

Anger

“There are so many injustices and offenses in the world, how can I *not* be angry?”

We get angry too easily, and we justify our anger way too easily. Sure, we live in an unrighteous world. And sure, people have a sin nature and they express it wantonly, so offenses freely come. And sure, our society not only deliberately wants us to be angry (if not outraged), but it will certainly turn up the heat very shortly in the effort to make us angrier than ever. It's a good time right now to ask, Is it OK to be angry? Or not OK?

This is a timely matter because our news media increasingly – almost continually – publish articles deliberately intended to provoke people. Marxists *want* people to be not merely angry but enraged at the injustices in society that they pretend to be able to correct. Conservative news media do the same to keep viewers/readers engaged. Political involvement in the church has reached a point at which I see only anger resulting. Anti-theists in the culture and in government plot new strategies to isolate and silence Christians, and we need to ask, Is anger at their machinations appropriate? Or necessary? Or wrong? There's more to this issue than just controlling our emotions. So, let's discuss anger. It's important for our sanctification.

First, let's look at some examples of anger in the Bible. Cain was angry because God didn't accept his offering but did accept that of Abel. Instead of being angered (Gen 4:5b), he should have tried to discern the reason for the difference. His anger led him to kill his brother and a resultant judgment. That was misplaced, inappropriate, or disordered anger. In contrast, when Moses descended Mt. Sinai with the Ten Commandments, he was filled with anger at the Israelites worshipping the golden calf, so he demolished the tablets (Exod 32:19). That was righteous anger, fully appropriate. Jacob had to wait for the anger of his brother, Esau, to subside (Gen 27:44). Esau's anger was reasonable, for Jacob stole the birthright from him, but that anger was excessive, and it denied that God was exerting His holy will in that circumstance. King Xerxes was filled with anger when Queen Vashti refused to obey his command (Esther 1:12). His anger undoubtedly was due to his power over others being frustrated. A more sensitive person would have tried to understand her concern. And in that narrative, Haman was filled with anger at Mordecai (3:5,9). Haman's problem was pride and lust for power and honor. His anger was totally wrong and it eventually got him executed. But most instances of anger in the O.T. are God's fury at His people forsaking Him and going instead after idols. In Zechariah (8:2), God also says He is angered at those who seek to destroy His beloved people, Israel. God's anger is righteous.

In the N.T., anger is eschewed or, better, denounced, forbidden. “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger . . . along with every form of malice” (Eph 4:31; also Col 3:8). “I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing” (1 Tim 2:8). We're not to be given over to anger. If we're in Christ, controlled by the Spirit, we're to express Christ's lovely character, and Jesus is a gentle [the opposite of angry] and humble Person. Only once in the Bible does it say that Jesus was angry. In Mark 3:5, Jesus was angry at the Pharisees who had no concern, no love or compassion, for the man in need of healing. Their human contrived rules regarding Sabbath observance were more important to them. Jesus healed the man, and He then, in radical love, went to the cross so that healing could also come to those Pharisees. When Jesus “cleansed” the Temple of money-changers, that wasn't done in anger but to fulfill His prophesied Messianic and kingly role. In fact, Jesus specifically instructed His followers in the Sermon on the Mount NOT to be angry (Matt 5:22). “Do not judge” (7:1) means don't be critical of others; if we're not to be critical, that would also exclude anger. If we're to love our enemies (5:43), that too would exclude anger. And if we're to be forgiving of others' offenses (6:14), anger is certainly excluded. We're to leave anger to God (Rom 12:19; 1 Thess 2:16; John 3:36; Eph 5:6 and Col 3:6). Scripture is plain enough. Still, we get angry.

I offer the following thoughts regarding why we get angry and what to do about it. They're not in any special order. I encourage readers to reflect on these, because, even if they make us uncomfortable, many of these probably apply to us. Our goal, after all, is a mature and perfect faith, regardless what it takes to attain it.

-- Although we may allege that it's OK to get angry at injustices, recall that the greatest injustice of all time was when evil men put the incarnate Son of God to a humiliating and agonizing death on a cross. Jesus submitted to that exceedingly unjust deed knowing that His Father in heaven would reverse the injustice and vindicate His submissiveness. He didn't burst out with anger at the Jewish leaders nor even at Rome. So with us: We need to acknowledge and live with the fact that in this sin-saturated world ruled by Satan and his wicked minions, unrighteousness prevails and injustice rules. That's true even in America, which is just another of the Gentile nations on earth under the dominion of Satan and under God's condemnation. In God's timing, Christ will return to set up His Kingdom of righteousness and

peace. Until then, we need simply to busy ourselves with faithfully carrying out what God ordained and revealed in Scripture that we should be doing.

