

COMMENTARIES COMPARED:

EXPOSITION ANCIENT & MODERN:

BE ANGRY BUT SIN NOT

By David Lee Burris

How To Be Angry Without Sin

ANGER POSES A PUZZLE for students of the ageless gospel. In some places the New Testament and other early Christian writings oppose it while in others it is allowed, perhaps even considered godly. We will here examine the writings of the earliest Christians on the subject to see if they can be harmonized, or whether the first followers contradicted themselves and each other. Jesus threatened divine judgment against “whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause” (Matt. 5:22). Paul’s letters especially discountenance anger. In 2nd Corinthians 12:20, Ephesians 4:31, and Colossians 3:8, he classifies it with slander. Ephesians and Colossians also lump it with malice. Second Corinthians considers it to be in the same category as jealousy and selfishness. Galatians 5:19–21 includes it in the same class, not only with jealousy and selfishness, but with sexual immorality, idolatry, drunkenness, orgies, and hatred. James 1:20 states “the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.” *First Letter of Clement* and *The Pastor of Hermas*, very early Christian era books recommended by Church leaders as edifying spiritual reading, contain ten separate negative comments against anger. Including “wrath” and “rage.”

Yet anger is a naturally-occurring emotion that comes upon a person whether s/he wants it or not, and is usually sudden and unplanned. It is often unavoidable and was experienced by the best and most exemplary of Bible personages. In the Acts of the Apostles, Paul appears to have been angered by some Jews and pagans on his missionary journeys, while his epistles indicate a similar feeling towards some of his congregations. Hebrews 3:10–11 depict God himself as angry, as does much of the Old Testament. Mark 3:5 states point-blank that Christ was angry, while some people today believe he was angry when casting the moneychangers out of the Temple (Mark 11:15–17 and parallels). Origen, the leading Bible scholar and preacher of the first half of the third century, conceded that even “the perfect” among us experience anger without forethought on their part. He even saw it as beneficial and necessary when it leads to restraining sin, restoring righteousness, and reproaching, correcting, and disciplining sinners. Near the middle period of Origen’s labors, Tertullian, a prominent north African minister, wrote that being unjustly angry and allowing the sun to set on one’s anger were daily and usually unavoidable occurrences.⁷⁸

The New Testament must be interpreted in context, both within its own pages and within the Christian culture that grew up alongside it. We include the earliest non-biblical Christian writings as part of the latter. When taking all these sources as a whole, it appears that what early Christianity taught was that anger should be controlled and dampened down, and that Christians should not allow the involuntary emotion to control their actions or attitudes, not that its occurrence is a sin in itself.

The earliest Christians recognized not so much an outright ban on anger but restrictions and limits so that it would not harm anyone. James 1:19 counsels Christians to be “slow to wrath;” it does not forbid it entirely. The *New International Version* of 1st Corinthians 13:5 states that love “is not *easily* angered.” not that love is never angered.

Ephesians 4:26 is particularly informative: (1) “Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath” indicates that anger itself is not a sin but merely may bring a person closer towards sin, and (2) “let not the sun go down upon your wrath.” The second called forth comments from Origen. He instructed Christians to abandon anger before it causes the sunshine of faith to set upon us and bring spiritual darkness to our souls. Tertullian’s sentiment is stated above.

The ancient use of adjectives also suggests that what was condemned was not the involuntary emotion itself, but anger that has become unjust, furious (both Tertullian), boiling, unmanageable (both Clement of Alexandria), uncontrolled, flaming, irrational or brutal (all Origen). Origen also opposed being drunk with anger or enslaved by it. *The Didache*, a church manual dating from the first century, discountenanced being “of hot temper.” Titus 1:7 indicates that a bishop in particular is to be “not soon angry.”

