

ANGER

ANGER DEFINED

Take a moment and think about this past week and answer this question, did you get angry at any time? For me, that answer is a definite yes. When you are preparing a sermon on anger, you soon realize how many times it flies upon your personal radar. With the spotlight on, I see everything that sparks frustration, discontentment, and angst. These are all related to anger. So, what is anger? One definition says it this way: Anger is an emotional response arising from a negative moral judgment against perceived evil. I would add it is some sort of perceived injustice.

CAUSES OF ANGER

OTHERS

Here is an example. You are obeying the traffic laws minding your own business. Suddenly, a car comes flying along at a high rate of speed. They commit an illegal lane change with no blinker mind you, causing you to abruptly hit the brakes. Immediately the inner moral judge steps up to the throne and reacts with anger. This anger can remain internal. This is when our inner voice expresses our discontentment with the driver. You see, just because you didn't say or do anything outwardly doesn't necessarily mean you handled it well. Or your anger expresses itself outwardly with vocal words or other outward actions. In either response, what you have done is recognize the injustice and responded to it. You have cast a correct judgment on the driver's action. They are guilty of breaking the law and placing you in harm's way. But what makes this difficult, is that they got away with it. Now our anger is even more justified. Therefore, be angry!

But we can experience or see much bigger injustices. Such as the lives of the unborn being taken away. Or when adults exploit children and youth. These situations are wrong. We can become angry with these situations, and rightfully so.

Last week, I was reading about a Holocaust survivor. When news of the ending of the war hit the concentration camps, the guards changed instantly. They immediately began treating the prisoners respectfully. That angered me. How could they just act as if every nothing ever happened. I wanted them to pay.

OBJECTS

But as I reflected on my past few weeks, I realized how easily angered we can become. In fact, it is mind boggling what can make us angry. I don't need to witness or experience a moral injustice in order to awaken the angry giant within my heart.

I discovered physical objects make me angry. Slow internet speeds, computer malfunctions, car repairs, door jams, and even wireless headphones. Doesn't that seem silly? DOOR JAMBS...have you jammed your

toe into one running around the corner in your home? It doesn't feel good and it too awakes my emotion monster.

Have you ever woken up in the middle of the night to get a drink of water or use the restroom? On the way to the bathroom, you feel a searing pain on the bottom of your FOOT. It is as if a sword has arisen from the floor and is now splitting the bones of your foot. You leap into the air fighting your emotional outburst out of respect for those sleeping. Only to find some toy stuck to the bottom of your foot. And you wonder, how in the world did it land here? It is as if someone strategically planted it there just for you. You want someone to pay because you they did it on purpose. At least that's how it goes in my mind. I've gotten angry walking into a hidden spiderweb floating invisibly in the air. These are a few examples how "things" can expose our anger.

OURSELVES

We can also become angry with ourselves. Have you ever spontaneously spent money on something you wanted. Only to regret it when it is too late to return it? There's even a name for it, it's called buyer's remorse. But on a more serious note, we can also become angry with ourselves over sins we commit. Such as yelling at our children or spouses in an outburst of rage. Spewing hurtful words in an explosive reaction to a situation. What about that sin you repeatedly commit? We can become angry with ourselves because our lack of ability to overcome it. You see, we don't necessarily need others to stir up our heart's emotional anger.

The bottom line, we can be very angry people. And if you think about, it really doesn't take much. But this has been around since the beginning. Soon after Adam and Eve were banished from God's presence, their family was torn apart by the anger. Cain would not repent of his anger which led to the murder of his brother. With that being said, I want to revise the original definition of anger. I would like to define anger as: the emotional response to objects, ourselves, or others where we have perceived or experienced some sort of unrighteous act upon ourselves or others. Let's pray.

ANGER COMMANDED

Let's look at our text now and see what God says about anger. Turn with me to Ephesians 4:17-32. I am going to work backwards through this text. Although we are reading the entire section, I am going to focus on the second half first. We will circle back around to the first half at the end. I also will not be covering this text verse by verse but more in a general sense. There are many texts I could have used, and it was very difficult to settle on one for a topic as wide as this one. Let's read. I want you to pay attention to verses 25-32. The focus here is on anger.

¹⁷ Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. ¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰ But that is not the way you learned Christ!— ²¹ assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²² to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,

²³ and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. ²⁵ Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. ²⁶ Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil. ²⁸ Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Did you hear it and see it? Look at verse 26, “Be angry and do not sin” and verse 31, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.” Be angry and yet put away anger. That can be a little confusing. What we can determine then from this text is that there is a permissible anger and yet another anger we are to “put away”. In biblical terms, there’s righteous anger and unrighteous anger. What this also tells us, in either case, we are not to hold on to them. But I am getting ahead of myself. Let’s take a moment and dig into those two terms first.

