

Anger

“for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God” – James 1:20

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**“Let all bitterness, wrath, anger,
clamour, and evil speaking be put away
from you” - Ephesians 4:31**

But...

What is anger? Why is it a problem?

Where does it come from, and

How do we get rid of it?

Defining anger:

“A response of the human spirit against perceived evil or injustice, desiring to see evil dealt with, and righteousness restored”.

Anger says: “That is wrong... we must put it right”.

Example: Nehemiah 5:4-6:

4 There were also those who said, “We have borrowed money for the king’s tax on our lands and vineyards.

5 Yet now our flesh is as the flesh of our brethren, our children as their children; and indeed we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have been brought into slavery. It is not in our power to redeem them, for other men have our lands and vineyards.” 6 And I became very angry when I heard their outcry and these words.

God's righteous anger

Mark 3:1 - And He entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand. 2 So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. 3 And He said to the man who had the withered hand, "Step forward." 4 Then He said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they kept silent. 5 And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other.

Twisting God's good gift of the Sabbath day for self-righteousness, not caring about a suffering fellow human. This angered Jesus.

Matthew 21:12 Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. 13 And He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’ ”

Jesus saw God’s name being defiled; using the temple to defraud; God’s purpose to have all nations pray to him being thwarted: he was angry, and as the rightful Son over God’s house, he took action.

But, still in the same chapter:

Matthew 21:14 Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. 15 But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were indignant 16 and said to Him, “Do You hear what these are saying?”

Here was anger. Something was “wrong”. There was an “evil” – people were praising Jesus, as the Son of David. The chief priests and scribes wanted to put this “wrong”, “right”. They were indignant (= “feeling or showing anger because of something unjust or unworthy”).

Romans 1:18 “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.....”

- Wrath: God’s personal response
- A response against ungodliness and unrighteousness

Q. So, what is ungodly anger?

A. Something different to God's anger.

For example:

- Not, at heart, a response to evil, but personal frustration. Genesis 4:8 - *“Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.”*

Cain's sacrifice was not accepted, and his pride was hurt, and so he hit back.

- *Jonah 3:10 Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it. 4:1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry.*

Jonah was angry, why? Because he wanted to see Nineveh being punished. Jonah had his own desires for history... which were not God's.

The book of Esther:

1:12 But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command brought by his eunuchs; therefore the king was furious, and his anger burned within him. ... 19 Vashti shall come no more before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she.

This anger was out of proportion to any wrong done (if we assume that there was one).

Esther 3:5-6

5 When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow or pay him homage, Haman was filled with wrath. 6 But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him of the people of Mordecai. Instead, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus—the people of Mordecai.

Haman is not seeking justice, or putting a wrong right....
his anger was only to express his own pride.

Matthew 18:8 *“But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’ 29 So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ 30 And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt.”*

The servant in this parable did not want to forgive, or to heal and restore relationships. He would not be patient. He only cared about receiving something immediately. The debt was real... but the angry response was sinful.

Romans 12:18-19

18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. 19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.

In sinful anger, we take vengeance *to ourselves*. We punish the person, whether through outward action, or quietly through withdrawing from them, or through insulting and attacking them in our minds and hearts. We are saying: “I am God, I will repay, I will punish”.

Where does sinful anger come from?

James' exhortation:

1:19 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; 20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. 21 Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow (footnote: "abundance") of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

- Not a new problem! (An "abounding" one).
- Ungodly anger is the result of a hasty spirit inside

I believe that if we are meant to read these verses from James in the context of the whole first chapter.

Verses 2-4: We face “various trials”. These put our faith into action, so that we may produce patience and maturity. To avoid ungodly anger, we need to have God’s perspective on our trials, and their purposes.

Verses 5-8: We can only gain God’s perspective through believing, persevering prayer. Believing prayer tests our motives in life. Do we want to know God, and walk with him, and become like him? Or do we have other lusts and desires that are stronger? Who is our real master?

Verses 9-11: Consider the trial of earthly poverty and earthly riches.

- The poor can rejoice, because their position in Christ supersedes and outlasts their temporary outward poverty.

- The rich can rejoice that God deals with them and humbles them, preparing them for better things by telling them that their outward riches will pass away.

Note: one source of anger is having worldly standards and desires. We tie our happiness to outward things.

James 1:12 Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

God's trials during this life are designed to bring us to true riches, true glory, eternal glory, to teach us to love him, the one who is truly beautiful in every way. Keep your eyes on the goal, and you will be able to fight against temptations to anger or despair along the road.

Verses 13-15: Very important verses

We say.... “The situation was impossible”. “I was right to be angry”. “I was provoked”. “God should not have put me in that situation, he knew it was too much”.

James says.... the real problem is inside us. Jesus faced many large provocations. But the Son of God never reacted with ungodly anger, because he had a perfect love of holiness and patience in his spirit. God is never trying to break us; our anger exposes what we are like, not what God is like.

Remember what anger is: our response to perceived wrong. But if our desires are twisted, then we think that the greatest wrongs are when self is not served; when we do not receive what we desire (e.g. respect, praise, service, honour) for our own glory. Our sinful desires – v14 – give birth to our sinful anger, which leads us to death.

V16 – Don't deceive yourself about this! “Why really was I angry? Is my perspective on the situation self-centred, or God-centred and love-to-neighbour centred, and ‘God wants me to grow through trials’-centred?”

v17-18:

So, see your trials as God's gifts, remembering his plan to prepare us for his wonderful new creation. He gave us a new life: stop living according to the values of the old life (money, pleasure, power, comfort, success, recognition ... for ME!). Then, you will be much less angry about things of this life.

(Note: we are not talking here about serious abuse. It is normal to feel anger if you have been violated in terrible ways. God feels angry about wickedness. This is something to work through carefully, casting your soul upon God, to whom vengeance does belong).

Then we arrived at v19-21: be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry.

The angry person, we see, is failing to submit to God, and is failing to make Christian maturity and Christian fruitfulness the priority of his life. He is at war with himself. The anger on the outside is only reflecting a need for repentance on the inside.

V22-25 – don't deceive yourself! No exceptions!

V26-27 – don't deceive yourself! An angry tongue denies the faith. Patience and maturity teach us to take up our cross and care for the needy, not our own glory.

James 4:1-4 – James repeats his teaching

4:1 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

Wisdom from the Proverbs... (time only to read!)

14:29 - He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, But he who is short of spirit exalts folly.

16:32 He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

19:11 Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offence.

Wisdom from the Proverbs...

22:24 Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare.

29:22 An angry man stirs up strife, and a furious man abounds in transgression. 23 A man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honour.

Defeating ungodly anger

Remember the gospel. It is by the gospel of Christ that we bury sin in the grave and rise to a new life. It is for the ungodly. Christ did not come for the righteous, but for sinners. Christ bore God's holy, righteous deserved wrath against our sin.

Romans 3:23-25 - "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith".

Romans 12:2 - “be transformed by the renewing of your mind”

- Don't speak lies to yourself: “it's OK because everyone does it; I'm right to be angry; he/she deserves it”. Speak the truth: “I have desires that war inside me, and I got angry because I want to lift myself up, and I don't love the people around me like God loves them.”

Remember what James says: “Man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God requires”.

Trust in God: he will bring right vengeance at the right time (Romans 12:19). Wait upon him. Don't be an atheist!

Confess your sins quickly – God's mercies are new every morning.

Be patient, and wait upon the Lord: good fruit takes time to mature. "I am not yet what I wish to be.... but by God's grace, I have moved forward from where I once was."