

# Biblical Solutions to Life Issues

## Topic 22 – Anger

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### Introduction

Anger is as common of a sin as any other in the world and in the church. Its manifestations appear in news headlines in the form of assaults, riots, murder, and even war. In dealing with individuals regarding anger, there are many factors to consider: long-term habits, pride, anger at others' sin, anger at one's own sin, not getting what you want, strong desire to have peace and ease in life, hurt feelings, hiding fear, using anger to control, feeling pressured by people or time...etc. Anger is not as simple as it may seem to manage in one's own life or in the lives of others.

Essentially there are two kinds of anger: the anger of God and the anger of man. Many in the church have taken the stance that Christians can and should imitate the anger of God. However, God's Word never conveys this as necessary for believers to carry out. Instead, believers are only ever commanded to be angry at their own sin. By and large, God's Word provides numerous wisdom statements and commands urging believers to avoid anger.

### What Is Anger?

Hebrew:

1. Ragaz – “to quiver (with any violent emotion, especially anger or fear): be afraid, stand in awe, disquiet, fall out, fret, move, provoke, quake, rage, shake, tremble, trouble, be wroth”
2. Ap – “nostril, nose, face, or anger;” from Anap – “to breath hard, be enraged, to be displeased”

Greek: Orge – “to provoke, to arouse to anger, to be provoked to anger, be angry, be wroth”

“the emotion of instant displeasure on account of something evil that presents itself to our view. In itself it is an original susceptibility of our nature, just as love is, and is not necessarily sinful. It may, however, become sinful when causeless, or excessive, or protracted (Matt 5:22; Eph 4:26| Col 3:8. As ascribed by God, it merely denotes his displeasure with sin and with sinners (Ps 7:11).”<sup>1</sup>

“a strong feeling of annoyance, displeasure, or hostility”<sup>2</sup>

“a strong feeling of displeasure and usually of antagonism”<sup>3</sup>

### How the Bible Describes Anger

#### 1. *Something to avoid*

Cease from anger and forsake wrath; Do not fret; it leads only to evildoing. (Psa 37:8)

Do not associate with a man given to anger; Or go with a hot-tempered man, (Prov 22:24)

#### 2. *Countered by wisdom, foolish*

Scorners set a city aflame, But wise men turn away anger. (Prov 29:8)

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<sup>1</sup> M.G. Easton M.A., D.D., “Anger,” *Easton's 1897 Bible Dictionary*.

<sup>2</sup> Google definition, accessed August 12, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Merriam-Webster definition, accessed August 12, 2014.

Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, For anger resides in the bosom of fools. (Eccl 7:9)

3. *Leading to strife*

An angry man stirs up strife, And a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression. (Proverbs 29:22)

For the churning of milk produces butter, And pressing the nose brings forth blood; So the churning of anger produces strife. (Prov 30:33)

4. *Sinful Attitude*

"You have heard that the ancients were told, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.' "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. (Mat 5:22)

5. *Unloving*

[Love] does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, (1 Cor 13:5)

6. *Undesirable in a church*

For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there will be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances; (2 Cor 12:20)

7. *Fleshly and opposed to the Spirit*

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, (Gal 5:19-20)

8. *To be put away*

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. (Eph 4:31)

9. *Of man, unable to achieve the righteousness of God*

This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. (Jas 1:20)

10. *Righteous Indignation*

**Righteous Indignation – The Anger of God**

It would seem from examining certain passages in the Bible that there exists a righteous anger that believers are permitted to feel. This is a very common position in Christianity, but many run quickly to this interpretation without the caution necessary to understand what this righteous indignation truly is.

Christ was certainly angry at times, but His anger was righteous since He is God and everything He does is right and holy. In Matthew 23:1-36, He confronts the Pharisees very firmly calling them hypocrites several times, blind guides, fools, blind men, self-righteous...etc. Jesus' assessment of their hearts and actions was perfect, and He could speak to their self-righteous hypocrisy accurately

and in perfect righteousness. Jesus' righteous anger towards the Jewish leadership of his day is more succinctly stated in Mark's gospel.

After looking around at them **with anger**, grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored. (Mark 3:5)

Jesus knew their motives as they were trying to get him to break the Sabbath by healing this man with a withered hand. No account more vividly depicts Jesus' righteous indignation than his clearing of the Temple.