RIGHTEOUS ANGER

Righteous anger simply being angry at what makes God angry. God is righteous and therefore His anger is against what is not righteous, or unrighteousness. As one author put it, “God’s anger is byproduct of His righteousness.”¹ God is all that is good, righteous, holy, and perfect. All that He says (Heb. 6:5) and all that He does (Micah 6:8) are good because they are “righteous altogether” (Ps. 19:9). Therefore, anything that violates His goodness, or His righteousness is evil. Those things which distort and disfigure God’s glory are the things which anger God.

Here are few examples.

- God was angry at the lack of trust of Moses in Exodus 4:14. When God called Moses to go to Pharaoh, Moses began to argue with God, questioning Him.
- We read in Exodus 22:21-24 that God was also angered by the mistreatment of those who are helpless, who are strangers, widows, and orphans.
- And He was also angered by those who trust and worship idols (Exodus 32:10; Deuteronomy 6:14-15; Judges 2:13-14; Ezra 8:22).
- Finally, God was angered by the grumbling and complaining of His people in Numbers 11:1, 10 just to name a few.

When we move to the New Testament, we can find a few times when Jesus expressed anger. Here are three of them.

¹ Jon Bloom, ‘How Can We Be Angry and Not Sin’ [desiringGod.org](https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-can-we-be-angry-and-not-sin), <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-can-we-be-angry-and-not-sin>

- The gospels record twice Jesus clearing the temple at the time of the Passover. He drove the people out. They had no reverence for who Jesus was. What's interesting with the account in John 2, it says Jesus made a whip of cords. This insinuates he had a plan. He didn't run into the temple in an explosive burst of rage.
- He was angry at the hardness of heart of Pharisees (Mark 3:5).
- And when he also angry with the hypocrisy of the Pharisees in Mathew 23.

He was concerned with His Father's kingdom rather than Himself. And He was always self-controlled.

It is biblical to be angered by sin. It is biblical to be angered by the mistreatment of the weak, the helpless, and the exploited. Our anger is biblical when a car darts around a school bus while children are exiting. Or when a driver sped around first responders, almost hitting them the other day. I was angered by the man who stole a police vehicle and ran into a van killing two young children. There are injustices occurring every day. And we are justified to be angry with those situations. But we are not to hold on to that anger. We will re-visit this later.

UNRIGHTEOUS ANGER

What about unrighteous anger? Unrighteous anger is concerned with self. It is concerned with your personal right and desires. Unrighteous anger occurs when your personal standards or expectations are violated. Now that doesn't mean you can't have expectations in your office or home. It means anger is probably not proper response when they go unmet. The question may be, what are your expectations? Are they unbiblical? If you don't get what you want, when you want it in the way you want it, do you get angry? Our anger is unrighteous when:

- We get angry because someone did not do what you wanted them to do such as a spouse, child, or co-worker.
- We get angry because dinner is not ready when we want it
- We get angry because some is not answering our text soon enough
- We get angry at ourselves because we made an innocent mistake. Such as forgetting to pay a bill or forgetting that you committed to some task and you forgot to complete it.
- We get angry at some object, such as a computer, or phone for not working properly. There is nothing in the Bible commanding righteous anger over inanimate objects.

But we have a way of justifying our anger. Jeremiah tells our hearts are deceptive. It's almost becomes an art. Once we have justified ourselves, we sit on our throne with righteous indignation. This only feeds our pride and self-righteousness. It is as if we won the battle. It becomes a victory in our personal kingdom. Therefore, we are now justified in meting out punishment. There are a variety of ways in which we express our anger.

EXPRESSED

VERBALLY

First, we can express anger through verbal lashings. This is probably the most common response when angered. James reminds us our tongue has great power but very difficult to tame. It can cause tremendous

damage especially when motivated by anger. Our spouse and children probably know firsthand the damage of an angry outburst. It is a shame that we are the harshest to those whom we love the most. Have you ever verbally assaulted someone in a restaurant due to the service or lack thereof? Maybe someone took your parking spot. Or, maybe some was on their phone taking their time with absolutely no awareness of those around them.

SILENTLY

Yet, we don't even have to say a word to express our anger. It's called the silent treatment. We clam up and ignore the other person. Again, you are meting out the punishment to others who have violated your law. This probably most often seen in marriages. This is expressed in withholding attention or affection. It is our attempt to "punish" your spouse for their injustice to you in a situation.

