

# Class #8: Anger & the Lust for Control

Sunday, February 24, 2019 | Geoffrey R. Kirkland

"Cease from anger and forsake wrath; Do not fret; it leads only to evildoing" –**Psalm 37:8**

"Some Christian people today who would never curse, steal, miss a prayer meeting, or think of getting drunk, respond with unrestrained anger toward those who disagree with them ... These Christians overreact, slaying their brothers and sisters in Christ and plundering the Church" (Alexander Strauch)

**"Nothing, I maintain, so constantly gives the Devil an opportunity as loss of control in anger"** (Martyn Lloyd Jones)

"In facing up to our anger, we need to realize that no one else causes us to be angry. Someone else's words or actions may become the occasion of our anger, but the cause lies deep within us—usually our pride, or selfishness, or desire to control" (Jerry Bridges).

## ***Introduction***

- God gets righteously angry (Ps. 7:11, Rom. 1:18, John 3:36)
- God's anger is a right and just response to what is wrong and offensive. God's anger is not sinful (James 1:13, Lev. 11:44, )
- Jesus was righteously angry at times (Matt. 21:12-13, Heb. 4:15, 1 Peter 2:22)
- Therefore, God demonstrates that anger can be utterly holy, right, good, and even a loving response to sin
- Though the capacity for human anger may be linked to being made in the image of God, sin has so twisted the human heart that human righteous anger, untainted by sin, seems highly *unlikely*.

## ***Definition of Anger***

**Anger** is a whole-personed, active response of negative moral judgment against perceived evil.

**Anger** is "the rising up in the heart in passionate displacency against an apprehended evil, which would cross or hinder us of some desired good" – Richard Baxter (17<sup>th</sup> c. Puritan Pastor).

### ***The New Testament has three main words for anger:***

1. *Thumos* (θυμος) – explosive anger, the boiling agitation of the feeling and passion of anger (“wrath” in NASB) – Eph. 4:31, Gal 5:20; Col 3:8
2. *Orge* (οργη) – an abiding, settled attitude of indignation that frequently seeks revenge (“anger” in NASB) – Eph. 4:31, Rom 12:19; Col 3:8; 1 Tim 2:8; James 1:19-20\* (cf. Prov 15:1)
3. *Parorgismos* (παροργισμος) – anger mingled with irritability, exasperation, and embitterment (“anger” – NASB) – Eph. 4:26

*Why is anger so bad? Because anger is, like a fire...*

It can be used for heating and cooking or it can burn down the house. When disputes arise and analytical judgment is most needed, anger often flares out of control. It turns reason into irrationality and confusion. It short-circuits open and fruitful communication and hinders honest discussion of the issues (Strauch, *Bite and Devour*, 53).

### ***Some Key Scriptures:***

- James 4:1-3, 1:19-20 [the root of all anger]
- Ephesians 4:26-32 (Colossians 3:8) [how to put off anger & what to replace it with]
- Philippians 2:3-5 [how to act *instead* of being angry]
- 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 [what true love looks like]
- Matthew 5:21-22 [the real evil of anger residing in the heart]
- Exodus 34:6 (Numbers 14:18; Nehemiah 9:17; Ps 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Nahum 1:3)
- ❖ Prov 12:16; 14:29; 15:1, 18; 16:32; 19:11, 19; 22:24; 29:8, 22; 30:33
- Ecclesiastes 7:9; 11:10
- James 1:19-20 [man’s anger is *not* pleasing to God]
- Galatians 5:20 [it is a deed of the flesh which keeps one out of heaven if left unchecked]
- Jonah 4 [anger leads to depression and bitterness; a vivid narrative picturing sinful anger in the heart]
- 2 Chron 16:10 (King Asa) [how anger can control a man & lead him to horrible sin]

## ***Faulty Ways of Thinking About/Handling Anger***

Under the "Disruptive, Impulse-Control, and Conduct Disorders" category in the **DSM -V** [*The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, by the American Psychiatric Association], there is something called:

**Intermittent explosive disorder** (IED): a behavioral disorder characterized by explosive outbursts of anger, often to the point of rage, that are disproportionate to the situation at hand (i.e., impulsive screaming triggered by relatively inconsequential events).

“There is currently little agreement among mental health practitioners as to what constitutes an anger problem” (Bunmi O. Olatunji & Jeffery M. Lohr, both Dept of Psychology at U. Of Arkansas).

### From the American Psychological Association

“Remember, you can't eliminate anger—and it wouldn't be a good idea if you could. In spite of all your efforts, things will happen that will cause you anger; and sometimes it will be justifiable anger. Life will be filled with frustration, pain, loss, and the unpredictable actions of others . . . . Because anger is a psychological issue, it is possible to treat symptoms with medication. While the goal of treatment programs will be to eventually make the patient self-sufficient, particular medicines can be helpful in the treatment phase. Antidepressants such as Prozac, Celexa and Zoloft are commonly prescribed for anger issues.”

