

**4. Provide a biblical definition of anger. Describe manifestations of anger in both the inner and outer man. Explain the biblical factors that drive anger. Detail several biblical strategies to respond to anger.**

**I. Overview**

- A. Define Anger Biblically
- B. Explore Manifestations of Anger in both the Inner and Outer man.
- C. Explain the Biblical Factors that Drive Anger.
- D. Describe Biblical Strategies & Practical Steps for Responding to Anger.

**II. Define Anger Biblically**

- A. Anger is our whole body's response to a perceived injustice. Anger is something that we do, it's a response, not something that happens to us. We become angry when we sense that something has gone wrong. Maybe our expectations were not met, maybe something we valued was disrespectfully handled, or maybe we were sinned against. For example, maybe someone cut you off in traffic with what seems like no regard for the three children you have in your backseat, let alone your life. Don't they care that they just put the lives of four people in jeopardy? And for what, to get ahead one spot in traffic? If only they valued human life more than getting their car in front of mine...
  - 1. Anger, like most other emotions, should be thought of as a warning light on the dashboard, indicating that something has gone wrong.
  - 2. Semler "When we understand our anger to be our whole being's response, we can evaluate our desires and our thinking, compare it to what the Scriptures teach, and identify unbiblical desires or ways of thinking."<sup>1</sup>
- B. Anger is not always sinful.
  - 1. Mack "Is it always a sin to be angry? Some people sincerely believe that it's always a sin to be angry. . . The truth of the matter is that *anger is sometimes sinful and sometimes righteous*."<sup>2</sup>
  - 2. Adams "Anger, in and of itself, is not sinful. We learn this from Paul's careful distinction between *being angry* and *sinning*."<sup>3</sup>
    - a. "Anger [in contrast to rage], however, is a very necessary and useful reaction . . . Anger is appropriate as a communication of feeling in reaction to another's behavior."<sup>4</sup>
    - b. Adams "All emotions, however, can *become* destructive when we fail to express them in harmony with biblical limitations and structures."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Matt Semler, *How to Handle Anger Biblically*, from an outline at the 2021 Biblical Counseling Conference at Cross Pointe Church.

<sup>2</sup> Wayne Mack, *Anger & Stress Management God's Way*, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual*, 348.

<sup>4</sup> E. Mansell Pattison, in Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual*,

<sup>5</sup> Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual*, 349.

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- c. **James 1:20** *For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.*

### C. What is sinful anger?

1. Mack “. . . anger that is displeasing to God and destructive to us, other people, and other things,” is sinful anger.<sup>6</sup>
2. Mack “*Our anger is sinful when we become angry for the wrong reasons. In many cases, our anger is aroused because of our selfishness. Selfish anger is always a sin. Cain’s anger toward his brother Abel was a sinfully selfish anger (see Gen. 4).*”<sup>7</sup>
3. Mack “*Our anger is sinful when we allow our anger to control us. . . An uncontrolled spirit can be as destructive to our souls as an attacking army is to a city.*”<sup>8</sup>
  - a. **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.*
  - b. **Proverbs 25:28** *A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.*

## III. Explore the Manifestation of Anger in both the Inner and Outer Man

- A. Lou Priolo describes the inner man as the heart, what is found within the person. What are their desires, motives, goals, values, etc.? The outer man is described as the body, lips, mouth, tongue, etc.<sup>9</sup>
1. **Matt 12:33-35** “*Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.*
- B. Anger can manifest both in our inner and outer man. When someone experiences anger in the outer man, they may blow up, they may yell at someone or something, or they may throw things. Their body will experience changes with the release of adrenaline and other hormones. Another common phenomenon is that the person cannot think properly, as if parts of their brain have shut down. Even if they respond in anger, their emotional energy was likely completely wasted sinfully.
- C. When someone experiences anger in the inner man, they may clam up and harbor feelings of resentment and bitterness in their hearts toward the person or object, the source of their anger. Overtime, this resentment and bitterness will
1. Adams “Righteous anger can become unrighteous anger in two ways: (1) by the *ventilation* of anger; (2) by the *internalization* of anger. These two extremes are known more popularly as *blowing up* and *clamming up*. When one blows

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<sup>6</sup> Wayne Mack, *Anger & Stress Management God’s Way*, 13.

<sup>7</sup> Wayne Mack, *Anger & Stress Management God’s Way*, 13.

<sup>8</sup> Wayne Mack, *Anger & Stress Management God’s Way*, 19.

<sup>9</sup> Lou Priolo, *The Heart of Anger*, 91.

