

## Anger

Reading: Jonah 4

“Anger is a universal problem, prevalent in every culture, experienced by every generation. No one is isolated from its presence or immune from its poison. It permeates each person and spoils our most intimate relationships. Anger is a given part of our fallen human fabric. ... Sadly this is true even in our Christian homes and churches.”<sup>1</sup>

A couple of weeks ago, I spoke about the sin of bitterness. Usually, anger is the driving force in bitterness. Bitter people are, typically, angry people. If we don't deal with anger properly and biblically, it can easily drive us into bitterness.

Anger can have terrible consequences in our lives. Some people have trouble controlling their temper; they experience angry outbursts and temper tantrums when things don't go their way. Violence and abuse is often caused by anger. Terrible and tragic events stem from anger.

We often control our anger in public settings because we don't want to get into trouble and we don't want to have a bad reputation in the community. But at home and in private, people with anger issues often vent their anger. Those we love the most may be the most common objects of our anger.

Anger is another one of those sins of the spirit that may be hidden, lurking just beneath the surface, that no one would suspect of us. Some of us here today may have anger issues that no one knows about; no one would even suspect that we have a bad temper. It's a common problem with many people, even among Christians.

The Bible speaks to the issue of anger, and we must make sure we are handling anger biblically. What is anger, and what does the Bible say about it?

We'll begin, as we often do, by defining the issue.

- I. Anger is a strong feeling of displeasure.
  - A. In the OT, the word commonly translated as “anger” comes from a root word meaning, “to breathe hard; to snort.” Another OT word carries the idea of heat or passion (אָרָה). These words reflect the emotional nature

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<sup>1</sup> Robert D. Jones, *Uprooting Anger* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2005), 13. Quoted in Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2007), 121.

of anger; it's a strong emotion. For some people, it is a life-dominating emotion.

Jonah 4:1 *But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry* (הָרַף).

Jonah 4:9 *[Jonah] said, "I do well to be angry, even unto death"*

Jonah was angry because of his own discomfort and because the Lord withheld judgment from the Ninevites. This was a sinful form of anger; it focused on Jonah and what he wanted.

- B. The NT word (ὀργή) originally referred to the upsurging of sap. Anger is a strong impulsive passion, an upsurging of emotion. The word is often associated in the Bible with punishment or vengeance.
- C. Anger is a common emotion because life is full of displeasing experiences. The cause of anger could be any number of things, from very minor inconveniences all the way up to violence and abuse. Some of us have probably been angry already today; we may be feeling it right now. You may be angry that I'm talking about it.
  - 1. Some people are quite naturally angry because of how others have mistreated them. They are angry that they've been abused; they have suffered pain and anguish; we would almost expect them to be angry because of their tragic experiences.
  - 2. But sometimes, anger flares up simply because we are frustrated or don't get our own way. Our expectations are unmet; people fail and disappoint us; circumstances are not what we want them to be, and thus we get angry.
- D. The root cause of anger is usually our own self-centeredness, desire to be in control, or personal frustration. Usually, anger comes from not getting what we want or from being treated unjustly or badly.
- E. Often, but not always, the inner emotion of anger leads to sinful behavior. Angry people often use hurtful words and harmful actions to lash out at those who make them angry.
- F. Anger becomes sinful in two ways:
  - 1. By venting it – “blowing-up,” throwing a tantrum. This kind of anger often leads to verbal and physical abuse and even murder.

James 4:1–2 *Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war.*

2. By keeping it – holding on to the emotion, allowing it to linger, not dealing with it correctly. Anger kept inside leads to bitterness, hatred, and resentment.

**Quote:** We [may] get angry as a response to someone else’s anger. A husband comes home expecting dinner to be on the table. When it’s not, he becomes angry and verbalizes his anger in hot and hurtful words. The wife gets angry in return, but she may not verbalize her anger. Instead she seethes inwardly with resentment. Her anger is just as sinful as her husband’s. A man is chewed out by his boss, possibly in front of fellow employees. He can’t retaliate in kind, but he, like the unfortunate wife, will also seethe with resentment.<sup>2</sup>

So whether you vent it or keep it locked up, anger often results in sinful behavior.

- G. Even though anger is often the cause of sin, anger itself is not necessarily sinful. Like any emotion, anger can become destructive or constructive.
- H. We know that anger itself is not sinful because
  1. God gets angry. Exodus 22:24 *My wrath (אֵף) will become hot, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.*  
  
Psalm 7:11 *God is a just judge, And God is angry with the wicked every day.*
  2. Jesus got angry.  
  