“Based on what I believe is fair, I have the right to be angry about the disappointments in my life.” (WRONG!)

Vented Anger	The Slow Burn
Yelling, screaming	Clamming up/moodiness
Slamming things around	Being frustrated
Cursing	Being irritated
Telling someone off	Being disgusted
Verbal attack/name-calling	Glaring
Hitting	Huffing

Secular psychologists/psychiatrists may encourage a practice called “**venting**.” If they have a client who is angry or resentful toward someone else — perhaps a mother/father — they might hand them a pillow and encourage their client to do to the pillow what they would like to do to the person they’re upset with.

Another practice among secular ‘therapists’ is something called “**transference**.” In this method of dealing with anger, the counselor tries to take the place of the person with which the client is upset. The counselor may say: “*Pretend that I’m your mom & tell me everything that you would like to tell her. Just let it all out. Let me really have it.*” The psychiatrist tries to encourage the client to attack a substitute. *But* God never encourages us to attack a substitute, or transfer our anger to another person.

1. Most think their anger is a justified and normal response to how they have been treated
2. Some even think that not expressing or “validating” your anger is the real source of people’s problems
3. Yet the Bible consistently warns people to **not** be angry (Ecc. 7:9, James 1:19-20, Rom. 12:19, Eph. 4:31, Ps. 37:8)

4. Instead, the Bible calls for a different response to what most people think is a normal and justifiable occasion for anger (Matt. 5:44, 22:39, Rom. 12:18, Eph. 5:25)

**Unbiblical Ways of Interpreting Bouts of Your Anger-Flares** [*do you ever say/think the following?*]

- ✓“I deserve much more than I’m getting”
- ✓“If she only had listened to me”
- ✓“I’m going to be late & it’s a horrible thing to be late...I hate being late!”
- ✓“I told her what I wanted and she’s not cooperating. She is so selfish”
- ✓“That person totally misrepresented what I said or what I did.”
- ✓“After all I’ve done, this is what I get?”
- ✓“I deserve praise or recognition more than the person who got it does”
- ✓“My husband/wife is never satisfied”
- ✓“No one ever pays attention to me”
- ✓“No one cares what happens to me”
- ✓“People are always taking advantage of me”
- ✓“I’m always the one who has to do the dirty work”
- ✓“She never wants to do what I want to do. She always has to have her own way.”

*And, there can be physical effects...*

In one’s physical appearance/demeanor (Genesis 4:5)

Certainly high blood pressure, lack of sleep, disruption of work/vocation, responsibilities.

**“A hot tempered man abounds in transgression”** (Proverbs 29:22)

***Why Do We Get Angry*** [*the biblical diagnosis/the root problem*]

*Usually we are angry for selfish reasons: pride, hurt feelings, etc. Then we express anger in sinful ways (Jim Newheiser).*

*Anger demonstrates a great dissatisfaction with God's sovereignty in your life. Anger arises out of living to please self instead of living to please the Lord and causes much trouble.*

1. Anger is something that a person chooses to do. People do not make us angry (Ps. 37:8, Eph. 4:31)

Saul as a perfect example (his jealousy led him to *choose* sinful anger): he became angry and tried to kill his oldest son (1 Samuel 20:30-33).

“In facing up to our anger, we need to realize that no one else *causes* us to be angry. Someone else’s words or actions may become the occasion of our anger, but the cause lies deep within **us**—usually our pride, or selfishness, or desire to control” (Jerry Bridges).

2. Anger comes as a result of idolatry: putting self in place of God (Rom. 12:19, James 4:3)

Uzziah, the King of Judah, confronted by the priests for his unfaithfulness to the Lord [and pride/self-idolatry], became enraged when he was confronted with his sin and was struck with leprosy until the day of his death (2 Chronicles 26:16-23)

3. Anger is mental murder (Matt. 5:21-22, James 4:3)

Anger always involves thoughts and intentions (Proverbs 4:23; Ephesians 4:17-18)

4. Anger is extremely deceptive (Heb. 3:13)

5. It deceives us into thinking that it is right for us to hurt people who have hurt us

6. It deceives us into thinking that we must obey it – that we can't help our angry response

Anger involves a lack of self-control (Proverbs 17:27; 25:8; 29:11; 2 Peter 1:6)

Jonah was greatly displeased and angry when the Lord showed compassion on Nineveh, and God subsequently rebuked and humbled him (Jonah 4:1-11). He felt as though he *had* to be angry.

7. Anger is both taught and modeled to us in life the more we spend time with angry people (Prov. 22:24-25). It can become a habit or second nature through practice (Prov. 19:19).