The fact that some early authors imposed parameters and limits indicate that while they did not approve of anger, they nevertheless did not regard it as an automatic sin. We are to avoid acting under the influence of anger because it may impair our judgment and self-control. Origen counselled Christians to conquer anger in ourselves, chasten ourselves to remove incentives to it, and soften it—say by moderation and meditation. About the same era, a book of testimonies proving that Christianity is better than Judaism instructs people to overcome anger.⁸²

The consensus among Christian writers before AD 1250 appears to be that, while we might be unable to avoid becoming angry, we should make efforts to damp down anger and control it. If this does not work, we should avoid acting under its influence. We must not be *prone* to anger or quick-tempered (Titus 1:7, *Didache* and Origen). Still less should we provoke it in other people (Ephesians 6:4, Clement of Alexandria, Origen), pray under its influence (1st Timothy 2:8, Origen), or reprove someone in anger (*Didache*).

As in so many other ways, Jesus' actions in cleansing the Temple are a model of behavior when angry. His calmness and deliberation show he was not controlled or enslaved by anger. Nor did he prolong the emotion or allow it to interfere with his relationships with other people. In Matthew's account (21:12–14), he immediately returned to his usual healing ministry, while in John 2:13–21 he at once engaged in teaching and a peaceful conversation.

772. Origen *Homilies on Genesis* 1.17, .6.

78. Tertullian, *On Modesty* 19.

79. Origen, *Commentary on Ephesians* 4.26b.

80. *Didache* 3.2 (ANF 7:378).

8110. Origen, *Commentary on Romans* 9.1.3; Origen *Homilies on Joshua* 1.6, .3; Origen *Homilies on Psalm 36* 2.3.

82. *Testimonies against the Jews* 8.¹

¹ Brattston, D. W. T., & Ward, K. (2020). [Bible problems solved by early christians](#). Eugene, Oregon: Resource Publications.



Sin not

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. (Ephesians 4: 26-27)

Barnes' Notes on the Bible

Be ye angry and sin not - It has been remarked that the direction here is conformable to the usage of the Pythagoreans, who were bound, when there were any differences among them, to furnish some token of reconciliation before the sun set. Burder, in Ros. Alt. u. neu. Morgenland, in loc.

It is implied here:

(1) that there "may" be anger without sin; and,

(2) that there is **special danger** in all cases where there is anger that it will be **accompanied with sin**. "Anger" is a passion too common to need any description. It is an excitement or agitation of mind, of more or less violence, produced by the reception of a real or supposed injury, and attended commonly with a desire or purpose of revenge. **The desire of revenge, however, is not essential to the existence of the passion**, though it is probably always attended with a disposition to express displeasure, to chide, rebuke, or punish; compare [Mark 3:5](#). To a great extent the sudden excitement on the reception of an injury is involuntary, and consequently innocent. Anger is excited when a horse kicks us; when a serpent hisses; when we dash our foot against a stone - and so when a man raises his hand to strike us. The "**object or final cause**" of implanting this passion in the mind of man is, to rouse him to an immediate defense of himself when suddenly attacked, and before his reason would, have time to suggest the proper means of defense. It prompts at once to self-protection; and when that is done its proper office ceases. **If persevered in; it becomes sinful malignity**. or revenge - always wrong. Anger may be excited against a "thing" as well as a "person;" as well against an act as a "man." We are suddenly excited by a wrong "thing," without any malignancy against the "man;" we may wish to rebuke or chide "that," without injuring "him."

Anger is sinful in the following circumstances:

(1) When it is excited without any sufficient cause - when we are in no danger, and do not need it for a protection. We should be safe without it.

(2) when it transcends the cause, if any cause really exists. All that is beyond the necessity of immediate self-protection, is apart from its design, and is wrong.

(3) when it is against "the person" rather than the "offence." The object is not to injure another; it is to protect ourselves.

(4) when it is attended with the desire of "revenge." That is always wrong; [Romans 12:17](#), [Romans 12:19](#).

