

Applying Scripture to Life's Difficulties

Topic 7 – Anger

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Introduction

It's not a stretch to ask you to think about a time when you became angry. In fact, it's probably quite easy to remember the last time you got angry, whether it was a sudden outburst or even a slowly festering annoyance. It might be just as easy to think about a time when someone became angry at you. I have found that as I have talked with folks and considered my own life, anger is something of a struggle, and for some the biggest struggle. This is a difficulty of life that we can all relate to in some way. Unfortunately, it is also a topic that often gets easily excused away. As we consider this topic, I hope that we approach it with a desire to learn, eager to submit to the word and what it says. Why do people get angry? As we will see, we can boil it down to the fact that we are sinful. People get angry because of a desire to rebel against God and focus on self. The anger of man is sinful, bottom line.

James 1:20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

I. Man's Anger

A. Some Definitions

1. According to dictionary.com: a strong feeling of displeasure and belligerence aroused by a wrong; wrath; ire
2. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*: A strong feeling of displeasure, dissatisfaction, or annoyance, generally combined with antagonism or hostility towards a particular cause or object
3. According to Thayer's Greek Lexicon
 - a. **orgē** suggests a more settled or abiding condition of mind, frequently with a view to taking revenge. Orge is less sudden in its rise (as opposed to *thumos*, see below), but more lasting in its nature. orge the more active emotion
 - b. **thymos** indicates a more agitated condition of the feelings, an outburst of wrath from inward indignation. Thumos expresses more the inward feeling. Thumos may issue in revenge, though it does not necessarily include it. It is characteristic that it quickly blazes up and quickly subsides, though that is not necessarily implied in each case. It speaks of passion, an agitated anger, a blaze of sudden anger quickly kindled.

Colossians 3:5-6 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 On account of these the wrath [*orgē*] of God is coming.

Colossians 3:8 But now you must put them all away: anger [*orgē*], wrath [*thymos*], malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

Interestingly, in the passage from Colossians cited above, the same word is used to describe God's opposition to sin that is perfect, holy, and righteous (more on this later) and at the same time something that is evil for people to allow, something that we are to "put off."

B. Anger Addressed in the Scriptures

Here are some passages, many from the wisdom literature, which address man's anger. What can we glean about the anger of man from the following passages?

Psalms 37:8 Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.

Proverbs 15:1 A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

Proverbs 15:18 A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.

Proverbs 22:24 Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man,

Proverbs 29:22 A man of wrath stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes much transgression.

Proverbs 30:33 For pressing milk produces curds, pressing the nose produces blood, and pressing anger produces strife.

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

Proverbs 14:29 Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.

Proverbs 17:27 Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.

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

Proverbs 25:28 A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.

Ecclesiastes 7:9 Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart[a] of fools.

1 Corinthians 13:4-5 4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;

2 Corinthians 12:20 For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder.

Galatians 5:19-20 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger [*thymos*], rivalries, dissensions, divisions,

Matthew 5:21-22 21 “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.

James 1:19-20 19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Ephesians 4:31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Galatians 5:16-23 16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

One thing we can say for sure from Scripture is that the anger of people is sin.

Romans 12:9 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.

C. Five Wrong Responses to Anger.

1. The anger of man should not be expressed...

- a. ... in deed.
- b. ... in words.
- c. ... in attitude.
- d. ... to others.
- e. ... to surrogates.
- f. ... to God.

2. Anger of man must not be justified...

- a. ... by cause.

b. ... by comparison.

Matthew 5:48 You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

c. ... by character.

d. ... by conviction.

3. The anger of man must not be denied...

a. ... by ignoring it.

b. ...by renaming it (by using euphemisms)

4. Anger of man must not *simply* be managed...

a. ... *simply*

b. ... by time.

c. ... by withdrawal.

d. ... by substances.

D. One Right Response to the Anger of Man: Repentance

Let's look at what repentance is, in particular as it relates to anger.