Mark 3:5 *[Jesus] looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, ...*
  3. Believers may get angry without sinning.  
  
Ephesians 4:26 *“Be angry, and do not sin”*: *do not let the sun go down on your wrath,*

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<sup>2</sup> Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2007), 123.

- a) Anger is justified if it arises from a true displeasure with evil. If you are angry over a violation of God’s moral law, you have the right to be angry; we often call that “righteous indignation.” Like God, we may be angry against sin, evil, immorality, injustice, blasphemy, etc. If the focus of our anger is on God and how his will has been violated, our anger is probably righteous.
- b) We have to be very careful because even righteous indignation can easily slip into bitterness, resentment, and a desire for revenge. Our natural sinfulness tends to take over and lead us into a sinful form of anger if we are not careful.
- c) Righteous anger is self-controlled. If you lose your temper or behave sinfully because of your anger, you are not experiencing righteous indignation. Righteous anger is not self-centered or uncontrolled; it does not blow up.

II. Anger is a spiritual issue.

Pr 22:24 *Make no friendship with an angry (אָר) man; and with a furious (הַמְרִיר) man thou shalt not go:*

Pr 29:22 *An angry (אָר) man stirreth up strife, and a furious (הַמְרִיר) man aboundeth in transgression.*

In Galatians 5:19–25, “outbursts of anger” (θυμός) is listed as one of the “works of the flesh.” “... those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” That kind of anger is a mark of unbelievers.

If we are under the control of the HSp, we will be able to control our feelings of anger.

Proverbs 16:32 *He who is slow to anger (אָר) is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.*

Jonah 4:2 ... *You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger (אָר) and abundant in lovingkindness...*

Some people might think of anger problems as a personality issue or a character trait—“It’s just the way I am”—but really it’s a spiritual problem. And the solution is also spiritual....

### III. What to do about anger

If you find that sinful anger is a regular part of your life, you must take a biblical approach to overcoming this sin.

#### A. Choose your response to displeasure carefully.

1. Remember that anger is a response to displeasure. We can choose how to respond to feelings of displeasure.
2. We can't control our circumstances or what others do to us, but we can control our responses to the things that typically make us angry. Our desire should be that we respond to difficult situations in a godly way.
3. Unpleasant people and difficult circumstances cannot *cause* us to be angry. They may be the *trigger* for our anger, but not the true cause. We get angry because we allow ourselves to get angry.
4. Self-control (temperance) is a fruit of the Spirit. As we grow in spiritual maturity, we should be able to control our anger. At least, we should be able to prevent ourselves from losing our temper when we get angry.
5. Do not let angry feelings explode into verbal abuse or physical violence. This kind of angry outburst hurts others and yourself.

#### B. Respond to displeasure; don't react.

1. A *response* is thoughtful and disciplined. We choose how we are going to respond after thought and reflection. Hopefully, we choose a proper, biblical, godly response to a difficult, displeasing situation.
2. A *reaction/reflex*, on the other hand, is spontaneous and uncontrolled. E.g., when the doctor hits you knee joint with that little rubber hammer—that's a reaction/reflex. You don't think about that; it happens naturally—it's a natural reflex.

If you follow your natural, reflexive inclinations, when you get angry, your uncontrolled reaction will probably get you into trouble.

Respond properly to situations that make you angry. Respond thoughtfully and with self-discipline.

C. Try to discern the root cause of your anger.

One of the main strategies for dealing with sin is to try to deal with root causes.

1. In some cases, the root cause of anger may be righteous—i.e., you are angry because someone is violating God’s law. You are angry for morally justifiable reasons.
2. In many cases, the root causes of anger include self-centeredness, bitterness, resentment, or pride. These emotions often stem from a lack of forgiveness or a lack of humility. If pride and unforgiveness control you, anger may be the result.
3. The root cause of anger may be previous displeasing, unpleasant, or even abusive experiences. Angry people often have terrible experiences in their past.

If that’s the case, you need to deal with those past hurts biblically. Usually, that involves forgiving others. We can forgive others because God forgave us. We can do all things through Christ, including forgiving those who have wronged us. It may take a lot to time and effort to work through these issues.

4. If the root cause of your anger is sinful—i.e., pride, bitterness, hatred—repent of that sin and seek to overcome it. Work on undercutting and weakening the internal sin that is causing you to be angry.

