

Thinking Biblically About Anger

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[0 : 00] What one word would you use to describe the current climate in this country? Just think about it a moment. One word that you think accurately describes the overall climate in this country.

How about the word angry? I think the word angry or anger describes the current climate of our country at this moment in time.

According to some headlines of major newspapers, other people think the same thing. For an example, from the Wall Street Journal at the 1st of June, anger and unrest sweep across the U.S. From the Washington Post near the end of June, Americans are living in a big anger incubator. That article describes how anger is a common response to three major problems that Americans have been forced to deal with this year.

Note this quote. According to psychiatrist Joshua Morgenstein, the country is now dealing with three disasters superimposed on top of one another.

[1 : 24] The pandemic, the economic fallout, and civil unrest. Certainly one way of responding and a common way of responding is anger, said Morgenstein.

Now, anger is not only a common way of responding to major disasters in our country. It's also a common way of responding to minor disappointments in our personal lives.

For example, do you ever go to Walmart and you notice there are eight checkout lanes closed? Two open and a long line in each one of those.

Does that ever make you angry? Think about this past week. Did your spouse, your child, your parent, your friend, your co-worker, that they say or do something that just didn't set well with you? And you unleashed your anger on them? Anger is a common response to many of life's major and minor injustices, irritations, and disappointments.

[2 : 48] Jerry Bridges points out that it's a common response, too common a response maybe, in our lives as Christians. Look at what he says.

Anger is a universal problem. 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, it is true even in our Christian homes and churches. Anger is often directed toward those we should love most, our spouse, children, parents, or siblings in our human families, and those who are our brothers and sisters in Christ in our church families.

Now you think about it. Sinful anger. Sinfully expressed anger causes all kinds of divisions and destruction in our country, in our homes, and in our personal relationships.

Therefore, I think it will be helpful for us this morning to think biblically about the problem of anger and how God will help us to deal with it and control it if we want to.

[4 : 15] See, that's the key. He's not going to make us. We've got to see it as the problem it is. Look to Him for help and then use His help.

Take it. Now, before we begin, I want to make it real clear. Anger is a complex issue. There's no way that it could be dealt with adequately in a single sermon or even a series of sermons.

Let me say this. A person with frequent and intense anger that often leads to physically or emotionally abusive behavior needs the help of a real Christian counselor or maybe even, and maybe even a medical doctor.

So hear that clearly. If you have a real problem with frequent and intense anger that results in physically or emotionally abusive behavior, do something about it.

Seek help. And I would encourage you to seek a good Christian counselor first. Now, the focus of this message is to deal with some of the more common aspects of anger that we as Christians struggle with.

[5 : 44] Some of us struggle more than others. Let's think about it. Two questions. Number one, why do we struggle with anger at times? Why do we as Christians struggle with sinful anger and angry outbursts?

Well, if you do a study of anger using Christian or secular sources, you're going to find that many people describe a list of what they call causes of anger.

Some of them are very helpful. Jerry Bridges summarizes the cause of anger. It's a simple approach, what he's trying to do. He's not trying to be a Christian counselor. But he summarizes the causes of anger under three categories.

Pride. Personal pride. Selfishness. And a desire to control. A desire to control the people and the situations that we find ourselves in.

Now, that can be a helpful list. It may be that you can look at that and you can identify a source or sources of your sinful anger just by that little list.

[7 : 04] And if so, good. That's the first step to properly deal with it. But I want us to look at something James White does in helping us to identify anger.

He takes another approach by helping us identify the sources of our anger in terms of things we believe that are wrong.

In his book, *Long Night's Journey Into Day*, White says that most of our anger arises because of three myths or false assumptions, or you can't use the word illusions, or even lies, three myths we believe about life.

That's how I want us to begin looking at anger. Number one, we get angry because we believe the myth that the world and everyone in it should be dedicated to doing what is in my best interest.

Now, look at that statement. Here's the myth in that. We think life is all about me. We think the world should revolve around me.

[8 : 09] Now, we would never say it that way. We would never admit it. But how often do we act like everyone around us, everything around us should be focused on me, should be centered on me?

I'll be honest. Sometimes I get behind somebody going slow in the fast lane, or I'm just down a two-lane road, like going to Anderson on 178, somebody's going 35 miles an hour.

I truly believe that person ought to pull over and stop and let me get around. I'll be honest with you. Sometimes I get angry when they don't.

Now, don't anybody look at me like that's never happened to you. Lying is a sin we can look at next week if necessary. Now, just the Walmart situation.

When you go in there and it's crowded, long line to check out, you see all these empty lanes, all these unstaffed cash registers, you think to yourself, they should open another checkout lane for me.