A. Repentance involves the heart.

Ephesians 4:30-32 30 And do not grieve [stop grieving; don't have the habit of grieving] the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Put Off	Put On	Motivation
Bitterness -	Kindness to one another -	Sin grieves the Holy Spirit of God
Wrath and Anger -	Tenderheartedness -	And causes loss of fellowship, loss of filling, loss of controlling
Clamor -	Forgiveness (like God does) -	
Slander -		Sealed
Malice -		
*Sinful actions always begin with unchecked sinful thoughts.		

Matthew 18:21-22 21 Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” 22 Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.

Instead of grieving the Holy Spirit with sin, be like Christ.

B. Repentance also involves the mind.

It is not simply an event that triggers our anger, but our perception of the event that triggers the anger within us.

Hebrews 11:23-25 23 By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. 24 By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. 26 He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.

C. Repentance also involves the will.

James 3:18 And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Matthew 5:21-26 21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. 23 So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. 25 Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. 26 Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

James 1:19-20 19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Romans 12:9 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.

II. God's Anger

If you look at all the times that anger is mentioned in the scriptures, you'll find that most of the time, it is God who is angry. More than two-thirds of all the references to anger in the Bible are about God being angry. To whom is he expressing anger? The vast majority of instances of God's anger, it is directed to his people, Israel. You really get the idea that God is not happy with the conduct of his people. Why would that be? He expected more of them. He gave them more privilege, more information, more blessings.

A. God intensely hates sin.

Psalm 5:4-6 4 For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you. 5 The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers. 6 You destroy those who speak lies; the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.

Nahum 1:2 The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord is avenging and wrathful; the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies.

Colossians 3:6 On account of these [what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry] the wrath [*orgē*] of God is coming.

John 3:36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath [*orgē*] of God remains on him.

Exodus 22:21-22 21 “You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. 22 You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. 23 If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, 24 and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.

**This was written to his own people*

B. Yet, God is slow to anger.

Exodus 34:6-7 6 The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.” Wonderful characteristics, and then... At a point justice is served.

Numbers 14:18 ‘The Lord is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, to the third and the fourth generation.’

Nehemiah 9:17 17 They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them.

Psalm 86:15 But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

Psalm 103:8 The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Psalm 145:8 The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Joel 2:13 and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.

Jonah 4:2 And he prayed to the Lord and said, “O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.

Nahum 1:2-3 2 The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord is avenging and wrathful; the Lord takes vengeance on his adversaries and keeps wrath for his enemies. 3 The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and the Lord will by no means clear the guilty. His way is in whirlwind and storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet.

C. WWJD? What about Jesus?

1. Jesus was angry at the Pharisees.

Mark 3:1-5 1 Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. 2 And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. 3 And he said to the man with the withered hand, “Come here.” 4 And he said to them, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent. 5 And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. 6 The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

2. Jesus was angry at the cleansings of the temple.

John 2:13-22 13 The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. 15 And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep

and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. 16 And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." 18 So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" 19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" 21 But he was speaking about the temple of his body. 22 When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

Three years later...

Matthew 21:12-13 12 And Jesus entered the temple[b] and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. 13 He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."

Mark 11:15-17 15 And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. 16 And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. 17 And he was teaching them and saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."

Luke 19:45-46 45 And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, 46 saying to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of robbers."

He appears to be angry, and this must be righteous anger because Jesus does not sin. What can we conclude about the anger of Jesus?

D. Jesus' anger.

1. The anger of Jesus was selective.
2. The anger of Jesus served others.
3. The anger of Jesus expressed his authority.

Christ was certainly angry at times, but his anger was righteous since he is God and everything he does is right and holy. Also, Jesus was able to assess people's hearts and actions perfectly. There are no triggers that caused Jesus to be angry, his anger was perfectly directed toward sin.

III. What about Righteous Indignation, ie Righteous Anger

We have seen clearly that anger is sin. Yet, we also see that God is able to be angry at sin and sinners (his settled opposition and displeasure) and not sin. Some call this "righteous indignation," but it is really "perfect anger" or "sinless anger."