D. Use the energy of anger positively. Re-direct it. Channel the power of the emotion into a solution of the problem.

*1 Samuel 11:6–7 Then the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard this news, and his anger was greatly aroused. <sup>7</sup> So he took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, “Whoever does not go out with Saul and Samuel to battle, so it shall be done to his oxen.” And the fear of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out with one consent.*

1. Anger is a powerful emotion. Direct the energy of anger into solving the problem. Perhaps you can engage in some kind of activity that would soak up some of your angry energy. E.g., protest abortion, protest the LGBT agenda, engage in political action, get involved in fighting against the wickedness of our culture.

2. Focus on the problem, not on people. Don't allow your feelings of anger to result in the abuse or mistreatment of others. Use the emotional energy to solve the problem, not to abuse people.
- E. Replace sinful anger with biblical virtues like kindness, grace, and forgiveness. Work at developing the fruit of the Spirit instead of yielding to the works of the flesh.

*Ephesians 4:31-32 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.*

*Colossians 3:13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.*

Christian growth/sanctification is the process of taking off the old and putting on the new. If you are a new creation in Christ, then you need to work at putting off anger and putting on kindness, forgiveness, and compassion.

- F. Trust in God

**Quote:** To dissolve our sinful emotions, we must believe that God is absolutely sovereign in all the affairs of our lives (both the “good” and the “bad”) and that all the words and actions of other people that tempt us to anger are somehow included in His wise and good purposes to make us more like Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

If we believe that our circumstances are ultimately part of God's providential work in our lives, then we should not be angry that God allowed something displeasing in our lives. God has a good purpose for everything he does. Trusting God is part of walking by faith.

- G. Admit that no one and nothing can *cause* us to be angry. Circumstances and people can be the trigger of our anger, but anger is an emotion we allow within ourselves. We can control it. Others may do things that make us angry, but anger is our own response. Control your response.
- H. Do not let anger turn into bitterness, resentment, or hatred. We should seek to get over our anger quickly—“let not the sun go down on your

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<sup>3</sup> Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2007), 126.

wrath.” We must defuse our angry feelings quickly lest they turn into bitterness, hatred, and resentment.

- I. Confess the sinfulness of your anger and make restitution (if you need to). Apologize to those whom you’ve hurt.

#### IV. What about anger directed toward God?

- A. Many people, even professing Christians, become angry at God. God has displeased them in some way—he has allowed pain, sorrow, grief, illness, injury, unfulfilled expectations, etc. You were trusting in God and expecting him to provide for you, and something tragic happened. So now you are angry with God. Maybe you still come to church and do all the normal Christian things, but deep down inside, you are angry with God. You resent God’s providence in your life.

- B. Are we allowed to be angry with God, or is that a sin? My view is that anger directed toward God is sinful. Several reasons this is true:

1. It’s sinful because it implies that God was wrong to allow something in our lives. Anger toward God accuses him of wrongdoing, neglect, or unfair treatment. Anger against God assumes that we have the right to sit in judgment of God. Anger toward God says that we are right and God is wrong.

E.g., Job comes very close to accusing God of wrongdoing.

2. It’s also sinful because it assumes that we know better than God. We know what is good for us better than God knows. We deserve better than what God gives us. That is not true.
3. It’s also sinful because it is a form of unbelief or lack of trust in God. It’s a failure to believe passages like Rom 8:28. It’s a failure to love God with our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Job 13:15 *Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: ...*

- C. If we feel angry with God, we should very quickly remind ourselves that God is the creator. We answer to him, not he to us. He has no obligation to explain himself to us. Cf. Job 40-41. Like Job, we must remember how sinful we are and how holy God is. We must acknowledge that our own failures may be the cause of the problems we experience. And ultimately, we must trust that God knows what he’s doing in our lives.

Rom 9:20 *But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed [it], “Why have you made me like this?”*



- D. If we feel angry with God, we must admit that to him in humble confession of sin. We must trust in the sovereignty, wisdom, and love of God. We admit our feelings to God and trust him to help us deal with our feelings of displeasure. God is merciful and gracious; if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.

Anger is a natural, powerful emotion. We may be angry in a righteous way, but it's probably more common that our anger is sinful.

If you struggle to control your anger, spend extra time in prayer. Study what the Bible says about anger. Angry Christians must make every effort to uproot and remove sinful anger from their lives. They must exercise self-control and seek to be led by the Spirit on this issue. We must all seek to replace anger with kindness, patience, and compassion. We can overcome anger as we yield ourselves to God and walk by faith.