



"What fools are they who, for a drop of pleasure, drink a sea of wrath."

—Thomas Watson

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Hidden Anger (Part One)

In his book *Wishful Thinking Transformed by Thorns*, Presbyterian minister Frederick Buechner makes this colorful observation:

Of the seven deadly sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back—in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you.

As inhabitants of an age of rage and having seen this take place, we can all identify with this sentiment to some degree. We are moving beyond the decade of decadence, and now find ourselves in a time full of anger, animosity, bitterness, and brooding envy. As [this world](#) continues to unravel, we encounter much anger and much to be angry about. Yet, as Buechner's remark reveals, anger is fraught with pitfalls and risks—not only to others, but especially to us.

The Bible contains hundreds of references to and examples of anger, wrath, hatred, and malice, particularly in Solomon's writings (see [Psalm 37:7-8](#); [Proverbs 11:12](#); [15:1](#), 18; 16:32; 17:14; 19:11, 19; 22:8; [Ecclesiastes 7:9](#); [Amos 1:11](#); [Matthew 5:21-22](#); [1 John 3:15](#)). But to grasp how serious anger and its cousins are, notice some of the [works of the flesh](#):

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: [adultery](#), fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, *hatred*, *contentions*, *jealousies*, *outbursts of wrath*, selfish ambitions, *dissensions*, [heresies](#), *envy*, *murders*, drunkenness, revelries, and the like. . . . ([Galatians 5:19-21](#), emphasis ours)

Hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, dissensions, envy, and murder are all related to anger. In addition, anger need not be in the form of rage or fury; it has been quipped that "depression is merely anger without enthusiasm." It is still a problem even when it does not have visible intensity. The seriousness of these attributes is found at the end of verse 21, where Paul warns that "those who practice such things will not inherit the [kingdom of God](#)." [God](#) considers these traits to be the very opposite of eternal life in His Family.

Consider how contrary anger and its cousins are to the [fruit of the spirit](#), found in verses 22-23: "[love](#), [joy](#), [peace](#), [longsuffering](#), [kindness](#), [goodness](#), [faithfulness](#), gentleness, and [self-control](#)." Unrighteous anger will inhibit the expression of godly love. It will leech the joy out of life. Anger is certainly the antithesis of peace and longsuffering. It erodes kindness, and is rarely in alignment with biblical goodness. Anger despises gentleness and resists attempts at self-control. In short, the fruit of the spirit will not be found in a person while he is practicing the various forms of ungodly anger.

Recall, however, that anger *can* be godly. It is an emotion created by God, and in the right circumstances, it is appropriate and even necessary. The Bible reveals God being angry and wrathful at times, and we can be sure that His anger is always in the right proportion and always appropriate.

However, He is motivated by love, not anger, which is certainly not the case with man. What men like to think of as righteous indignation may not be anything more than a self-centered temper. A person in God's image, though,

is one who is angry on the right grounds, in the right manner, at the right moment, for the right length of time, and with the right words and actions. That, we realize, is a very tall order!

In "Anger: Spiritual Drano[®]" (*Forerunner*, December 1997), Dr. David Maas suggests that "the godly purpose of anger is to consume and destroy its target utterly. Nothing [is] to be left. . . . In every case in which godly wrath is exhibited, the target is [sin](#), not people, although sometimes people get caught in it." Later on, Dr. Maas writes,

Psychologists have taken a long time to discover that anger does not dissipate until it has totally and utterly consumed its target. Some advise their patients to "let it all out," but [Proverbs 29:11](#) says, "A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise man holds them back." Venting anger only brings in more "oxygen" to make the fire burn hotter and more destructively. Again, the only use for anger is to destroy everything in its path, a scorched-earth policy. This emphasizes how important a correct target for anger is.

However, anger that cannot reach and annihilate its target is turned inward, and as it was designed, it begins wreaking havoc. Physicians claim that anger turned inward can aggravate or cause digestive troubles, eye disorders, dental problems, skin diseases, hives, and ulcers. A person who cannot find a target for his anger becomes like a rattlesnake that, if restrained, will strike its fangs into itself, effectively committing suicide. Those with unresolved angers need to focus on the sins that keep the anger boiling.

Notice the principle that anger *will* acquire a target—whether wrong or right—and the anger will not dissipate until that target has been destroyed. The safest target for our anger, then, is our own sin—something that can and should be destroyed.

But what happens when anger is allowed to develop for the wrong reason; is directed against the wrong thing; or as mentioned at the beginning, is kept inside, held onto, nursed, and even secretly enjoyed? This anger eats away at a person, stealing his joy in life, limiting his potential, keeping him

miserable. It reaches out to injure anyone who makes a suitable target. What is especially alarming is that such anger can be hidden even to the person retaining it yet manifest itself in ways that are subtle, indirect, and illusive.

In Part Two, we will look at scriptural examples of anger that remains beneath the surface but is nevertheless very real.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Anger \(Part One\)](#)

by Martin G. Collins

The world is becoming angrier. Anger, whether explosive or smoldering, can lead to high blood pressure, migraine headaches, or can ultimately lead to our spiritual demise. God gets angry with the wicked every day, but is solution oriented. Jesus had anger toward the Pharisees for the hardness of their hearts as well as for the money changers defiling the temple. We ought to have indignation and anger at our own sin with righteous or godly sorrow. If we love God we must hate evil motivated by a hopelessly debased, reprobate mind. While we are commanded to be indignant or angry, we can not be angry in a sinful manner, allowing ourselves to become provoked or irritated, seething with rage. Anger should not be nursed until it becomes an entrenched condition. We parents dare not provoke our children to wrath, discouraging them. Several wrong ways to deal with anger are to try to bury anger, to bottle it up, or to ventilate it. We must ask God for the power of the Holy Spirit to remove uncontrolled anger.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[The Formula for Overcoming](#)

by David F. Maas

When setting out to achieve a goal - especially significant and overarching

ones - most of us fall prey to a common problem: We find ourselves intimidated and perhaps depressed by its seeming impossibility to reach. But there is an easy, proven formula for accomplishing even the loftiest goals, like overcoming sin and growing in God's character. Dr. David Maas provides a surefire method we can use to achieve even the most difficult of life's tasks.

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