

James 1:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

Analysis

For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Human wrath (orgē anthrōpou, ὄργὴ ἀνθρώπου) does not produce God's righteousness (dikaiosynē, δικαιοσύνη). Anger might feel righteous, but James states bluntly that it fails to accomplish covenant justice. Only Spirit-produced righteousness—fruit of peace, mercy, and impartiality—expresses God's character.

Reformed theology distinguishes God's righteous wrath from ours; we are not reliable instruments of judgment. When believers justify anger as zeal, James reminds them that holiness is advanced by meekness, not human fury. This prepares for warnings about the tongue and strife later in the letter.

Historical Context

Persecuted believers could easily rationalize retaliatory anger toward oppressors or toward fellow saints who disagreed. James knew zealots in Judea were stirring rebellion; he warns diaspora Christians not to adopt fleshly anger under guise of righteousness. Paul's exhortation in Romans 12:19 parallels this: leave vengeance to God.

Positioned as Jerusalem's leader, James sought to keep churches from splitting over harsh words or angry activism divorced from gospel mercy.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. Where have you justified anger that actually hindered God's righteousness?
2. How can you channel zeal into prayerful, patient obedience?
3. Who can help you discern when righteous concern slips into sinful wrath?

Interlinear Text

ὀργὴ	γὰρ	ἀνδρὸς	δικαιοσύνην	θεοῦ	οὐ	κατεργάζεται
the wrath	For	of man	the righteousness	of God	not	worketh
G3709	G1063	G435	G1343	G2316	G3756	G2716

Additional Cross-References

Ephesians 4:26 (Judgment): Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath:

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