

## Fact Sheet for “A Wise Riddle” Ecclesiastes 7:9

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Solomon begins the book of Proverbs with the words of Prov. 1:2-6. As in the book of Proverbs, the central section of Ecclesiastes moves quickly from topic to topic. The words found there are some of Solomon’s wise words. In a sense they are a wise riddle and worthy of our careful thought.

ESV <sup>9</sup> **Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools.**

It seems simple enough, but when you think a little deeper you have questions like this one, “Is anger sinful?” Wisdom and foolishness are almost paralleled with righteousness and sin. So since Solomon says “anger lodges in the heart of fools” is he saying that anger = sin? A good way to answer this question and to understand this proverb well, is to place it in context with what is said about anger in other places in the Bible.

### Jesus

Here’s a question. Was it ever said that Jesus was angry?

That actual word was used to describe Jesus only one time, and probably not the time you are thinking of (Mk. 3:1-6, *parallel passages: Matt. 12:9-14; Luke 6:6-11*).

Now admittedly that was a trick question. It truly was the only place where the actual word “anger” was used to describe Jesus’ attitude. However you can see that same attitude when He drove the moneychangers from the temple, both at the beginning of His public ministry (Jn. 2:13-17) and a few of days before His crucifixion (Matt. 21:12-13; Mk. 11:15-17; Lk. 19:45-46).

Consider both of these occasions. Jesus was angry due to their hardness of heart (in the case of the man with the withered hand) or because they were financially gouging people in the temple during Passover.

On other occasions Jesus likely was angry (Jn. 18:19-24, “Woe to you” passages or Matthew 5:1-20; Mark 7:1-23 for instance). If anger = sin then Jesus was a sinner. We obviously have more thinking to do.

Think about how often we as people become angry over the kinds of things Jesus did. It’s not very often. We usually become angry when people get in our way, or say something we don’t like, or are bothering us, or do something to us that we feel is wrong, or over some injustice, or because people can be just plain stupid or callous. The things Jesus got angry about were usually very different than the things we get angry about.

But anger in itself is not sin, so take another look at Eccl. 7:9. Is the first line of this this proverb saying that we should never be angry... or that we shouldn't have a short fuse or a flash temper? But then what does the second line mean?

### Paul

One of the best passages of the Bible on anger appears in Paul's letter to the Ephesians (4:26-27). This sentence has four imperatives set in couplets. These are not just verses for a good marriage. They are verses for a good life. Notice that Paul does not say that anger = sin. Anger is an emotion that we can use sinfully, or not.

Paul would add to this sentence these words (Eph. 4:31-32). Just how much has God forgiven you? In comparison what are you asked to forgive others for? And... God provided for your forgiveness unilaterally (Rom. 5:8).

Paul is not contradicting himself ("Be angry" and "Let all... anger... be put away from you"). Perhaps it can be said this way. When you become angry don't nurse it. Set it aside quickly, and be quick to forgive. Forgiveness is a sure way to put a grounding rod to anger. Then the cup is empty.

The Hebrew word for "lodges" in Eccl. 7:9 is found in several other contexts.

Gen. 8:14 The ark came to rest

Ex 10:14 The locusts settled

2 Kin. 2:15 The spirit of Elijah rested on Elisha

Ex. 20:11 The Lord rested on the 7<sup>th</sup> day

1 Samuel 25:9 David's men waited

When Solomon wrote that "anger lodges in the heart of fools" he did not mean that anger appears, even briefly, in the heart of fools but that anger is a character flaw that resides in the heart of fools.

### Solomon

Solomon wrote elsewhere... Prov. 16:32; 19:11, 19; 29:22.

### James

Read James 1:19 for another example.

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Do you have a flash temper? In what areas? Do you have a hard time forgiving others? Then this verse is speaking to you.

Are you slow to anger? Are you quick to forgive? Then this verse affirms you.

Does this seem impossible to do? It is what God has done in the believer's life that allows him or her to change (Rom. 6:5-11).