-- The fact that we get angry over the many cultural, societal, and political issues that continually erupt, however ugly they may be, indicates that we're too engaged with the world—*way* too engaged. If we suspect that our property, or our freedoms, or our way of life is being threatened, instead of getting angry we should thank God for the privilege of being persecuted. (But let's be sure we're being persecuted for identifying with Christ, and not because we're a Republican, or a Trump supporter, or whatever.) We have no rights that need to be defended with anger. We have only the right to give up everything, even our lives, for Christ. And we should be willing to do that with peace and with exceeding joy.

-- Many things that get us angry are really not that important. If we were to write down the issue and then go back, say, two weeks later and revisit the issue, we might be embarrassed or feel silly that we got angry over it. We get angry too often as a reaction to an affront to our will. We're self-obsessed (an aspect of our indwelling sin nature), and the anger erupts because *my* honor is at stake, or *my* expectations, or *my* understanding of things. We need to be yielded to the Holy Spirit, whose fruit is love, joy, peace, gentleness, long-suffering and self-control (Gal 5:22).

-- We need to be extremely careful about not getting angry at other people. All humans (and that includes even our enemies, even those with profound disabilities, even those with ugly personalities or evil in their hearts) are made in the image of God. That fact should powerfully control our relationships with others. God made each human, placing something of Himself or that reflected Himself in that person, and we therefore must esteem other people with the highest regard. Never contempt. We therefore should react to offenses – however hurtful – with kindness and love. We show grace. We make allowances for other people's faults and sins. That's what God did for us! Yes, people will in one way or another disappoint us. Or they will offend us or hurt us. So what! We're already on our way to unimaginably wonderful glory (1 Corinth 2:9-10).

-- Politics must be avoided. Absolutely! Politics is all about power, which means those who are threatened get angry and sense the need to respond in kind. Politics breeds cynicism. And it breeds contempt if not outright hate. So politics corrupts us. It doesn't merely distract us. Its focus is always on the State, which desires to be a god. So involvement in politics borders on or merges into idolatry. Politics is for pagans. We who are in Christ, however, are to live our present lives in the light of eschatology. God's Kingdom will come, in His time and in His way, and that's what our great desire should be. We're not living now in that Kingdom, we're in just another of the pagan nations on earth, where we're aliens and strangers (1 Peter 2:11). We need to trust ourselves to God and to His promises, which means submitting to circumstances as if He intended them for us for our good. Justice in this world – or the lack thereof – is God's responsibility. If there's something we can do to promote it, of course we can do our part. We don't want to be indifferent to wrongs. (For example, we can send funds to the International Justice Mission.) But responding with anger fails to trust in a sovereign God.

-- Anger is a power expression. It makes us feel good, or even great. Or virtuous. Some people are habitually disposed to angry outbursts. It's a subtle form of control; we need always to be in control of things. I would suggest that it's a form of narcissism. It flows out of exuberant pride. If we're in Christ, we need to practice humility, self-effacement, and generosity for others. Instead of angry responses, we could go to prayer and offer to God a lament. We could offer intercessory prayer. That's a biblical response. We're going to live in the future in *shalom*, in peace in the presence of the Lord. So we need to start practicing it now. Anger is for pagans, not for those who are (supposed to be) putting on the new man in Christ.

-- The martyrs of the church didn't (and don't) harbor resentment or anger at those who tortured and killed them. They prayed for them. They rested in the written promises of the Lord. And they learned something that's so radical we don't even know what it means (although we sing hymns about it, uncomprehendingly): surrender to God's will. This is not helplessness, nor apathy, nor despair. It's a silent but powerful trust in the living God who raised Jesus from the dead and who promised likewise to raise and exalt us.

-- Finally this: We need constantly to keep in mind the BIG picture. We too easily get hung up on things that are inconsequential. The BIG picture is God's great cosmic mission to save people who're in the grip of Satan by reaching out to them with the gospel, so they can spend eternity in the joy of the Lord rather than in hell. We need to use much discernment as to what may be worthy of anger (if anything is) *versus* what's irrelevant. If we're faithfully and wholeheartedly participating with God in His great mission of love, we'll find it hard to get angry over anything.