

“Is Anger a Sin?”

Just about all of us become angry from time to time. For some, it takes a lot to make them angry; then there are those of us who have a very short fuse. In fact, we’ve all encountered someone with a volatile temper. One time, I worked with a man who had that kind of explosive temper. One day, he was sitting at the table behind the building where we worked, enjoying his break and reading the newspaper. All of a sudden, a little breeze came up and blew his newspaper off of the table, scattering it in the grass. Well, the man blew up! He stood up and fired off a few expletives and then, would you believe that he even shook his fist at the sky and cursed the wind?!

Sometimes, little things annoy us and through the course of the day, they add up until we finally boil over. Then there are times in our relationships where we might harbor ill feelings over something that might even have happened a long time ago. We may not say much about it at the time, keeping it to ourselves. But, inside we’re bitter. That bitterness is like a pile of smoldering rags, until something feeds just the right amount of oxygen to it, and BOOM! It ignites in an outburst of anger.

Anger is very hard to control. Which raises the question: Is anger a sin? I think most would agree that some degrees of anger are wrong; some would even say that a Christian is never to be angry. In fact, some will say that the image of a Christian is someone who never becomes upset, is always agreeable—even timid and mild. But, what saith the scriptures? The Bible actually has a good bit to say about emotions like anger.

Proverbs 16:32 “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.”

What does it mean to be *slow to anger* and to *rule (one’s) spirit*? Does that mean that anger, under all circumstances, is a sin? Would you believe that there are some things that a Christian actually should be angry about? Let’s turn to the word of God for some insight on this subject.

I think we would agree that, in most cases, anger is unbecoming of a Christian. It’s hard to imagine somebody reflecting the life and love of Christ, who goes through life with an explosive temper, always angry at someone or something around them. In fact, many times anger is a manifestation of bitterness, and when you see someone who is chronically angry, many times it is the result of unresolved issues in his life. Sometimes the source of it goes back years and years. Sometimes people have been abused and severely hurt, and they react defensively with anger. Their anger is a way of fending off further attacks, is attention-seeking, or is an effort to vindicate themselves from the mistreatment that they have suffered.

Some think that a hot temper, a sharp tongue, and a brutish display of power makes them appear less vulnerable and appear more strong to others. Solomon says that it’s actually the very opposite, as we read in our text.

Proverbs 16:32 “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.”

Our *spirit* in this case refers to our *temperament* or our *emotions*. Solomon is saying that the greatest battle that we must fight is actually the battle to conquer ourselves, not someone else. Now, it is human

to experience emotions like anger, but the Bible is telling us that we must be in control of our spirit. We must learn to rule our emotions; not be ruled by them.

But, notice that Solomon does NOT say that it is a sin to become angry. He says that the man who rules his spirit is *slow to anger*. In other words, it doesn't overcome him. He doesn't have knee-jerk reactions to things that irritate him; he doesn't fly off the handle and lose control of his emotions. When he becomes angry, there is a reason for it, and he controls the anger, rather than the anger controlling him.

The fact is, the Bible does teach that not only are there times when anger is *permissible*, but there are times when it is absolutely *appropriate*. But we have to be careful that our anger is properly motivated, properly channeled, and controlled.

When does it every become appropriate for the Christian to become angry? We can read where Jesus was angry on at least two occasions. I don't know how His actions could be interpreted any other way than to say that the Son of God was angry. Twice, Jesus cleansed the temple: once toward the beginning of His ministry and once at the end.

John 2:13-16 "And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise."

Matthew 21:12-13 "And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves."

Now, what was this all about? Well, the temple here was under the rule of Annas, the high priest, and his sons. They had set up a lucrative business at the temple called 'the temple market.' It was a Bizarre of sorts, where they sold items, particularly those that were needed for the sacrifices that took place there. That doesn't sound so bad; most temple-goers were pilgrims who travelled from a great distance to worship at the temple. Therefore, it was a hardship for them to bring the animals and other supplies that were needed for their sacrifices. So, Annas and his family had this market set up in the outer court of the Gentiles where the people could come and buy what they needed to worship. They made sure that the animals met all of the requirements, so this was very convenient. One could argue that it was even a benevolent and helpful thing for the people to have this service available.