[9 : 30] And when things like that do not happen, we get angry. The myth, the world should revolve around me. Everyone should sit up and take notice of me.

The truth is, things don't always go our way. In fact, life rarely works the way we want it to. Most people don't make us the center of their world.

You know, some people struggle with paranoia. I hope you don't, because most people don't think about you. They don't talk about you.

They don't care about you. Don't be paranoid. If you're sitting in that pew, and you see somebody sitting over here, and you stay there whispering, some people think they're whispering about me.

No, they're not thinking about you. They're thinking about where they're going to eat, and the service is over. They're not thinking about you. Life does not revolve around you or me.

[10 : 32] There are very few people who will ever even have the thought of making life better for you or making you the center of their world. Jesus helps us to understand that we live in a fallen, sinful world that is not for us, especially as Christians, or as Christians, is what He's talking about.

Look in John 16, 33. Jesus said this, talking to His disciples, preparing them for the persecution that was to come in the near future, but also as they took the gospel to the ends of the world, He's preparing them.

He says, I have said these things to you that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but take heart. I have overcome the world.

What we need to understand as Christians is the world's not our friend. The world rejects our king. The Lord Jesus.

The world rejects our source of truth. The Bible. If you desire to live a faithful Christian life in this world, I mean to really follow Christ, seek God's will, do things His way, that's not going to make your life easy.

[11:59] When Jesus said what we saw on the board there, we should expect opposition. We should expect opposition to the world. We should expect even real persecution, even as Christians living in this country today.

Now, on a more general level, we need to accept the fact that life in this world is not fair. Surely, if you are in your 40s, absolutely if you're in your 50s or older, you have learned that life's not fair. If you haven't, where have you been? If you haven't, how have you missed it? A lot of people, children, teenagers, young adults, sometimes have this idealistic view of life and for some reason think life is fair.

Life is fair for me. It's not. As I said a few weeks ago, fair is where you go to ride rides and eat cotton candy. Fair is not what you're going to experience in this world.

So, we need to reject the myth that life is all about me. Myth number two, we get angry because we believe the myth that our anger is caused by external circumstances.

[13:29] Here's the myth. We think that other people or our circumstances make us angry. Haven't you said things like, he makes me so mad.

She infuriates me. That makes me livid. We say things like that. We believe things like that. But that's a myth.

The truth is, no one makes us angry. Our anger comes from within. Within us, our heart, our mind. Anger is an internal reaction to some kind of external event.

You know, we have looked over the last several weeks at several things Jesus talked about that helps us understand that what comes out of us, what comes out of our mouth, our, these kind of things like anger, it originates from what's within us.

Here's a good example. Jesus said, the good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good. And the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil.

[14:43] For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. What comes out is an indication of what is inside us.

Anger is an emotion. It originates from within us. Now, here's something that I know some people have been, you know, you're thinking to yourself, you're arguing with me. Here's where we're going to agree on this.

Some people know how to push our anger buttons. Don't they? Some people know what to say, what to do.

is going to spark that angry feeling, emotion, and probably outburst. Some people know how to push your anger button to make you lose control, to put them in control, to give them more power. Some children know how to push the anger button of their parents. They get mad, they blow up, they lose control. That is a fact.

[16:02] Some people know how to push our anger buttons, but we control how we respond. We really can't blame other people or other things when we erupt in anger.

They may have made the situation more difficult for us. Bottom line, though, we're responsible for how we respond. We're responsible for the words that come out of our mouths.

We're responsible for the way we express our emotions, including our anger. So, reject the myth that your anger is caused by external circumstances.

Myth number three, we get angry because we believe the myth that anger is a force beyond our control. Here's the myth. We think we can't help it when we lose our temper.

We make excuses for why we lose our temper, for why we get angry and say and do things. I was tired.

[17:11] It had been a long day. I'm under a lot of stress. You just would not believe the stress that I experience at my job.

Or, I'm just a hot-tempered person. That's just how I was made. As if God is at fault for your anger. The truth is, we can control our angry reactions. The Bible teaches us repeatedly that we are responsible for our actions, including controlling our anger.

And I want you to note what James says, and he's writing a letter to Christians and telling them what to control. Look at this. Know this, my beloved brothers, let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Now, for James to write that to Christians means we can control our anger. It also means, let me back up a moment, anger can be a problem for Christians.

[18 : 27] James is writing in the first century. Every New Testament letter deals with problems in the life of the church. and the life of individual Christians.

So, when you read that, James was aware that some people in the church, they're quick-tempered. And so, he tells them to be slow to anger.

And he tries to give them a reason, for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. The reason he can tell us that as Christians is because we are indwelt with the Spirit of God. We can successfully control our emotions like anger and prevent emotions like anger from controlling us.

