



Vision: WE LEAD PEOPLE TO LIFE-CHANGE THAT IS ONLY POSSIBLE THROUGH THE LORD JESUS CHRIST! (2 Cor 5:17)

Mission: REACHING PEOPLE WITH THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST TO ESTABLISH THEM IN THE BODY OF CHRIST AND EQUIP THEM TO BE WITNESSES FOR CHRIST, TO THE GLORY OF HIS NAME! (Col 1:28; Eph 4:11-16)

Philippians 1:21-22:

*"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.
If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me..."*

Biblical Counselling 101

25 AUGUST 2020

DEALING WITH ANGER

THINKING AND DEALING BIBLICALLY WITH ANGER

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Key Quote:

“Sinful anger probably is involved in 90 percent of all counselling problems.” (Jay Adams, The Christian Counselor’s Manual, 359)

1. Introduction

We all experience the consequences and effects of human anger. We have all been angry at times in our lives and we have all experienced someone being angry at us. Anger is one of the most powerful and destructive forces in our lives and yet we don’t understand much about anger. But the Bible is not silent on the subject of anger.

In **Ephesian 4:25-27** Pauls say, “Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.”

Here the Apostle Paul is not telling us to be angry. He is acknowledging that we will experience anger at some point in our lives. Anger itself is an emotion and is not a sin. If anger was a sin, it would mean that God’s anger was a sin and therefore God would be evil. It would also mean that Jesus was a sinner and we know that Jesus did not sin. The Bible says in **2 Corinthians 5:21**, “For our sake he made him to be sin **who knew no sin**, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

We read in the Bible, on many occasions, of God’s anger and wrath. (**Num 22:22; DEU 6:15; 31:17; 32:21; Jos 23:16; Jdg 2:12; 2 Sam 6:7; Rev 14:10**). We also read of the occasion where Jesus cleansed the temple in **John 2**.

The type of anger God expresses, however, is called **righteous indignation**. When God is angry it is a righteous anger and any time Jesus manifested anger it was righteous anger that was manifested. We as humans, on the other hand, mostly get angry without just cause. This is **unrighteous anger**. More on righteous anger a bit later.

2. Unrighteous Anger

Anger is a volatile and dangerous human emotion. Many times, when a person experiences anger, that becomes an occasion for sin. We lose control or we lose our temper. Anger can cause the loss of self-control and we can end up hurting other people and even ourselves.

Therefore Paul says, “*be angry and do not sin*”. Paul understood that anger can become the occasion for all kinds of wickedness. Paul then continues and says, “*do not let the sun go down on your anger*”. Paul also understood that anger could lead to all kinds of sinful emotions like bitterness, resentment, holding grudges and more. This is what happens when we let the sun go down on our anger and we carry it over into the next day, the next week and even next year. Some people even carry these emotions throughout their whole lives because of something that happened when they were young.

The power of anger should never be underestimated. It can destroy families, marriages, and even cause wars between nations. Christians should not be characterised by anger and it is therefore important to understand the nature of anger and how to deal with it.

“*But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.*” (**Col 3:8-10**)

2.1 The three causes of anger

1. **Disappointment**. This is when we have expectations that are not realised. The truth is that people disappoint people. We as sinners are not able to fulfill all the expectations that other people have

from us. We should also acknowledge that other people will not always fulfill the expectations we have from them.

2. **Frustration.** Frustration is just disappointment realised repeatedly. When we set goals for ourselves or other people, and we see failure to reach those goals repeatedly, it leads to frustration. It is the compounding of disappointment after disappointment.
3. **Pain or hurt.** This is not just physical pain, although physical pain certainly can cause anger. But we all understand the pain we experience when someone gossips about us, or when someone steals from us.

These three are closely related and all of them include some form of pain or hurt. Jesus felt pain when he saw His Father's house of prayer being turned into a house of merchandise (**Matt 21:12-17**). All forms of anger are in some way rooted in a form of pain. This is important if we are to deal with someone's anger. We need to look past the anger and understand what causes the pain behind it. It is much easier to deal with the pain than it is to deal with the anger.