Ephesians 4:26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,

How can we reconcile this command to be angry with everything else we just talked about? We can interpret this verse in a few different ways.

A. OPTION 1: We're allowed to be angry, but don't go to bed angry. [Spoiler alert: WRONG!]

While this is a common application of this verse, it is an incorrect one. This is not an out that allows us to get angry. First, we need to understand the context of Ephesians. Paul is writing to believers. He laid out the theological blessings of salvation in chapters 1-3, then implored them to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called" in chapters 4-6.

In the progression of thought in chapter 4, Paul commands the Ephesians to "no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity" (4:17-19), to put off sin by "put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires" (4:22), to be "renewed in the spirit of your minds" (4:23), and to "put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (4:24). In 4:25, Paul begins to give examples of put-off/put-on in lying and truth. In 4:28 on, he gives other examples of personal sin to be put-off: stealing, unwholesome words, bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and slander. So, the context surrounding 4:26-27 is putting off personal sin.

The first phrase of Ephesians 4:26 "Be angry and do not sin" appears to be a quote from Psalm 4:4.

Psalm 4:1-4

- 1 Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness!
You have given me relief when I was in distress.
Be gracious to me and hear my prayer!
- 2 O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame?
How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? *Selah*
- 3 But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself;
the Lord hears when I call to him.
- 4 Be angry, and do not sin;
ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. *Selah*

The context is the call for God's people to put off personal sin. This is the same context as Ephesians 4. So, Paul is not quoting scripture out of context. "Be angry" is a command with the usage that directs believers to be continually angry. What then is the object of that continual anger?

B. OPTION 2: We're supposed to be angry at sin all of the time. [I think this is incomplete.]

From the context, the object of the believer's perpetual anger is one's own sin. "And do not sin" is also a command (in the imperative mood in Greek) with the usage that directs believers to be continually not sinning (it is in the present tense, in Greek). So, this verse seems to command believers to be continually angry at sin as a means to continually not be sinning. We are to have a deep seated, settled opposition and displeasure toward sin. But Jesus was around sin all the time, and he wasn't perpetually angry.

C. OPTION 3: We're supposed to be angry at our own sin at all times. [I think this is a good interpretation, and probably the one to which I hold.]

Again, from the context, the object of the believer's perpetual anger is *one's own sin*. "And do not sin" is also a command with the usage that directs believers to be continually not sinning. So, this verse seems to command believers to be continually angry *at their own sin* as a means to continually not be sinning. Furthermore, in Greek, the command to be angry is in the middle voice, meaning that the self is the object of the command here. We are to have a deep seated, settled opposition and displeasure toward *our own sin*. So we could understand "don't let the sun go down on your anger," as not allowing the sun to set on your anger towards your own sin. Since Christ never sinned, this did not apply to him. While this is an odd phrasing, there is precedent in the Old Testament for it regarding the sun setting on the prophets, meaning that there will come a day when there were to be no more prophets.

Micah 3:6 Therefore it shall be night to you, without vision, and darkness to you, without divination. **The sun shall go down on the prophets**, and the day shall be black over them;

D. OPTION 4: We're allowed to be angry at sin, but don't let it fester. [I think this also is a good interpretation]

Everything from options 2 and 3 above. Be angry at your own sin as well as righteous anger at sin. In other words, it's alright to become angry when you hear of or see sin, as in when God's people are led astray, for example. However, we can understand "do not let the sun go down on your anger" as a time limit. Since the command is "Be angry and do not sin," allowing your sin to fester may lead to sin, so make sure you don't sit in it too long. The thrust of options two through four are "do not sin."

For Additional Study

Reread the verses about anger above. Based on those verses, how would you define anger?

How and when do you get angry? What about these situations makes you tempted to be angry?

Why do people close to you get angry?

Read James 4:1-2. What do these verses say about the cause of conflicts?