Reject the myth that anger is a force beyond your control. Now, if you often deal with sinful anger, anger, and the sinful expressions of that anger, I want to encourage you to be open and honest with God about that.

And first of all here, ask God to help you to identify the source of your anger. Think about it. Spend some time today. Pray about it.

[19 : 53] In light of what we've said, is it your pride, your selfishness, your desire to control everyone and everything in your life? Is that what causes the anger that you have to deal with so much?

Or is the source of your anger coming from the fact that you believe you have false assumptions about how life works that we just looked at? Once we start identifying the source of our anger and accept our responsibility for dealing with it, expressing that emotion appropriately, then we'll be ready to start working on controlling it.

And that's the next question. How do we control our anger? Well, I'm going to say this to begin with. Just as the causes of anger are complex, so is the solution. There is no easy solution. There is no one prayer that you can pray and all of a sudden your anger is gone.

I would have prayed that a long time ago. if that was true. There is no secret formula, no biblical formula that you do this, this, this, and it will eliminate all your sinful expressions of anger.

That does not exist. But with God's help, there are things we can do to help us better control our anger and control how we express it.

[21 : 23] So let's look. First, accept the fact that most of our anger is sinful anger. How do we control our anger? First of all, accept most of our anger is sinful anger.

Now I say that because some anger is good, healthy, appropriate. All anger is not sinful. I want you to look at this verse, verses from Ephesians 4.

Be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil.

It's right to be angry sometimes. It's right to be angry because sometimes God's angry. Jesus did some things and showed his anger like when he cleansed the temple, like when he dealt with some of the hypocritical Pharisees.

Jesus was angry and it was good that he was angry. There's some things in life that should move us to the right kind of anger.

[22 : 31] Things that violate God's moral will. When I say that, that's what the Bible reveals in terms of how God wants us to live. That's God's moral will.

He wants us to be people who speak the truth. He wants us to love one another. He wants us to forgive one another. He wants us to have the right kind of relationships in our home between husbands and wives and parents and children.

But we've got to be very careful that when we express our righteous anger, we do it in an inappropriate way.

We are never justified to express righteous anger in an unrighteous way. James Robbins in a USA Today article points out how the justified anger that peaceful protesters express following George Floyd's killing has been overshadowed by the unjustified angry response of violence and destruction.

I want you to note what he says. Peaceful protests over George Floyd's killing have been overshadowed by images of rage-fueled violence and destruction.

[23 : 47] Resorting to rioting is strange because there is little disagreement that Floyd's death in custody was senseless and criminal. Few defend the police who were responsible.

They were quickly fired. One has been charged with murder. And the Justice Department has opened an investigation into the tragedy. Everyone is on the same side of this issue. Yet, rioting sparked and spread. There is no rational purpose behind people burning buildings, torching cars, breaking windows, spray painting obscenities, and the other actions that have left city blocks looking like war zones.

Some say these are expressions of anger and frustration and maybe so. But they are also unjustified, foolish, and counterproductive. Now, I want you to think of your anger issues. Think personally. There may be occasions when you are justifiably angry.

[24 : 59] But if we're honest, that's rarely true. It's possible. And sometimes we may be justifiably angry.

But if I'm honest, most of my anger is not justifiable. More often than not, our expressions of anger are unjustified, foolish.

That is, they're irrational. And they are counterproductive. Similar to the anger of rioters and looters. But our anger is more on a personal level.

Or on a family level. On a much, much smaller scale level. But it's just as sinful.

Just as wrong. Therefore, the first thing we need to do is to get control of, the first thing we need to do in order to get control of our anger is to stop justifying it.

[26 : 04] Just admit, most of our anger is sinful anger. So instead of trying to justify it, confess it as the sin that it is against God.

And after you do that, confess it as the sin that it is against the person you exploded on. A lot of times that's a whole lot more difficult.

But that's necessary. Yes, we confess our sin to God because ultimately all sin is against God. But we need to also learn to confess our sin to those we wrong and be humble about it and seek their forgiveness.

We not only need to confess it, agree with God, we need to repent of it. We need to change our mind about the way we're acting. About unleashing our anger just because we want to.

It helps us to get it out or whatever. We need to change our mind and turn from our sinful pride or selfishness or controlling desires in order to overcome anger.

[27 : 26] We've got to stop believing lies that everything's supposed to go our way. That someone else is responsible for my anger. Or that I can't help it when I explode in rage.

Then we need to draw near to God. We need to ask Him to fill us afresh with His Spirit. I'm talking about if we want to overcome our anger.

Everybody doesn't. But if you as a Christian want to be right with God, right with other people when it comes to how you deal with these kind of emotions, if you want to overcome your anger issues, learn to live each day in dependence upon God.