PHYSICALLY

But there is still another way we can express anger, and it is probably the worst. We can become physically violent. This is what the story of Cain and Abel. Anger stewing, no repentance, leading to Cain's attack on his very own family member, his brother. Many spouses and children die every day due to domestic violence and child abuse. All driven by uncontrolled anger.

HANDLING ANGER

DEAL WITH IT SWIFTLY

How then are to handle our anger? Let's look at our text again. Look again with me in verse 26: *"²⁶ Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷and give no opportunity to the devil."* Anger, righteous or not, should not consume us. We may get angry, but we to release it quickly. Don't hold on to it. The problem comes when we allow it to linger. It begins to stew within our hearts and minds. We won't let it go. We reason within. We know we are right. The action we witnessed was clearly sinful. We believe we will be able to change the situation or person with our angry response.

When we hold onto our anger and allow it to control us, we believe in our power and not God's. You placed your trust in yourself. This is the way of the world. When we allow our anger to reign within us, we are opening the door of opportunity for the enemy. There's an old say, the mind is the devil's playground. Left unchecked, our mind will wonder into dark and sinful thoughts.

BE SLOW TO ANGER

Not only are we to deal with our anger swiftly, but we are to be slow to anger. In the kingdom where we now reside, there is great mercy and grace. For our God is a merciful and gracious God, who is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness (Nehemiah 9:31; Exodus 34:6; Numbers 14:18; Psalm 86:5; Psalm 86:15; Joel 2:13). He is patient, kind, and forgiving. Likewise, we are to be the same.

We are all going to experience some sort of injustice, perceived or real, but we are not to mete out the punishment. We are to leave that up to God. Romans reminds us, *"Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably*

with all. 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."

Paul will later tell us in the book of Ephesians, *"For we don't wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."* This is the way of our King and kingdom. Trust in the power of God by obeying His Word. It takes faith to be slow to speak, quick to listen, and slow to anger. It takes faith to be merciful and kind in the midst of a dark and broken world. It takes faith to live life biblical in a world that is against Christ and His kingdom. But that is the way we are to learn Christ and live accordingly. This is the way of wisdom.

Trusting in the way of Jesus rather than trusting in the power of self. When we forgive others, hold no grudges, exercise self-control and refrain from anger, we are using the spiritual weapons of grace given to us by power of God in Christ. To the world, we will appear passive, soft, and weak. But these are powers of a heavenly kingdom.

REFLECT AND RESPOND

So how do we live this way? How do we learn to manage it or bring into submission to ourselves? Let's return to our text. Let's start at the beginning of the section of text. Read along with me starting in verse 17. Note how we are to put off the old and put on the new:

¹⁷Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. ¹⁹They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. ²⁰But that is not the way you learned Christ!— ²¹assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, ²²to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

We put off the old, renew our minds to put on the new. The best way I have come to understand this is this: Between every stimulus and response, there is a moment of opportunity. A moment to decide how you will respond. Although there are situations when there does not appear to be a gap, such as when you touch something extremely hot like a stovetop. But it is still there. So, let me explain what I mean with a real-life illustration.

You are driving down the road in heavy traffic and someone comes barreling up next to you. In a blink of an eye they dart in front of you causing you to slam on your brakes. Now, your emotional anger explodes within. It's as if you have no control over it. But then, you stop. Was it an unrighteous act? Yes. But I too have committed unrighteous acts. Now you wield the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. You remind yourself the anger of man never achieves the righteousness of God. In addition, the Lord has deemed it necessary that I experience this situation and you pray. You speak gospel to yourself. You remember the

unrighteous acts Jesus experience to for the salvation of your soul. Capturing the moment between our anger and its response takes practice. That's why the bible tells us in 1 Timothy 4 train yourself in godliness. These situations give us opportunity for training. Exposing our heart weaknesses and struggles is a grace of God. He wants us to pursue Christ and His righteousness and that means eliminating sin within us. Exposure of the sin within our hearts is a gift from God. And deep heart exposure is most easily revealed in difficult situations and trials.

Now, use scripture to help us battle anger is useful but isn't anger a heart issue? Yes, it is. So, while scripture helps in the moment to battle the flaming darts, it doesn't not root our heart issues. we need to take time for self-reflection. Not only is the Word of God our sword but it is also our mirror. The Word of God not only tells us who God is and it also tells us who we are. And in that, it gives us opportunity to root out doubts, unbelief, and sinful desires. You can't repent of sin that you don't see. God desires that we repent of all sin. It is same with our anger and its sources. He wants us to come to Him, seeking further healing and restoration.