2.2 Two types of unrighteous anger

1. **Situational anger.** Situational anger is when you blame people for something that is not caused by people. When you drive to the shop with your spouse and you hit a pothole, you are angry about the possible damage on your car. The incident was not caused by either of you but you end up arguing over the situation anyway.
2. **Misdirected anger.** We have all experienced this type of anger. When a husband has had a hard day at work, drove through terrible traffic on his way home and dropped his cellphone in the driveway when he came home, what is the first thing he does? He takes out his frustration on his wife and children by being angry and short tempered. This would definitely be misdirected anger. He knows they had nothing to do with his bad day but takes it out on them anyway.

We need to recognise when we experience these types of anger and respond with the necessary self-control to manage our frustration or pain. Christians are called to have self-control over their emotions. *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law."* (**Gal 5:22-23**)

2.3 Biblical examples of unrighteous anger

King Saul. (**1 Sam 18:1-9; 20:30-34**) Jealousy and pride.

Moses. (**Num 20:1-13**) Frustration and pride.

2.4 Seven results of unrighteous anger

1. **Conflict.** *"A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention."* (**Prov 15:18**)
2. **Foolish behaviour.** *"A man of quick temper acts foolishly, and a man of evil devices is hated."* (**Prov 14:17**)
3. **Broken relationships.** *"A brother offended is more unyielding than a strong city, and quarreling is like the bars of a castle."* (**Prov 18:19**)
4. **More Anger.** Contrary to the psychological technique of catharsis, expressing anger doesn't get your anger out. In fact, anger produces anger, because anger is habit forming. *"A man of great wrath will pay the penalty, for if you deliver him, you will only have to do it again."* (**Prov 19:19**)
5. **Other sins.** *"A man of wrath stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes much transgression."* (**Prov 29:22**). An expression of anger is never a lonely sin: hot-tempered people abound in hurtful words, irate shouting, lies, false accusations, gossip, slander, bitterness, and a host of other evils.

6. **Satanic opportunity.** “do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.” (**Eph 4:26-27**). Retained anger gives Satan an opportunity to divide churches, families, and other relationships. In short, anger is Satan’s playground.
7. **Divine dishonour.** “for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” (**Jam 1:20**).

2.5 Key steps to overcoming anger

1. Acknowledge the **divine resources** available to help.

Anger is so habit-forming that it often becomes an insidious, life-dominating sin. However, God’s resources are available to change the angry person.

- The renewing power of Christ. (**2 Cor 5:17**)
- The self-control of the indwelling Spirit. (**Gal 5:16; 22-33**)

2. Accept **personal responsibility**.

Most people hold a victim view of their anger. They consistently assert that God, people, or circumstances outside themselves are responsible for their outbursts or their bitterness. Facing up to the true source of anger – self and self’s desires – is one of the keys to overcoming anger. People aren’t forced to become angry; they choose to become angry. **Prov 29:11** literally says, “*The fool always sends out his spirit.*” In Biblical terms, you don’t lose your temper, you send out your spirit. That’s active responsibility (**Jam 1:14; 4:1**).

3. Identify **patterns**.

Ask the relevant penetrating questions. As said above, you need to discover what pain is resulting in the anger.

- When do you most often become angry?
- In what situations?
- With whom?
- How do you typically express your anger?

4. Identify **motives**.

Angry counselees usually view themselves as victims of other people, circumstances, or their personalities. The Biblical truth is that people get angry because they want something or because they didn’t get something that they believed they deserved (**Jam 1:14; 4:1**). The counselee’s expectations need to be assessed and addressed.

- What were you thinking when you got angry?
- What did you want?
- What “I deserve” thinking was in your mind when you became irate?

5. **Confess and repent**.

The counselee must call his anger by its Biblical name, acknowledge that his reaction is sinful, and ask forgiveness from God and the people whom he has hurt (**1 John 1:9; Ps 32:5; Prov 28:13**).

Typical anger sins include:

- **Impatience** – retaliation for inconvenience (**1 Thess 5:14-15**).
- **Bitterness** – retained anger, brooding over past offences (**Eph 4:31; Heb 12:15**).
- **Wrath / anger** – everything from exasperations to rage (**Eph 4:31**).
- **Clamour** – raised voices and arguing (**Eph 4:31**).
- **Slander or evil speaking** – hurtful, attacking words (**Eph 4:31**).