But I don't think that was the problem. The problem was the same one you have when you go to the airport, and you decide after you get all checked in that you want something to eat. Well, you're stuck, and you don't have much of a choice if you want a meal. So, they can charge you a lot more. Jesus showed that the concern of the high priest and these temple officials wasn't really to help the people. Rather, it was to entrap them. It wasn't to help the common man; it was to help themselves. They had a racket going and they were taking advantage of these pilgrim worshippers, charging exorbitant amounts of money to obtain what they had to have to offer a sacrifice. In fact, the doves that they were selling

were primarily sacrifices that the poor could offer, so these men were taking advantage of these indigent worshippers.

Well, Jesus was incensed. He didn't quietly slip in and ask to see the high priest, and tactfully ask him to consider what he was doing. Oh, no. Jesus marched into the temple court, He started throwing tables over, shooing those unscrupulous men out of the temple, and when the Lord was finished, there were animals running and flying loose, the temple a mess and money all over the floor!

Did Jesus lose control of His spirit? Did Jesus sin? Well, of course not, because the Bible tells us that Jesus never sinned.

I Peter 2:22 "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:"

Normally if a person went into a place like that and behaved like Jesus did, we might think, *how terrible! How out of line!* But, not Jesus and not in this case. Why?

Well, first of all, remember that Jesus deliberately went into the temple to cleanse it. This wasn't a matter of Him stumbling upon the temple and seeing these moneychangers there and in a flash of temper, losing control. No, Jesus intentionally went to the temple knowing what He would see there, as He is all-knowing, and He went to cleanse it. In fact, He was fulfilling a divine prophecy, which we'll look at in a moment. At least in one sense, He was fulfilling the picture that Malachi painted of Him.

Malachi 3:3 "And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness."

At the very least what Jesus did here on these two occasions *literally* is a picture of what He came to do *spiritually*. There was a divine overarching purpose involved when Jesus showed this great anger over what was happening in the temple.

Here is the prophecy that the disciples recognized Jesus as fulfilling the first time He overthrew the tables of the moneychangers.

John 2:17 "And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up."

In other words, He went to the temple with *righteous indignation* over how these religious leaders—who should have known better—were showing such disrespect to the house of His Father in heaven. You see, Jesus was motivated not out of spite, not out of vindictiveness over some personal wrong, but rather this was a show of *righteous indignation*.

There are times and there are things which warrant a certain form of anger. Anger that is rightly motivated, rightly directed and carefully controlled. Friend, anybody who cares about righteousness and who loves the Lord and His word ought to be angry about what we see around us. We ought to be angry over the disrespect and blasphemy that people direct toward our precious Lord. When we see the weak and the poor and the vulnerable abused and taken advantage of, it ought to make us angry. We ought to be angry when we hear of children who are abused or molested. We should be angry at the sewer of filth and vulgarity that Hollywood has unleashed in our living rooms. These things ought to make us

angry, just like Jesus was angry. But Jesus didn't lose control of His anger. He didn't abuse or mistreat those people, but He let it be known in no uncertain terms, that He was angry over their sin.

But, let me caution you with this: that anger needs to be tempered by sorrow and love. Just before this incident in the life of Jesus, when He was making His way into Jerusalem for this the final week of His earthly life, the Bible tells us how that He stopped atop the Mount of Olives, where He had a spectacular view of the entire city of Jerusalem. He looked down and saw that city and that glittering temple, and knew what it had become: it was beautiful on the outside, but had become rotten on the inside because of the behavior of God's people. And knowing the judgment that was coming for all of that, the Bible says that the same Jesus who would go into that temple in anger and drive out those moneychangers, broke down and wept. He literally sobbed as He looked out over Jerusalem. So, Jesus' anger was a righteous anger and it was actually tempered by a broken and concerned heart.

I don't mind telling you that the sin of our age makes me angry. But it also makes me very sad when I think about the masses of human souls who are stumbling into hell every day.

So, there is a righteous kind of anger, but listen. Jesus may have been angered by seeing the poor exploited. He may have been angry over seeing His Father's temple turned into a den of thieves. But we never once read where Jesus became angry at somebody for how they treated Him. Isn't that interesting? In fact, isn't that amazing?

We don't read where Jesus lashed out at Judas for betraying Him for money. If anybody ever had a reason to be angry with somebody, that would be it, but we don't read of it. Jesus didn't lash out at Peter when He listened to him deny Him. I mean, if anybody ever had a right to be angry, here He is going through the greatest injustice and impending agonies of His life. It is His darkest hour, and Peter, His closest of disciples, turns his back and denies that he even knows Him! Jesus didn't get angry, so far as we read. In fact, He forgave Peter. Neither did He lash out at Pilate. He didn't retaliate or lash out at the Roman soldiers when they took His garment, crowned Him with thorns, spit on Him, mocked and crucified Him. He didn't look down and curse at or threaten the hissing, howling mob of instigators who were hurling insults at Him on the cross.