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up, his emotional energies are aimed and fired at someone else. When he clams up, bodily tensions are released within oneself. In both cases, the emotional energies of anger are wasted. In both they *are* used ‘destructively.’ In neither instance are they used constructively to solve problems.”<sup>10</sup>

D. **Manifestations of anger in the inner man.** This occurs anytime “. . .an individual directs their anger inward rather than using it to solve the problem.”<sup>11</sup>

### 1. Fretting, Brooding, and Resentment

a. **Psalm 37:7-8** *Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices! Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.*

1) Mack “*Fret* is not a word that we use much anymore, but it means to constantly think through distressing events in one’s mind while giving those events a negative slant. To put it in the words of Proverbs 30:33, fretting involves churning your displeasure into anger in the same way the milk is churned into butter. It means constantly dwelling on some personal slight until what started as a small annoyance is built up into an enormous offense.”<sup>12</sup>

2) Westerberg “When a person is displaying the fruits of bitterness, they are revealing their own heart (Matt 15:17-20).”<sup>13</sup>

3) Westerberg “A failure, or resistance, to forgive reveals a heart that is proud and arrogant. Furthermore, it reveals their lack of understanding of how much they have been forgiven by Jesus Christ (Matt 8:23-35).”<sup>14</sup>

### 2. Our anger is sinful when we pretend that we are not angry.

a. **Ephesians 4:25** *Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.*

1) Mack “Many times I have said to husbands and wives who I’m counseling, ‘You are an angry person. You are filled with bitterness against your spouse.’ They respond, ‘Me? I’m not angry! I’m not bitter!’ Even as they say the words, their faces become red and their fists clench. Some of them have almost pounded my desk and declared, ‘I’m not angry!’”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual*, 349-350.

<sup>11</sup> Matt Semler, *How to Handle Anger Biblically*, from an outline at the 2021 Biblical Counseling Conference at Cross Pointe Church.

<sup>12</sup> Wayne Mack, *Anger & Stress Management God’s Way*, 25-26.

<sup>13</sup> Randy Westerberg, *Bitterness & Forgiveness*, From *A God-Centered Marriage*.

<sup>14</sup> Randy Westerberg, *Bitterness & Forgiveness*, From *A God-Centered Marriage*.

<sup>15</sup> Wayne Mack, *Anger & Stress Management God’s Way*, 30.

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### E. Manifestations of anger in the outer man.

1. Returning Evil for Evil, Attacking the Person with whom we are Angry.
  - a. **Proverbs 29:11** *A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back.*
  - b. Mack “When people have this type of anger . . . everyone knows it immediately, because they cannot contain this anger. These people give vent to their anger as soon as they feel it . . . ”<sup>16</sup>
2. Attacking or hurting a substitute.
  - a. **Exodus 32:19** *And as soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain.*
  - b. **Numbers 20:11** *And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice, and water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock.*
    - 1) Mack “Moses was angry with the people for grumbling and complaining, so he took his anger out on the rock as a substitute. It was sinful anger, and God punished Moses for it by not allowing him to enter the Promised Land.”<sup>17</sup>
3. Outbursts of Anger.
  - a. Semler “Blowing up is an uncontrolled explosion of anger directed at someone or something. This includes yelling, throwing things, physical abuse, breaking things, temper tantrums, road rage, throwing a fit . . . ”, etc.<sup>18</sup>
  - b. Semler “Some Secular Psychologists have advised their patients to take a pillow and pretend it's the individual they are angry at and go ahead and hit or beat the pillow until they get their anger out. This is not only a ‘blow up’ of anger but it is murder of that person in their heart.”<sup>19</sup>

### IV. Explain the Biblical Factors that Drive Anger

- A. Priolo “We have angry conflicts with one another because our pleasures (desires which are not necessarily sinful in and of themselves) have become so intense that they are at war within our members. The term to ‘wage war’ is a word that has as its root the idea of becoming ‘encamped.’ When our desires (as good as they may be) become so strong that they ‘camp out’ in our hearts, those desires (as good as they may be) become sinful, idolatrous desires; not because they are sinful desires in themselves, but because they are

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<sup>16</sup> Wayne Mack, *Anger & Stress Management God's Way*, 34.

<sup>17</sup> Wayne Mack, *Anger & Stress Management God's Way*, 37.

<sup>18</sup> Matt Semler, *How to Handle Anger Biblically*, from an outline at the 2021 Biblical Counseling Conference at Cross Pointe Church.

<sup>19</sup> Matt Semler, *How to Handle Anger Biblically*, from an outline at the 2021 Biblical Counseling Conference at Cross Pointe Church.