Trusting Him. Let's look at three things. Number one, trust that God's in control of this world and your life. Sometimes I've said it like this, trust that God is sovereign.

Stop blaming other people and circumstances for your anger. You know, God does not cause other people to sin against you, but He certainly allows it. God does not intervene and keep everyone from doing things that push your button.

[28 : 48] God does not intervene in every life situation and prevent people from driving slow in the fast lane so that you won't get angry. The life of Joseph is in Genesis 35 through 50, those chapters.

It illustrates this, the best, probably the best in the Bible. Joseph was truly a man of God, but he was betrayed by his brothers and sold into slavery.

He was taken to a foreign land. He became a slave in the household of an Egyptian leader. He was mistreated there, thrown in prison, forgotten there even.

Life was hard for Joseph from between the ages of 16, 17 and 30. Everything but fair. Many people would have just been an angry, bitter human being if what happened to Joseph happened to them. But Joseph didn't respond that way. If you read the story in every one of these situations, he remained faithful to the Lord. And at the end, God placed him in a place of power and authority over all of Egypt, just under Pharaoh.

[30 : 07] And in that position of power and authority, he got an opportunity to deal with his brothers. But I want you to look how he responded. Classic statement, Genesis 50, 20.

As for you, he told those brothers, you meant evil against me. But God meant it for good to bring it about that many people should be kept alive as they are today.

God didn't make those brothers do what they did or anyone else in the story. But God worked through their sinful actions, their jealousy. And even though Joseph suffered, God so worked to put him in a position to save his family, literally, which meant to preserve what was going to become the nation of Israel.

This is the way God works in all of his people's lives. Romans 8, 28, a verse that many of you claim very often. And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who've been called according to his purpose.

If we want to learn to deal with anger the right way, we need to learn God's in control. We can trust him. He is in control. Number two, ask God to help you to grow in your love for other people.

[31 : 35] Love really is the key to developing healthy relationships which will help us to guard against unleashing our anger. It won't prevent it, but it will help us to be more cautious, on guard.

I want you to look at something Peter said that a lot of us need to take to heart. Above all, love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins.

A lot of us are too easily offended. A lot of us too easily get our feelings hurt.

Part of that probably where I'm on our sleeve. We're easily offended, easily hurt. And so a lot of times we take things too seriously.

We take things as they were not intended and we get angry. We get bitter. We say and do things that just shouldn't be said and done. If we love people, we'll just learn to let a lot of things go.

[32 : 45] Give people the benefit of the doubt. That is what love does. It covers over a multitude of sins. But look at this. You know this in 1 Corinthians 13. Love is patient.

Love is kind. It is not rude. It is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered. The love that God will give us for one another will motivate us to be more self-controlled.

Including controlling our anger. Number three. Learn to be more sensitive to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Learn to be more sensitive to His presence and obedient to His leading.

In Galatians 5, Paul gives us some very helpful statements about how the Holy Spirit works in our lives. I want you to look at one. So I say, live by the Spirit.

Be obedient to the Spirit. Be sensitive to His presence. Be obedient to His leadership. Live by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. And then he says a little bit later in that chapter, he points out some of the acts of the sinful nature.

[33 : 57] And look at this one. The acts of the sinful nature are obvious. Fits of rage. When we get angry, we lose it. We explode. Fits of rage.

That is all of the sinful nature having its way in us. It's us living like an unbeliever. But when we live under the power of the Holy Spirit, look at this.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, is patience, is kindness, gentleness, and self-control. Self-control. Let's wind it up now. The worst thing that any of us can do this morning is to ignore, deny, or try to justify our sinful anger.

The very worst thing is just ignore it. Pretend this hour never existed. Or deny it. Or justify it.

[34 : 59] If you have a problem with anger, admit it. And ask God to help you to start dealing with it the right way by trusting Him, loving people, and living in dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit who lives within you.

Anger does not, should not, control a Christian. By the grace and power of God that we have as Christians, we can control our anger.

Let's seek God's help and do it. Would you pray with me? Father, show us now how each one of us as individuals need to respond to you, to this message.

How each one of us needs to deal with our anger. Father, help people here who are struggling to identify the source. Help them, Father, to confess the sin, to repent, to seek your forgiveness, to reconcile with those that they're not close to now because of anger.

Help us all, dear God, to learn to truly trust you. Help us to seek your help to grow in our love for other people.

[36 : 26] And Father, help us to desire to live a Spirit-filled, Spirit-controlled life. Help us to seek to consciously be aware of the Holy Spirit's presence in our life and obedient to His leadership.

Let's just, in an attitude of prayer, respond to the Lord as He wants you to. Let's use these next few minutes to do that.