Then they came to Jerusalem. And He entered the temple and began to **drive out** those who were buying and selling in the temple, and **overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves**; and He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple. And He began to teach and say to them, "Is it not written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL THE NATIONS'? But you have made it a ROBBERS' DEN." (Mark 11:15-17)

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. And **He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple**, with the sheep and the oxen; and **He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables**; and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business." His disciples remembered that it was written, "ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME." (John 2:13-17)

Even though Jesus acted out in righteous indignation towards those who had corrupted true faith in and obedience to His Father, there is only one place in Scripture where Christians are called to be angry (Ephesians 4:26). A quick reading of this passage is not enough to understand its author's intent. If we do not understand the author's intent, we will not know God's intent; and if we do not know God's intent, then we will not be able to apply it accurately.

Paul, in writing to the Ephesian believers, urges them not to walk any longer as the Gentiles walk (Eph 4:17), but to lay aside their old, corrupted self (Eph 4:22) and put on the new, holy and righteous self (Eph 4:24). The first part of Ephesians 4:26 is a quote from Psalm 4:4 where the context is the rebuke of the sins of God's people.

O sons of men, how long will my honor become a reproach? How long will you love what is worthless and aim at deception? But know that the LORD has set apart the godly man for Himself; The Lord hears when I call to Him. **Tremble, and do not sin**; Meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still. (Ps 4:2-4 NASB)

Paul quotes this Psalm in the same context in his letter to the Ephesians where the overarching context is his exhorting them to forsake their sin.

**BE ANGRY AND yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger**, and do not give the devil an opportunity. (Eph 4:26-27 NASB)

First, it would be strange if Paul interrupted his thought process to exhort believers at Ephesus to be careful not to sin when they get angry. Typically the only reason Paul interrupts his own thought process is to expound upon the glory of God through explanation or praise.

Second, it is important to note that in the NASB, the word “yet” is in italics. That means that there is no Greek word, phrase, or tense to back up that English word. It is this italicized three-letter word that makes all the difference in comprehending the meaning of this verse. It could be concluded that believers are to be angry but not sin in that anger based on the presence of “yet” in Ephesians 4:26. However, a better translation appears in the NKJV and ESV. These translations omit “yet” in their translating of this verse, and this omission opens the understanding of this verse up to its true intent.

Be angry **and** do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. (Eph. 4:26-27 ESV)

The phrase “Be angry” is in the present imperative, meaning that believers are commanded to be continually angry. The object of their continual anger is their own sin based on the context of believers fighting their sin. Therefore, being angry at their own sin is a way that believers are to avoid sinning and able to pursue holiness.

The next phrase, “do not let the sun go down on you anger,” has been commonly misinterpreted to mean that a believer should not go to bed with anger in his or her heart. However, this phrase should be understood to mean that we as believers are to never stop being angry. When the sun goes down, the day ends. However, believers are to never let the sun go down on their being angry with their sin. Ephesians 4:27 reinforces this interpretation since a continual anger towards one’s sin prevents the devil from gaining an opportunity to convince such a one that their sin is acceptable before a holy God.

In response to the question of whether or not believers are to be angry it can be said that they should always be angry at their own sin. There exists a righteous indignation that Jesus displayed at times, but He is God and His judgments and every one of his actions is perfectly righteous. It would be ultimately detrimental to try to express righteous indignation towards anything or anyone other than our own sin. Finally, the words of Paul to the believers at Rome make this point abundantly clear.

Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord. (Rom 12:19)

### **Helpful Verses about Anger**

In the world, anger is most commonly described as an emotion. Many who struggle with anger may feel some relief when told that their anger is simply an emotion. However, labeling something an emotion does not make it acceptable in the eyes of God. As was aforementioned, the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. Additionally, the Word calls other sins emotions (e.g., anxiety – cf. Phil 4:6, lust...etc.). Consequently, it is crucial that believers stand ready to fight the anger of man in their lives using the eternal Word of God. What follows is not an exhaustive list of all helpful biblical passages regarding anger, but a starting point.

1. This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and **slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.** (Jas 1:19-20)

Keeping in mind that the anger of man will not bring about what God desires in a situation or person can be helpful for someone struggling with anger since it is often expressed to manipulate people or situations to one’s liking. It should never be the knee-jerk reaction since we are told to be slow to it.

2. He who is **slow to anger** has great understanding, but he who is **quick-tempered** exalts folly. (Prov 14:29)

It can serve as great motivation to want to be wise and understanding rather than foolish. Calling to mind that anger and foolishness have a direct correlation, and conversely that being slow to anger and wisdom have a direct correlation, can bring clarity to situations where anger is a tempting action or response.