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desired *inordinately*. Our hearts covet them so intensely that we are willing to sin (war and fight) either in order to obtain them or because we are not able to obtain them.”<sup>20</sup>

- B. **Internal factors** that drive anger include judgments and demands. When we demand that something occur as we desire, and someone ignores our demand, we can become angry. We can also become angry if we conclude that someone doesn't care about something we value greatly, we can become angry. Both of these are internal factors that drive our anger.
  - C. **External factors** that drive anger include injustices or being sinned against. When a husband is caught in an adulterous relationship, the wife has been sinned against, and she will likely feel a great deal of emotions, one of which is anger. When someone deliberately excludes someone from the group, they may feel angry. These, and other, external factors can drive our anger.
  - D. When you consider internal or external factors, you must also understand that the individual has established motives, goals, desires, and preferences that are the precursor to the perceived wrong suffered. If the individual does not value anything, has no goals, and desires nothing, it would be difficult to illicit a response from them, let alone anger. They have to care about something to get angry about it.
- V. **Describe Biblical Strategies & Practical Steps for Responding to Anger**
- A. Directing the individual to take responsibility for their sinful anger.
    - 1. Foster an environment in which all things are viewed through the biblical lens. This must include objectively viewing one's anger through this lens. Do not allow your counselees to minimize or make excuses for their anger.<sup>21</sup>
  - B. Allow time and space for grace when attempting to identify the root cause.
    - 1. **Ephesians 4:26** *Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,*
    - 2. There are times when a couple will identify an issue that is problematic to solve in one day. Maybe more information is needed to understand the problem, maybe more info is needed to make a biblical decision about how to proceed. Maybe the overwhelming feelings that accompany anger are prohibiting your ability to make a decision biblically. Taking time to think about the issue or meditating on the circumstances can significantly help a couple in dealing with the underlying issue. One thing is for certain, making emotion-based decisions in the heat of anger is almost certainly not going to help.
  - C. The Conference Table
    - 1. Our counseling ministry has used a tool that was developed by Jay Adams to help people learn to both communicate biblically and resolve problems. This tool, if adhered to properly, vastly restricts our ability to respond to situations

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<sup>20</sup> Lou Priolo, *The Heart of Anger*, 105-106.

<sup>21</sup> Matt Semler, *How to Handle Anger Biblically*, from an outline at the 2021 Biblical Counseling Conference at Cross Pointe Church.

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angrily and allows for a biblical approach to resolving problems. (See Attached).

D. Response to fretting, brooding, or dwelling on past mistreatments.

1. **1 Corinthians 13:5** *It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged.* (NLT)
  - a. Continually dwelling on past mistreatments leads a heart to bitterness and resentment. Martha Peace states, “Bitterness grows when you take into account a wrong suffered.”<sup>22</sup>

E. Inculcating Godly Motives in Your Heart

1. Priolo “The ultimate answer to this question in every case out to be the glorify God. . . A Christian’s first love should be love for the Lord his God that exudes from his heart, mind, soul, and strength (Luke 10:27). This ought to be the supreme motive for everything that a Christian does. He may have in his heart good and noble motives in addition, but this love must be preeminent.”<sup>23</sup>
  - a. **2 Corinthians 5:9** *So whether we are at home or away, we make it out aim to please him.*

## VI. Suggested Reading

- A. Wayne Mack, *Anger & Stress Management God’s Way*, 9-40.
- B. Lou Priolo, *The Heart of Anger*, 90-121.
- C. Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor’s Manual*, 348-267; 368-374
- D. Stuart Scott, *Anger, Anxiety & Fear*.

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<sup>22</sup> Martha Peace, *The Excellent Wife: A Biblical Perspective*, 92.

<sup>23</sup> Lou Priolo, *The Heart of Anger*, 113-114.

## The Conference Table

*The Conference Table is a tool developed by Jay Adams to help people to learn to both communicate biblically and to resolve problems.*

### Directions:

1. Find a quiet place to talk in your home, preferably with a table. Make it a place you do not typically use.
2. Have **Ephesians 4:25-32** and the Four Rules of Communication written out and posted, so they are easy to see while you have your conference.
3. Husbands, Read **Ephesians 4:25-32** out loud before you begin. Then read the Four Rules of Communication, then lead in prayer.
4. Wives, record the problem(s) you discuss and your biblical solution(s).
5. You must talk for more than 15 minutes but not over 30 minutes.
6. If your spouse breaks any Four Rules of Communication (anger, lying, rolling the eyes, bad tones, etc.), raise your hand, but do not speak.
7. If your spouse raises their hand, you have violated a rule of communication. Do not try to deny it or justify yourself! Believe them!
8. When your spouse raises their hand, you must figure out how you communicated sinfully. After a reasonable period of time, if you cannot figure it out, they can tell you, but it is better if you figure it out yourself!
9. Once you realize how you sinfully communicated, confess your sin to your spouse and ask them specifically to forgive you. Once they have forgiven you, resume the discussion.
10. Use this as an opportunity to concentrate on resolving a problem rather than fighting and learning how you communicate sinfully. You may discover that you were sinning against your spouse in ways you were blind to!
11. When you are finished, husbands, lead in prayer. Thank God for what you each discovered about how you communicate and thank God for any problems you resolved.
12. If your problem wasn't resolved in 30 minutes, end the session and resume the discussion about this problem at the next conference table. Practice "putting off" sinful communication and "putting on" biblical communication.