

The Red Hot Emotion

Dear Friend,

The Bible has a lot to say about anger. In fact, it's hard to find a book in the Bible that doesn't describe or talk about anger at least once. Bitterness, wrath, anger, jealousy, resentment, malice and apathy are all cousin words used to describe a real, active response to our world. Because the Bible is a collection of books about real people and a real God, anger is expressed quite a lot. Today, we are going to look at three kinds of anger the Bible talks about. We are going to look at divine anger, human sin anger, and human righteous anger. We are going to discuss how to know when our anger isn't sinful. Finally, we will take a brief look at why we should care about getting rid of sinful anger.

Before we begin to look at anger in the Bible, it is important we have a working definition of anger. The Webster Dictionary defines anger as: a strong feeling of displeasure and usually of antagonism. This definition fails to capture how anger controls the whole body of a person. I believe the Bible describes anger in a different way. The Biblical definition of anger is "*when we actively respond negatively with our whole person to something we judge as morally wrong*". This definition recognizes how anger is not just an emotional response. The foundation of anger is built on who or what we worship. In the Bible, anger is expressed in three different ways: Divine anger, human righteous anger, and human sinful anger.

God expresses His divine anger against human sin throughout the Bible. One example of God's anger or wrath is in **Numbers 14:20-35**. The Israelites wickedly rebel against God and threaten to head back to Egypt. God responds with wrath toward the Israelites and threatens them with total destruction. Moses intercedes on the Israelites behalf, but God still punishes them with 40 years of wandering in the desert.

The best example of human righteous anger is Jesus Christ. In **Mark 10:13-16**, Jesus gets angry and rebukes his disciples for prohibiting little children to be blessed by him. Jesus is angry toward real sin; his intentions are for God's kingdom, and he responds in righteous proportions.

David provides an excellent example for sinful anger in **2 Samuel 12:5-8**. Nathan the prophet tells David a story about injustice and David flies into a rage. He disproportionately gets angry at the story, because deep down he knows he has sinned against God with Bathsheba. These are just three of the hundreds of examples of anger in each category. Anger is such a central theme in scripture because it's a common response for humans to make.

The root of anger is found in what we worship. We are created to worship God, but because of the Fall, we are bent toward worshiping other things. Even good things can become really bad masters. Food is something that we all need to survive and enjoying the taste of food is a good thing. God has given us taste buds for tasty food. However, when we idolize or worship food, it makes for a really bad master. Anger is just one of the fruits of worshiping. Righteous human anger is the result of worshiping God properly. There are several examples of righteous anger recorded in the Bible, but we are going to look at only two today.

Not all anger that we express is sinful. The Bible describes God as wrathful and angry at sin and injustice in the world. God cannot sin, so there must be some criteria for righteous anger. According to Scripture, anger is righteous when it is directed against sin not people, when it is focused on God's kingdom and concerns and when it is accompanied by godly qualities. First, anger is righteous when directed toward actual sin, not just what inconveniences us. When God's law is really broken and injustice wrecks havoc in our lives, it is appropriate and righteous to get angry. Second, righteous anger is focused on God's kingdom and his concerns. God should be glorified by the anger not dishonored. The anger should produce action that builds up the kingdom of God. The final criteria is that the anger should be expressed in godly ways. The reaction should be proportional to the situation. Flying off the handle at a small sin does not glorify God or call the sinner to repentance. This humbling criteria exposes how often our anger is sinful and not righteous. Let's look at two examples to see how this criteria plays out in Scripture.

Saul was the first king of Israel. He began his reign with a rocky start. During his coronation ceremony, the Israelites found him hiding among the baggage. Soon after, the kingdom was in trouble and Saul's response is an excellent example of righteous anger. 1 Samuel 11:1-7 says, **“Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh Gilead. And all the men of Jabesh said to him, ‘Make a treaty with us, and we will be subject to you.’ But Nahash the Ammonite replied, ‘I will make a treaty with you only on the condition that I gouge out the right eye of every one of you and so bring disgrace on all Israel.’ The elders of Jabesh said to him, ‘Give us seven days so we can send messengers throughout Israel; if no one comes to rescue us, we will surrender to you.’** When the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and reported these terms to the people, they all wept aloud. Just then Saul was returning from the fields, behind his oxen, and he asked, **“What is wrong with everyone? Why are they weeping?”** Then they repeated to him what the men of Jabesh had said. When Saul heard their words, the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him, and he burned with anger. He took a pair of oxen, cut them into pieces, and sent the pieces by messengers throughout Israel, proclaiming, **“This is what will be done to the oxen of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel.”** Then the terror of the Lord fell on the people, and they came out together as one.” Nahash, an enemy of the Israelite nation, surrounded Jabesh and demanded surrender. The odds were not in Israel's favor at all. To make matters worse, Jabesh Gilead was on the East side of the Jordan River. The men of Jabesh had very little hope of rescue from their brothers in the west. Saul's kingship was really being put to the test. When he hears the news, the Bible tells us that he burned with anger. Does his anger fit the criteria for righteous anger?

