

## The Heart of Sinful Anger (and How Christ Sets Us Free)

- In *Uprooting Anger*, Robert Jones wrote, “Anger is a universal problem, prevalent in every culture, experienced by every generation. No one is isolated from its presence or immune from its poison. It permeates each person and spoils our most intimate relationships.... Sadly this is true even in our Christian homes and churches.”
- What is anger? A strong feeling of displeasure and hostility often accompanied by sinful emotions, words, and actions hurtful to those who are the objects of our anger.

### 1. What causes our anger?

a. Someone else’s careless words or actions may become the occasion of our anger, but the cause lies deep within us.

1) Matthew 15:18-19 – But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. <sup>19</sup> For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.

2) James 1:13-14 – 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. <sup>14</sup> But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

b. In Christ, we have freedom to choose how we respond to the sinful actions of others toward us.

1) Romans 12:17-21 – Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup> If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. <sup>19</sup> Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” <sup>20</sup> To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

2) 1 Peter 2:20-24 - For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. <sup>21</sup> For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps. <sup>22</sup> He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth. <sup>23</sup> When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly. <sup>24</sup> He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed.

### 2. How do we handle temptations to anger?

a. Defeating ways to handle the temptation to anger.

Ephesians 4:29-31 – Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. <sup>30</sup> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup> Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

b. How do we handle our anger in a God-honoring way?

- 1) *Recognize* and *acknowledge* our anger and its sinfulness. Proverbs 28:13 – Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.
- 2) *Change* our attitude toward the people whose words or actions triggered our anger.
  - ✓ Ephesians 4:32 – Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.
  - ✓ Colossians 3:12-14 – Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup> And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.
- 3) *Hand over* to God the occasion of our anger (James 4).

### 3. Going Further: “Am I Angry with God?”

- a. Like Jonah, Christians are sometimes angry at God for some reason. “I have felt so many times that He has slapped me in the face when I was really depending on Him.”
- b. Is it okay to be angry toward God? “It’s ok to be angry at God. He’s a big boy. He can handle it.”
- c. It is *never* okay to be angry at God. Anger is a moral judgment, and it accuses God of wrongdoing. It gracelessly blames God for sinning against us by neglecting us or somehow treating us unfairly.
- d. How can we deal with our temptation to be angry at God?
  - 1) Trust in the sovereignty, wisdom, and love of Christ, best exemplified at the cross.
  - 2) Bring our confusion and perplexity to God in a humble, trusting way.
  - 3) Recognize our subtle demands and desire to control God. 1 Peter 5:6-7 – Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you, <sup>7</sup> casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you.

### Resources for Further Study:

- Ash, Christopher and Steve Midgley. *The Heart of Anger: How the Bible Transforms Anger in Our Understanding and Experience*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021.
- Jones, Robert D. *Uprooting Anger: Biblical Help for a Common Problem*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2005.
- Powlison, David. *Good and Angry: Letting Go of Anger, Irritation, Complaining, and Bitterness*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2016.
- Priolo, Lou. *The Heart of Anger: Practical Help for Prevention and Cure of Anger in Children*. Amityville, NY: Calvary Press, 1998.
- Scott, Stuart. *Anger, Anxiety and Fear: A Biblical Perspective*. Bemijdi, MN: Focus Publishing, 2010.
- Welsh, Edward T. *A Small Book About a Big Problem: Meditations on Anger, Patience, and Peace*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2017.