



"Anger is never without a reason, but seldom a good one."
—Benjamin Franklin

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The Wrath of Man

The dictionary defines *anger* as "a strong feeling of displeasure and usually of antagonism." In the [Old Testament](#), the Hebrew word for "anger" is also used for "nostrils," for when people are angry, their nostrils flare open and their breathing becomes heavy. In the New Testament, two primary words are translated as "anger": One refers to a passionate outburst, and the other, to a settled, irate frame of mind.

[Ephesians 4:31](#) tells us that neither one is acceptable to [God](#): "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice." In the same context appears a seemingly conflicting statement: "'Be angry, and do not sin': do not let the sun go down on your wrath" (verse 26). In the Greek, this literally means "Be angry, but do not [sin](#)," "In your anger, do not sin," or "When angry, do not sin."

The book of Proverbs contains many admonitions against anger, for instance:

- Proverbs 15:1: A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.
- Proverbs 15:18: A wrathful man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger allays contention.

- Proverbs 29:22: An angry man stirs up strife, and a furious man abounds in transgression.

Anger is a basic human emotion. Everyone becomes angry every now and then. Just as fear and desire can be constructive or destructive, anger can also be righteous or sinful. Mark 3 provides an example of righteous anger from [Jesus](#) Himself:

So [the Pharisees] watched Him closely, whether He would heal . . . on the [Sabbath](#), so that they might accuse Him. . . . 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. And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man [with the withered hand], "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other. Then the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him. (verses 2, 4-6)

Jesus was "grieved" by their hardness or coldness of heart. He was incensed at their hypocrisy in considering their manmade rules to be more important than doing good for a person in need. By healing him, Jesus demonstrated that [love](#), mercy, compassion, and justice trump tradition. This is righteous anger. What are the differences between righteous and sinful anger?

Righteous anger is unselfish while sinful anger is often selfish. Sinful anger occurs when *our* desires, *our* needs, *our* ambitions, or *our* demands are not met. Sinful anger always focuses on satisfying the self.

Righteous anger is restrained while sinful anger is often uncontrolled. Uncontrolled anger will cause us to say and do things we are sorry for later, things we would never would have said or done had we been in control. Uncontrolled anger leads to sin.

Righteous anger targets sinful acts or unjust situations while sinful anger frequently targets people. In Mark 3, Jesus was angry at the Pharisees' sin and their lack of compassion. Sinful anger lashes out against the people themselves.

Righteous anger seeks to remedy wrong while sinful anger retaliates.

Righteous anger contains no malice or resentment, yet sinful anger desires to hurt or to get even with others. People often say, "I don't get mad, I get even." They may not show a passionate outburst of anger, but nurse a grudge that takes root and produces bitterness, hatred, and vengeance.

Dr. Richard Strauss, author of nine books and a minister of 21 years, writes in his book, *Getting Along With Each Other*, that some psychologists claim that it is good for people to vent their anger to release the pressure. The problem, he writes, is that venting tells the body to maintain an emergency status, keeping the anger flowing. This establishes more deeply the habit of reacting angrily, making it more difficult to overcome sinful anger, as the Bible instructs. Further, allowing the emergency state to continue reduces our ability to reason clearly and ultimately upsets the body's chemical balance, making us physically sick. Doctors suggest that migraine headaches, thyroid malfunction, ulcerative colitis, toxic goiters, high blood pressure, ulcers, heart attacks, backaches, rheumatism, arthritis, allergies, indigestion, asthma, and many other illnesses can be emotionally induced. Jordan Rubin, the author of *The Maker's Diet*, states, "When we are angry, our immune system can be depressed for up to 6 hours."

How do we overcome sinful anger? First, by recognizing and admitting we have an anger problem and taking it to God, confessing it and praying for His help. As with any sin, we must acknowledge it before God in all honesty, seeking His forgiveness and asking for strength to overcome it through His Spirit.

Second, we need to examine its causes. Some common causes are: 1) *selfishness*, that our selfish demands are not being met; 2) *perfectionism*, that our oftentimes unjustified expectations are not being satisfied; and 3) *suspiciousness*, that we misinterpret others' motives or intentions.

Third, we must "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" ([Ephesians 4:32](#)). [Kindness](#) is the counterpart of malice, a resentment that produces bitterness. Kindness produces [goodness](#), helping us to avoid responding in anger.

Tender-heartedness is the opposite of cold-heartedness. A tenderhearted person, sensitive to the needs of others, is compassionate and [merciful](#), loving justice and hating injustice and sin while showing love toward the sinner.

Forgiveness, like a healing medicine, is vital to unity and harmony among people. More often than not, it is more for the offended or hurt person, because the offender may not care if he is forgiven or not. Forgiveness stops anger from settling in our minds, leading later to resentment and bitterness. Paul suggests that we need to practice forgiveness to learn from God's example.

In [James 1:19-20](#), the apostle sums up what we need to know about anger: "So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God."

- Clyde Finklea

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