(5) when it is cherished and heightened by reflection. And,

(6) **When there is an unforgiving spirit**; a determination to exact the utmost satisfaction for the injury which has been done. If people were perfectly holy, that sudden "arousing of the mind" in danger, or on the reception of an injury; which would serve to prompt us to save ourselves from danger, would exist, and would be an important principle of our nature. If people were holy, this excitement of the mind would obey the first injunctions of "reasons," and be wholly under its control; as it is now, it seldom obeys reason at all - and is wholly wrong. Moreover, if all people were holy; if there were none "disposed" to do an injury, it would exist only in the form of a sudden arousing of the mind against immediate danger - which would all be right. Now, it is excited not only in view of "physical" dangers, but in view of the "wrongs" done by others - and hence it terminates on the "person" and not the "thing," and becomes often wholly evil.

Let not the sun go down - Do not cherish anger. Do not sleep upon it. Do not harbor a purpose of revenge; do not cherish ill-will against another. "When the sun sets on a man's anger, he may be sure it is wrong." The meaning of the whole of this verse then is, "If you be angry, which may be the case, and which may be unavoidable, see that the sudden excitement does not become sin. Do not let it overleap its proper bounds; do not cherish it; do not let it remain in your bosom even to the setting of the sun. Though the sun be sinking in the west, let not the passion linger in the bosom, but let his last rays find you always peaceful and calm."

Expositor's Greek Testament

[Ephesians 4:26](#). ὀργίζεσθε καὶ μὴ ἁμαρτάνετε: *be ye angry, and sin not*. The words are taken from [Psalm 4:4](#), and follow the LXX rendering. The original Hebrew, וַיִּזְרַח־לִּי וַיִּזְרַח, is rendered by some “Tremble and sin not” (Ewald; AV, “Stand in awe and sin not”), *i.e.*, = “let wholesome fear keep you from this sinful course”; by others, as the LXX gives it (Hitz., Del., etc.). As used by Paul here the words recognise the fact that *anger* has its rightful place and may be a duty, while they indicate also how easily it may pass into the sinful. Great difficulty has been felt with this, and in various ways it has been sought to empty the injunction of its obvious meaning. Some take the first imperative *conditionally*, as if = “if ye are angry, do not sin” (Olsh., Bleek, etc.); others, in a way utterly at variance with the quotation, take ὀργίζεσθε as an *interrogative* (Beza, Grot.); others declare it impossible to take the first command as *direct* (Buttm., *Gram. of N. T. Greek*, p. 290), or deal with the first imper. as *permissive*, and with the second as *jussive* (Winer, De Wette, etc.), as if = “be ye angry if it must be so, but only do not sin”. Such a construction might be allowable if the first imper. were followed by ἀλλὰ καὶ or some similar disjunctive: but with the simple καὶ it is inadmissible. Both impers. are real jussives, the only difference between them being in the μὴ—which also throws some emphasis on the second. The καὶ has here the rhetorical sense which is found also in *atque*, adding something that seems not quite consistent with the preceding or that qualifies it, = “and yet” (*cf.* [Matthew 3:14](#); [Matthew 6:26](#); [Matthew 10:29](#), etc.). Nor is the difficulty in admitting ὀργίζεσθε to be a real injunction of anger anything more than a self-made difficulty. Moralists of different schools, the Stoics excepted, have recognised the place of *anger* in a moral nature; *cf.*, *e.g.*, Plato’s τὸ θυμοειδές; Butler’s statement of the function of anger in a moral system as “a balance to the weakness of pity” and a “counterpoise to possible excess in another part of our nature,” *Sermons*, Carmichael’s ed., pp. 126, 128. A righteous wrath is acknowledged in Scripture as something that not only *may* be but *ought* to be, and is seen in Christ Himself ([Mark 3:5](#)). So Paul speaks here of an anger that is approvable and to be enjoined, while in the καὶ μὴ ἁμαρτάνετε he forbids only a particular form or measure of anger. As the following clause suggests, even a righteous wrath by over-indulgence may pass all too easily into sin.—ὁ ἥλιος μὴ ἐπιδυέτω ἐπὶ τῷ παροργισμῷ ὑμῶν: *let not the sun go down upon your provocation*. For the expression ὁ ἥλιος μὴ ἐπιδυέτω *cf.* [Deuteronomy 24:13](#); [Deuteronomy 24:15](#); [Jeremiah 15:9](#); also Hom., *Il.*, ii., 413, and