First, Saul is getting angry at a real injustice, threat and sin against God. Nahash will either kill all the people in Jabesh or dishonor them by gouging out their right eyes. Either way, this was a real threat to God's people. Saul isn't angry by a petty offense that doesn't really mean much. His anger fuels him to restore God's kingdom. Second, Saul is really focused on God's people. His concern and God's concern are the same. The Bible mentions that the Spirit of God came powerfully on Saul and that is what made him burn with anger. Saul, as king of Israel, is focused on the same concerns as God. Finally, Saul doesn't act foolishly

or respond irrationally. He gathers all the tribes of Israel together before he sets out to punish Nahash. His anger convicts the Israelites and spurs them into action. The text mentions that the terror of the Lord fell on Israel and that's what united them as one nation. Saul's anger was the catalyst to real change and action among Israel. Yes, in this particular instance, Saul's anger was righteous and appropriate. Unfortunately, Saul's sin would cause him to respond angrily later in his reign as well. It would ultimately ruin his relationship with God and his closest allies and family.

Let's look at another example of righteous anger in the Bible. Jesus, as the Son of God and only sinless human being, should be our greatest example of righteous anger. Mark 10:13-16 says, **“People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.”** In this short episode of Christ's ministry, we see righteous indignation or anger displayed. The disciples were trying to prevent children from knowing and being blessed by Jesus. Both the children and the parents were probably hurt by the disciple's rebuke. Jesus' concern is not for his own fame or need to be needed, but his concern is that God's kingdom be known and shared. He doesn't pause his ministry or fly into a rage against the disciples. Jesus rebukes them then continues to bless the children. He uses the disciple's sin as an opportunity to teach about the kingdom of God. Only people who recognize their helpless state like children and rest their faith on Jesus Christ will enter heaven. This is just one example of Christ's anger, but we clearly see how he matches the Biblical criteria for righteous anger.

When I contemplate the criteria for righteous anger according to the Bible, I recognize that 95% of the time my anger is sinful. I selfishly want what I want and because I don't get it when I want it, I fly into anger. Even when I am angry over real sin, I am often not concerned with God's kingdom. In my worst moments, my words cut like swords in my anger. I hurt the loved ones around me, and I compound sin with sin. Anger has mastered my tongue, my thoughts and my

actions in ways that are shameful and childish. By God's grace through faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit convicts me and strengthens my heart. I don't know where you are at in your walk with Christ, but I want to wrap this sermon up with some final words on why we should seek to get rid of our sinful anger.

In a letter to the church in Ephesus, Paul said, "Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

Ephesians 4:25-27,29-32. In this passage, he encourages the congregation to get rid of all anger and contention. As the Body of Christ, the church should work to build each other up. The model for the Church is the kindness, compassion, and forgiveness we receive from God through Christ. Sinful anger hurts your health, destroys relationships, and displeases God.

There are plenty of scientific studies that show the dangerous effects of anger to our bodies and minds. Anger breaks down the immune system in the body, making a habitually angry person more susceptible to sickness and disease. Dwelling on things that make you angry opens the door for depression and anxiety to take hold. Anger has very negative effects on the body. Sinful anger almost always destroys relationships with others. If we sin in anger and do not repent or extend forgiveness, we often build that anger up inside. This pent-up anger builds up until it explodes, often ruining the relationship. Until the root of anger is addressed, every relationship is tainted by sinful anger. The greatest motivation to get rid of our sinful anger is that our anger displeases God. When we lash out at others, we fail to witness Christ to them. In fact, many people are turned away from God, because of the sinful anger we express. Anger is like a pair of sunglasses.

On a bright and sunny day, sunglasses protect your eyes from the sun's harmful rays. In the same way, righteous anger protects us from apathy and unmotivating depression. Righteous anger fuels us with zeal for God's Word and it causes us to act and glorify God. Wearing sunglasses in a dimly lit room blinds you, making it harder to see. In the same way, sinful anger blinds us. Sinful anger is harmful to our bodies, ruins our relationships and displeases our Lord. God's will for His children is to give Him the glory and that we look and act like Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit produces the behavioral change we all need. Paul tells us what the fruits of the Holy Spirit are, **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law"** (Galatians 5:22-23). May you grow in holiness as you look to God for grace and peace when you get angry.

Yours In Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Chris A. Rice".

Chris A. Rice