3. A **gentle answer** turns away wrath, but a **harsh word** stirs up anger. (Prov 15:1)

Anger-filled conversations and arguments are created by harsh words. Often those struggling with anger are dealing with other people who are struggling with anger as well. Giving gentle answers in conversations avoids much potential for anger to arise.

4. He who is slow to anger is **better than the mighty**, and he who rules his spirit than he who captures a city. (Prov 16:32)

Some use anger to look and sound tough and powerful, but in God's eyes the one who is slow to anger is better than the best warriors, or the manliest people imaginable. Self-control is put above anger as that honorable and respectable trait.

5. A man's **discretion** makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to **overlook a transgression**. (Prov 19:11)

It is good for those who struggle with anger to seek to develop discretion instead. This has to be done in advance and with intent since anger typically is an irrational response to something or someone.

6. Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, for **anger resides in the bosom of fools**. (Eccl 7:9)

Once again, the one struggling with anger needs to view it as foolishness, and they need to view themselves as fools when they think, speak, or act out of anger.

7. You have heard that the ancients were told, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER" and "Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court." But I say to you that **everyone who is angry with his brother** shall be guilty before the court and whoever says to his brother, "You good-for-nothing," shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, "You fool," shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. (Matt 5:21-22)

Remembering Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount is helpful in that it shows the seriousness of the sin of anger. Many people believe they can feel anger towards someone and not be sinning as long as they do not say or do anything to that person who is the object of their anger. Jesus calls His followers to deal with sin on a heart level. The legalistic Pharisees were the ones who dealt with sin just on an outward level, but no real lasting change would ever take place since sin originates in the heart and therefore needs to be addressed there first and foremost. The outward actions will follow a truly changed heart.

8. **Never** pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, as far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. **Never** take your own revenge, beloved, but **leave room for the wrath of God**, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord. (Rom 12:17-19)

Often people get angry in order to mete out their own justice. This is never acceptable because God is perfectly just and will do this better than anyone.

9. Now the **deeds of the flesh** are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, **outbursts of anger**, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that **those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God**. (Gal 5:19-21)

Once again, the seriousness of the sin of anger is emphasized. No one should be comfortable with this sin in their life. Those who “practice” anger are not true followers of Christ and will not inherit the kingdom of God.

10. For it is because of these things that the **wrath of God** will come upon the sons of disobedience, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, **put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth**. (Col 3:6-8)

Interestingly, the wrath of God is reserved for those who live a life of anger. Anger and all its ugly manifestations should be put aside never to be touched or indulged in.

### Real Life Scenarios

*Someone Else:* A fifteen year old boy is angry much of the time. He knows this is wrong according to the Word, but he finds himself thinking angry thoughts most of the day. He is angry at his parents because they sin against him and each other. He does not like to be at home. He is also angry at others at school: some because of their arrogance, others because they do wrong or stupid things, and others because they are fake. He has few friends. He complains frequently.<sup>4</sup>

- A. What additional information would you ask this boy in order to help him through this issue?
- B. What kinds of questions would you ask to find out the motive(s) for his anger?
- C. What specific Scriptures address one, some, or all of the manifestations of this issue?

*Yourself:* You are married your marriage is pretty good most of the time. Occasionally, when you get into arguments with your spouse, you use anger to control your spouse because you know he/she fears it. This usually brings the argument to an end, but it is followed by days of silence. Life resumes as usual after several days.

- A. What biblical alternatives exist to replace your use of anger in these situations?
- B. Once you realize you’ve sinned in this way, what should you do instead of waiting for things to resume as usual?
- C. What verses would you memorize to deal with this in your life?

### Conclusion

The Bible describes anger as a dangerous vice to avoid and put away from one’s life. The wrath of God is reserved solely for His righteous and just actions and the anger of man does not achieve this

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<sup>4</sup> Wayne Johnston, “Anger,” Biblical Counseling Notes, 2011.

righteousness. The only case in which believers are permitted to be angry is at their own sin. Finally, no sin can be fought successfully without the leading and power of the Holy Spirit, and no lasting change will take place if it is not motivated by a desire to love and serve God more fully.

**Biblical Solutions for Life Issues**  
**Topic 22 – Anger – Additional Study**

1. How and when do you sin in anger? What about these situations makes you tempted to be angry?
  
2. Why do people close to you get angry?
  
3. Read James 4:1-2. What do these verses say about the cause of conflicts?
  
4. Based on the Bible verses listed in the study above, write out a definition for anger (as it relates to man, not God).
  
5. How does your definition compare to the world's understanding of anger?
  
6. How does the anger of God differ from human anger?
  
7. When you take vengeance into your own hands, what are you in effect saying about God's role in taking vengeance?