**The Big Point:** Anger is a heart issue. (Mark 7:21 Matt. 12:34; Leviticus 19:17-18)

The bottom line reason for much of our sinful anger is related to the fact that we have an agenda and someone or something is standing in the way of our fulfilling that agenda (Wayne Mack).

It's not a mental condition that happens to come but a heart-sourced, self-worshipping transgression that sees my plan, and my desire, and my wants thwarted (or in danger of being thwarted). It thus is a sin against God that began with a self-motivated, self-loving, self-worshipping, self-planned desire for something.

Colossians 3.8 — 5 manifestations of anger:

1. anger
2. wrath
3. malice
4. slander
5. obscene talk

ANGER - a general word that encompasses/includes the 4 next words:

1. *wrath* — rage, heat, fury as unpredictable as the wind
2. *malice* — the word 'evil' in Greek and conveys using or speaking evil lies about someone
3. *slander* — insults or speaking in opposition to another
4. *obscene talk* — filthy, improper (rotten) language/street language.

## *How to Overcome Anger*

Anger must be mastered before it becomes malicious.

**For a Christian:** Since God's Word commands you to put away anger and bitterness, it **is** possible to do so. You don't **have** to give into anger; God provides a way out (1 Corinthians 10:13; Eph 4:31-32)

1. Recognize that the vast majority of anger is sinful
  - Many men are stuck here as they don't see their anger as "sinful". We have many labels for it: frustrated, annoyed, ticked off, worn out; don't wanna talk about it, etc.
  - But once we view much of our anger as sinful, then men *can* overcome their sinful anger by God's grace and thru His sufficient Word
2. Must adopt a biblical view of their anger
  - We are responsible before God for our anger. It's not their fault. I'm not a victim. I've sinned & am guilty.
  - Is it really MY fault? yes.
  - "In facing up to our anger, we need to realize that NO ONE ELSE causes us to be angry. Someone else's words or actions may become the occasion of our anger, but the cause lies deep within us..." (Jerry Bridges)
3. Must be taught the 'log' principle — don't be self-deceived/in denial (Matt. 7:1-5)
  - Pluck out your plank: You can't deny ("internalize") that you are angry or bitter.
4. Identify the thinking and ruling desires (**IDOLS**) that govern the heart (James 4:1-3)
  - We want something for ourselves and don't get it we are then tempted to be angry — James 4.1-2
  - Ask yourself, "What is it I am wanting so badly?" Let go of it as something you must have. The preeminent desire you must have is to glorify God!
  - Ask yourself, "What am I thinking that is wrong?"
  - Ask yourself, "What should I be thinking?" Use your new thoughts and Scripture
  - Ask yourself, "What is the right goal?"
  - Ask yourself, "How can I be patient and think of others?"
  - Ask yourself, "What do God and others want?" and "How can I serve them?"
  - Ask yourself, "Is there something right that I should do about the problem or issue?" (Address someone's sin in the right way, plan a solution, get counsel, etc.)
  - "Our anger is a response against something. It does not arise in a vacuum or appear spontaneously ... our active hearts are always responding to the people and events in daily life" (Robert Jones).

Here is a Sample-Plan to Slaughter the Sin of Sinful Anger in Your Life

1. Memorize helpful Bible verses
2. Identify your person pattern – develop a “plan for righteous responses” [what happens?, where are you?, when?]. Carefully assess the situation.
3. Meditate on the truths of God’s Word daily. Ask for His help regularly. Review your plan.
4. Consistent practice of righteous responses is the key to growth and change (1 Tim. 4:7b-8).
5. Quickly stop and repent when you begin to respond in anger. Don’t pretend it didn’t happen. Don’t ignore it. Confess and seek forgiveness quickly (Eph. 4:26)
6. Keep an anger journal to help you
7. Monitor your thoughts and “self talk.” Repent as soon as you catch yourself thinking angry, sinful thoughts. Replace them with biblical thinking.
  - a. What do I want that I’m not getting; what am I getting that I don’t want?
  - b. What compelling desires of mine are driving me, ruling me, demanding to be fulfilled?
8. Be aware of other sins which often accompany and feed anger (pride, bitterness, slander, gossip, evil intent, murder, sexual sin, other deeds of the flesh)
9. Make sure you seek forgiveness from all whom you have been angry with.
10. See God in the midst of the trial (Gen. 50:20, Rom. 8:28-29)
11. Make room for the wrath of God (Rom. 12:19)
12. Return good for evil (Rom. 12:21) -- what will you *choose* to do? Will you *choose* to obey God or self?

**Be on guard! And Don’t be naive about angry people: One angry person can destroy an entire congregation!**

### ***Heart-Searching Questions Getting to the ‘Heart of Anger’***

What did I want that I didn’t get?