Plutarch's statement of the Pythagorean custom—*εἵποτε προαχθεῖεν εἰς λοιδορίας ὑπ ὀργῆς, πρὶν ἢ τὸν ἥλιον δύναι τὰς δεξιὰς ἐμβάλλοντες ἀλλήλοις καὶ ἀσπασάμενοι διέλυνοντο* (*De Am. frat.*, p. 488 B). τῶ, inserted by the TR, is supported by [454] [455] [456] [457] [458]3, etc.; it is omitted by the best critics (LTTTrWHRV) on the authority of [459] [460]1[461], etc. The noun *παροργισμός* occurs only here in the NT; never, as it would appear, in non-biblical Greek; but occasionally in the LXX ([1 Kings 15:30](#); [2 Kings 23:26](#); [Nehemiah 9:18](#)). It differs from *ὀργή* in denoting not the *disposition* of anger or anger as a lasting mood, but *provocation, exasperation*, sudden, violent anger. Such anger cannot be indulged long, but must be checked and surrendered without delay. To suppose any allusion here to sunset as the time for *prayer* or tonight as increasing wrath by giving opportunity of brooding, is to import something entirely foreign to the simplicity of the words as a statement of *limitation*.

[454] Codex Claromontanus (sæc. vi.), a Græco-Latin MS. at Paris, edited by Tischendorf in 1852.

[455] Codex Augiensis (sæc. ix.), a Græco-Latin MS., at Trinity College, Cambridge, edited by Scrivener in 1859. Its Greek text is almost identical with that of G, and it is therefore not cited save where it differs from that MS. Its Latin version, f, presents the Vulgate text with some modifications.

[456] Codex Mosquensis (sæc. ix.), edited by Matthæi in 1782.

[457] Codex Angelicus (sæc. ix.), at Rome, collated by Tischendorf and others.

[458] Codex Sinaiticus (sæc. iv.), now at St. Petersburg, published in facsimile type by its discoverer, Tischendorf, in 1862.

[459] Codex Vaticanus (sæc. iv.), published in photographic facsimile in 1889 under the care of the Abbate Cozza-Luzi.

[460] Codex Sinaiticus (sæc. iv.), now at St. Petersburg, published in facsimile type by its discoverer, Tischendorf, in 1862.

[461] Codex Alexandrinus (sæc. v.), at the British Museum, published in photographic facsimile by Sir E. M. Thompson (1879).

Ephesians 4: ²⁶ "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give **the devil a foothold**.

τόπος; *topos*
a place

SUBJECT OVERVIEW IN PRESENTATION OUTLINE

Title: “Is It Right For You To Be Angry?” By Allen Dvorak

Introduction:

- A. In the story of Jonah, Jonah became angry because the Lord decided to spare the city of Nineveh (3:10-4:1).
 - 1. The Lord asked Jonah if it was right for him to be angry (4:4).
 - 2. The Lord prepared a plant to provide shade for Jonah, but then struck the plant so that it died (4:5-7).
 - 3. Jonah became angry at the death of the plant and God asked him again about the appropriateness of his anger (4:8-9).

- B. Unrestrained anger is a common problem.
 - 1. In the beginning, Cain was angry with his brother Abel and killed him.
 - 2. The devil is motivated by his wrath in his desire to destroy men (Revelation 12:12, 17).
 - 3. From road rage to terrorists, from abusive parents to students on the rampage, we are constantly bombarded by the evidence of uncontrolled, sinful anger.

- C. Purpose:
 - 1. Note the importance of the motivation for anger.
 - 2. Observe the danger inherent in anger.
 - 3. Encourage us to be careful about the way(s) that we express our anger.

Body:

I. Anger – Basic Information

- A. A Pauline Paradox
 - 1. Note these two verses:
 - a. **Ephesians 4:26** "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath,
 - b. **Ephesians 4:31** Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.
 - 2. What are we to do? Put away anger...or be angry??