- **Malice** – actively desiring another person’s hurt or humiliation (**Eph 4:31**).

6. **Stop** external and internal anger **responses**.

Teach the person to notice the early warning signs of his anger (a flushed face, clenched fists, a tight sensation in the stomach, a raised voice, etc.). When he feels those things happening, he must consciously stop himself, pray for help, and shut down his anger response (**Phil 2:12-13**). No sins – including anger sins – are stronger than a Christ-assisted choice to do what is right.

7. Actively replace anger with its **godly opposites**. (**Rom 12:21**)

- Kindness**: doing helpful, loving things for the other person, even if he or she doesn’t deserve it (**Eph 4:32; Luk 6:35**).
- Tender-heartedness**: viewing the other person’s sin based on how it affects him, not based on how it affects you (**Eph 4:32; Matt 9:36; Luk 15:20**).
- Forgiveness**: wiping away the unpayable sin debt of the person’s offence (**Eph 4:32**).
- Patience**: choosing not to retaliate for inconvenience (**1 Thess 5:15; Col 3:12-13**).
- Humility**: rejecting ‘I deserve’, ‘I expect’, or ‘I have the right’ thinking (**Col 3:12; Rom 12:3**).
- Love**: refusing to be provoked or to keep track of past offences (**1 Cor 13:4-5**).
- Self-control**: refusing to send out your spirit in an outburst of anger (**Prov 16:32; 29:11; Gal 5:22-23**).
- Momentary, **godly silence**: not saying something that you’ll only have to repent of later (**Prov 15:28; 26:20; James 1:19-20**).
- Gentle words**: using carefully chosen words and tones of voice in order to avoid escalating a tense situation (**Prov 15:1**).
- Refusal to take revenge**: vengeance is the business of a just God, not unjust men (**Prov 20:22; Rom 12:19**).

2.6 Four Helps

- Prayer**. Prayer calls for the fulfillment of God’s will, and God’s will is for you to be holy as Jesus is holy. Prayer admits dependency on God in the situation and appropriates His grace and omnipotence (**Col 1:9-10; John 15:5, James 5:16**).
- Scripture memorisation**. (**Prov 14:17; 14:29; 15:1; 15:18; 16:32; 17:14; 17:27; 19:11; 19:19; 20:22; 21:23; 22:24-25; 25:28; 26:4; 26:20; 27:3; 29:11; 29:22**).
- Review scenarios**. Walk the counselee through one of his recent outbursts, explaining how, by the Spirit, he could have thought and acted differently. Help the counselee recognise the pain behind his anger and how to respond Biblically when he feels such pain. Training outside the moment of anger teaches the counselee how to respond rightly when he is tempted in the moment of anger.
- Journaling**. Have the counselee write down his anger sins each day in a notebook. This helps him identify his anger patterns so that he can make an extra, Christ-assisted effort in those situations or relationships in which he frequently stumbles. For a good discussion of journaling, see Lou Priolo, *The Heart of Anger*, 80-85.

3. Righteous anger

As we've seen, God becomes angry and does not sin (**Rom 1:18; Num 11:1; Mark 3:1-5**). On that basis, some counselees will claim that their anger is also righteous anger. However, very rarely does our anger parallel God's righteous anger. Righteous anger has the following characteristics:

- It is **Momentary**. Righteous anger does not build bitterness or lead to sinful expression.
- It is **Internal**. It involves no shouting or yelling or any emotional outburst.
- **Expressed at sin** and sin's effects. It is not misdirected.
- **Concerned about God's glory**, not personal embarrassment or inconvenience.
- **Willing to trust God as Judge**, refusing to take personal revenge. If the sin is committed by a fellow believer, accept that Jesus has paid for that sin and you do not have to punish your brother or sister. If the sin is committed by a non-believer, accept that God is the only righteous Judge and that He will deal with that sin. (**Deut 32:35**)

4. Resources

The Heart of Anger, Lou Priolo

Uprooting Anger, Robert Jones

The Peacemaker, Ken Sande

A Quick reference for Biblical Counsellors and Disciplers, Joel James

How to deal with anger, RC Sproul