Is there something I am wanting too much?

What sinful thoughts and desires was I entertaining?

Does my anger tend to fit a pattern?

With whom am I typically angry?

In what contexts am I likely to get angry?

Under what circumstances am I likely to be angry?

How long am I angry?

Do I tend to blow up, clam up? Volcano or slow simmer? Deny it? Attack a substitute? Leave?

What do I feel are my ‘rights’?

- Right to have/control personal belongings
- Right to my own privacy
- Right to have/express personal opinions
- Right to earn and use money
- Right to receive respect from others
- Right to be understood and to be treated fairly
- Right to be successful

- Right to have good health
- Right to date/be married
- Right to be considered worthwhile and important

## ***After You Are Sinfully Angry, How Should You Respond?***

1. Ask yourself, "How did I sin?" Be **specific**.
2. Ask yourself, "If I had this to do over again, what should I **think** and **do** differently?"
3. Take care of your sin of anger as soon as possible (Ephesians 4:26).
4. Confess and ask forgiveness of God and anyone else who may have been aware of or the recipient of our sinful anger. Be specific about how you were sinfully angry: wrong thinking, wrong actions, lack of love, etc. (Psalm 32:5; James 5:16). Call sin *sin* & humbly repent & seek forgiveness.
5. Tell God and others what you plan to do in the future instead of becoming sinfully angry (Psalm 119:59-60).
6. Be on guard once again (1 Peter 5:8).

It is important that you not entertain the thinking: "This is impossible!" or "I'll never be able to change!" ... With God's grace, God's Word, and your sincere efforts, you *will be able* to change ... remember that being tempted is not a sin, but following through with sinful anger is. Do not grow weary in 'well doing' (Stuart Scott).

And don't forget the prevailing sovereignty of God over *every single situation*:

We must believe that God is absolutely sovereign in all the affairs of our lives (both the good and the bad) ... We must realize that any given situation that tempts us to anger can drive us either to sinful anger or to Christ and His sanctifying power" (Jerry Bridges)

## ***CONCLUSION:***

According to the biblical writers the origin of sinful anger does not reside with a critical spouse, a distant husband, a disobedient child, an unjust boss, a difficult employee, or the guy who is driving recklessly in traffic. No, Christ and the apostle point to the heart as the root of the problem. Their proclamation reveals the inaccuracy of the statement cited earlier: "You make me angry." According to scripture, the proper way to look at your anger is to say, "I make myself angry" or "My anger flows **from my own heart** and is **my responsibility**." With such a view in place, you are free to work towards godly transformation even if those in your life that you consider troublesome never choose to change (i.e., critical wife, distant husband, disobedient child, etc.). Additionally, by adopting a biblical worldview, you will begin to operate from a foundation that will facilitate true and lasting change in your life, and the means to do so will be very different than secular methodologies [*adapted from the Association of Biblical Counselors*].

## **A DAILY JOURNAL:**

*what happened JUST BEFORE i was tempted to get angry?*

1. what i thought...
2. what I wanted ...
3. what emotions was i feeling? ...
4. when tempted to choose anger, this is what I did and said...
5. here's WHY I did that...
6. what bible verse best describes my response...
7. what were the right things to want and do in that situation .... (include Scripture)

...

## **WHEN I HAVE SINNED IN MY ANGER:**

- 1.confess it (1 John 1.9)
- 2.regret sin (2 Cor 7.9-10)
- 3.repent of it (Prov 28.13)
- 4.turn from sin and toward righteousness (Rom 6.11-12, 19)
- 5.confess to those you've sinned against (Matt 5.23-24)

## **WHEN I HAVE BEEN SINNED AGAINST (the recipient of someone's anger):**

do not take into account a wrong suffered/don't hold a grudge (1 Cor 13.5)  
forgive because you have been forgiven so much (Matt 18.21-35; Eph 4.32)  
think what is true (Phil 4.8)

## **For Further Reading & Study**

- Robert Jones, *Uprooting Anger* (P&R, 2005)\*\*
- Lou Priolo, *The Heart of Anger* (Calvary, 1997)\*\*
- Wayne Mack, *Anger and Stress Management God's Way*\*\*
- Lou Priolo, *Get a Grip* (Calvary, 2006)
- Robert Jones, *Angry at God?* (P&R, 2003)
- David Powlison, *Anger* (P&R, 2000)
- David Powlison, *Anger* (google this & find a 3-part series in the *Journal for Biblical Counseling* [FREE!])
- Stuart Scott, *Communication & Conflict Resolution* (Focus, 2005)
- Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker* (Baker, 2004)
- Wayne Mack, *Strengthening Your Marriage* (P&R), Unit 4; and *A Homework Manual for Biblical Living* (P&R), section on anger.
- Paul Tripp, *War of Words*

