rage and despair. The book of Proverbs calls you to come back to the God who made you. To return to the kindness of His ways. Come to God even though you have willfully rebelled and sinned, He has given His Son as proof of His willingness to forgive sinners.

Are you here today as a believer who has cast off the rule of God and tried to self-rule? Christians also sit with self-inflicted wounds. Instead of living their lives by God's word and submitting their sinful desires to His will, they believe the lie of sin, they live as if God is not wiser than they are and His ways are not all good. Are you sitting in the self-made destruction of what you have made? Here is a thought for you, be grateful. Be grateful that you are not experiencing all the justice that your sins deserve and that you only feel ruin that brings you to your senses, through which the ministrations of a loving Father come to you to bring you back to your senses. Consider the fact that Christ had to die to pay for your folly. If we continue to reject His call, if we refuse to allow the small mishaps and pains to wake us up from our pursuit of sin, then we will face God in judgement. Put away your sins now and return to God and His ways.

The irrationality of our sins

'his heart rages against the Lord.' What drew me to this verse is this blatant description of our ability to deceive ourselves. Just let this verse impact you. Here is a person who has been sinning, the consequences of their sins have come upon them. It may even be the mercy of God to wake them up to their need for Him. And they cannot see their sins, they cannot see how they are primarily responsible for the pain they are feeling. They instead in their blindness blame the one who cannot be blamed. God cannot sin, He cannot err, He is perfect in every way, but yet still in our self-deception we rage against the one who is the most innocent completely blind to our own guilt. Adam blamed God for giving him Eve when he sinned. David blamed God for judging Uzzah when he should have obeyed the rules about how the Ark was to be transported. And here we see it again, so blind to our own sin we have anger in our hearts towards God.

The book of proverbs is a manual for biblical psychology, it helps you to know the human heart. In particular it helps us see the effects of sin upon the heart. Let me humanize this a bit more to demonstrate how we are all guilty of doing this. Lets think about the sin, the

path that this sinner chose. Let us not think that it is the obvious evil of drug addiction or serial murder. Let's make it more like our sins. A woman desperate for marriage settles for the wrong guy, there are years of toil and a time when she decides that God has let her down and she is going to make herself happy with an affair, and now she is sitting with the wreckage of that choice. Or a teenager whose whole world is focused on the approval of friends at school and at social media who gives into peer pressure and goes along with what the others are doing who is now sitting with the aftermath of some of those choices. A man who in his greed to succeed at business gets into the wrong business partnership and is willing to cut corners for profit is now sitting with the pieces of his bad decisions. I need you to feel with these people, I want you to watch their sins the same sympathetic way you watch people's sins on your favourite programs. Why? Because we love ourselves, we are always on our side, we see ourselves as the victim, the misunderstood person, the one who has been given the raw deal, and the one whose sin is just so understandable because of the pain we have suffered. We say things like 'If you only knew what I have been through you would understand.' We don't look at our situation from the objective perspective of God's law but from the subjective vantage point of our own desires.

As a result we cannot see the sin in ourselves, but we are able to see it clearly in others. We might be willing to speak in general categories of the ways in which we have sinned. We will speak about greed, or selfishness in ourselves but when it comes to the sins of others we can write a book. We have mind reading skills to expose their inner motives which are always with me-hating intent. We accuse them of deliberately doing everything they have ever done since they have known us with a vindictive intent. The report of their crimes against us is so in depth that we can point out the tiniest details. Why? Because we are sinners who favour ourselves and who deceive ourselves about others actions against us. This verse is pointing out how absurd our anger can be, that even one who cannot be guilty can be the target of our hottest wrath. How blind we are in our anger.

We are able to dwell on our hurts in such a way that our fixation upon ourselves makes us lash out blindly. But here is the trouble, we believe the lies. We are willing to believe the worst of people when we are in pain. We see red and we are gone and even God who cannot sin is guilty in our eyes. This anger is the sin of the perpetrator as we see in this proverb, so that even the most guilty person in the situation can be the angriest at others because of this blindness. But the victim who has only done a little wrong will also be so blind to their sins and only preach the sin of the other to themselves that their whole person becomes invested in their hurt and anger.

Are you dealing with this anger right now? Are you feeling anger as the perpetrator or the victim or if you are in a feud, both? Remember the insanity that holds the human heart and the ability for self-deception that we have. Paul tells us to be angry and not to sin so that we don't give the devil an opportunity to divide us. James gives us some advice too, 1:19-20, '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 of God.' We are quick to speak and accuse and make excuses, and quick to anger because we believe the half truth of the others persons guilt. And we are slow to stop and think biblically about our own sin, to stop and move our hearts to mercy over the extenuating circumstances that the one who has hurt us may be experiencing. This is where we must stop and think thoughts about the cross for it is the gospel which equips us to deal with these hottest of our emotions which are so quick to consume us. Remember Jesus on the cross. He prays, Father forgive them they know not what they do. They know part of what they are doing but not all. Jesus does not focus on their offence against Him, but in any way they are victims. He does not focus on justice abut mercy. He does not plead their guilt before God

to call down judgement, but rather mercy for their salvation. The cross reminds us that Jesus had to die for our sins against Him, we cannot stand before the cross and pray for judgement upon others while we watch Him praying for the forgiveness of the guilty. We can close our ears, it will only hurt us to do so. But we also have a clear help to overcome that blindness and sin which so often gets a hold of our hearts.

There is much to consider in this verse but let me close by making clear what I have attempted to do. You and I have a problem, we are self-deceiving. This is most apparent in our anger. We pursue sin, we hurt ourselves and even though we alone are guilty we are able to blame the only person who cannot be rightly accused. If have tried to look at ourselves by reminding you who God is, who you are and who our Saviour is. Know this about yourself. Look out for this in yourself. Trust in your God. And come before the cross and let Christ preach your own sins to you not others, and let Him model the mercy not justice we should have in our heart towards others.