Do you see the difference? Jesus Himself endured mistreatment and suffered abuse, and He taught us in word and example, that we are to do the same thing. And that is very hard. Solomon said that the strongest man is not the man who takes and conquers a city. Rather, it is the man who conquers himself by ruling his own spirit.

If we don't rule our spirit, anger can get us in a heap of trouble. I recall Moses, for example. God had told Moses that in order to provide water for the people of Israel as they travelled thru the wilderness, he was to speak to the rock and it would pour forth water. But as these people journeyed, they grumbled and complained, and made life miserable for Moses. They were blaming him for their plight in the wilderness, and you can understand how Moses would get angry. I mean, wouldn't you get angry if you were leading this ungrateful mob of people thru this barren wilderness, suffering all of this difficulty, and all they can do is blame you and hurl insults at you and make your life miserable? Well, Moses had had enough of it and he boiled over with anger. But his anger led him to disobey God, and instead of speaking to the rock as God had said, he took his staff and struck the rock and cried, "*Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?*" (**Numbers 20:10**). Moses was obviously and visibly angry at the people; so much so that he disobeyed the Lord and it got him into trouble.

So, how DO we deal with unholy anger? Any time we become angry, we need to beware. We need to stop and examine the situation and examine our hearts.

Ephesians 4:26-27 “Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil.”

That tells me that one CAN be angry without sinning. But beware, because anger can quickly and easily become sinful. How? Paul says *when we let the sun go down on our wrath*. What he means is when we let anger take control of us, we need to deal with that anger instead. Resolve it. If it's a personal wrong, get your emotions under control and approach it with the mind of Christ. Don't hold a grudge or let anger ferment and create the slow burn that the Bible describes as *wrath* within you. Go and get that problem straightened out. Be eager to rectify that issue. Don't let it smolder. Get it confessed. Confront and resolve it in your own mind, and do it very quickly. Why? because when you let the sun go down on your wrath, the devil steps in. Paul says *neither give place to the devil*. That's what unrighteous anger is: the devil's door into your heart, your life and your relationships. Sometimes it's the door through which he walks, right inside the church, where he begins to do terrible, terrible damage. Anger is the door that the devil uses to get inside your home, so he can try to destroy your marriage, defile and discourage your children, ruin your relationships. *Don't give place to the devil*. Paul goes on.

Ephesians 4:31 “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:”

It's interesting. This is really a progression that Paul describes in these verses. *Bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking, malice*. What's he talking about? *Bitterness* is what happens whenever something comes along and wounds you. You're hurt by something that was said or done, maybe even something you imagined that was said or done. Nonetheless, you are wounded in your heart and spirit over it. If you don't quickly deal with that and find a way to resolve it within your own heart and with that other person, it turns to *bitterness*, which turns to *wrath*. *Wrath* is that slow burn, that steady resentment that builds up and begins to root itself and manifest itself within our hearts. Then, Paul says that turns into *anger*, in this case, meaning that flash of temper and emotion, which in turn becomes what Paul refers to as *clamour*: that person who is combative and who speaks harshly, raising a ruckus over this thing that is bothering him. Then he becomes guilty of *evil speaking*, as he begins to rail against and malign somebody else and their character, maybe out of revenge. Ultimately, it's *malice*: that deep seeded hatred that all of this turns into in a person's heart.

We have to be careful about *anger* and *bitterness*. That's why the apostle Paul said, *Don't let the sun go down upon your wrath*. If you do, you're going to give place to Satan. Look what Paul says next.

Ephesians 4:32 “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.”

There is a way to keep anger in check. That is, to take on the mind of the Lord. Paul reminds us that Christ is our model in this matter. Christ is our example in how to deal with all of these issues that might arise within our hearts and create bitterness, anger and wrath and all of these things. You might say, *I am well within my rights to be angry, because they mistreated me. They crossed me and really hurt me. They don't deserve my forgiveness*. Tell me: what human being deserves the forgiveness of God? What person on the face of this earth deserves for God to forgive him? Who of us deserves Jesus' death on

the cross for our sins? We didn't deserve that. Christ Jesus came walking down the starry stairs of heaven and was slain on the cross of Calvary for one reason: the grace of God.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Friend, if you want to keep your anger in check, if you want to learn to rule your spirit, then take on the mind of the Lord Jesus Christ, in how you approach others, how you deal with situations that arise. Learn to rule your spirit.