- B. The resolution of this paradox is seen in some basic information about anger.
 - 1. Anger is a natural, God-given emotion.
 - a. Defined: *"A strong passion or emotion of displeasure, and usually antagonism, excited by a sense of injury or insult; as, to foam with anger."* Webster
 - b. Defined: *"the emotion of self-preservation of [one's] worth, needs, and convictions"* (Carter & Minirth, The Anger Workbook, p. 19)
 - 2. Anger is not always sinful.
 - a. The Lord was often angry with Israel

- (1) At Mount Sinai (Exodus 32:9-10, 11-12; Moses also - vs. 19).
- (2) At Korah's rebellion (Numbers 16:15, 20-22; contrast Moses' anger with that of the Lord!).
- b. While in the flesh, the Son of God became angry and yet is described as being without sin (Mark 3:5; Hebrews 4:15).
3. If anger is sometimes not sinful, what makes it sinful in other instances?
 - a. Look at Jonah's anger in the light of Webster's definition of anger:
 - (1) "A strong passion or emotion of displeasure, and usually antagonism, excited by a sense of injury or insult"
 - (2) Jonah was displeased...because the Lord decided not to destroy the people of Nineveh (Jonah 3:10-4:1).
 - b. The reason for Jonah's displeasure was the physical salvation of the Assyrians – a selfish motive.
 - (1) Jonah understood the danger that Assyria posed for the northern kingdom of Israel.
 - (2) Jonah's anger was aroused by the salvation of the Assyrians and the death of the plant; in other words, he was motivated by self-interest.
 - (3) Through the illustration of the plant, the Lord revealed to Jonah the appropriateness of His concern for the Assyrians (4:10-11).
 - c. The answer to selfishness, of course, is to crucify self (Colossians 3:5-8).

II. The Fruit of Anger

- A. Our study thus far indicates that we must distinguish between anger and its manifestation. While anger is not always sinful, we must also be concerned about the way that we express this strong emotion.
 1. Remember Paul's admonition: "Be angry, and do not sin" (Ephesians 4:26; see also Romans 12:19 – "give place to wrath" – vengeance implies injustice).
 2. Even legitimate anger can result in sinful behavior!
 - a. Moses was clearly angry with the people of Israel in Numbers 20 when they complained about a lack of water (vs. 1-11).
 - b. Although Moses' anger was legitimate (caused by Israel's sinful complaining), he spoke rashly (Psalm 106:32-33) and struck the rock contrary to divine instructions.
 3. The rest of Paul's comment to the Ephesians is designed to help us avoid the error into which Moses fell ("do not let the sun go down on your wrath").
- B. Anger presents several grave dangers:
 1. Hot wrath usually clouds our thinking, causing us to make irrational decisions.
 2. Anger makes it hard for us to listen to others or understand their point of view.
 3. Anger, if uncontrolled or harbored, can lead to bitterness, hatred and/or even violence (Proverbs 29:22 - "*An angry man stirs up strife, and a furious man abounds in transgression*").
- C. While we are born with the capacity to become angry, we choose when we become angry and how we express that anger.

1. “I can’t help it – he makes me so angry!” The truth is that our behavior is not determined by the actions of others. Jesus commanded love for one’s enemies (Matthew 5:44).
2. The way in which we express anger is influenced by several factors, including:
 - a. Our innate temperament
 - b. The examples of others, especially those close to us (friends, parents, etc.)
3. Note the principle of Proverbs 22:24
 - a. *“Make no friendship with an angry man, And with a furious man do not go,²⁵ Lest you learn his ways And set a snare for your soul.”*
 - b. The way that we express our anger is a learned behavior. Often we are greatly influenced by our parents or other adult role models.
4. Parents must be very careful about the way that they express their anger. If the parents manifest uncontrolled anger, it is likely that the children will learn to behave in the same way.
5. Be slow to anger
 - a. **Proverbs 16:32 (ESV)** 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 19:11 (ESV)** ¹¹ **Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.**
 - c. **Ecclesiastes 7:9 (ESV)** ⁹ **Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools.**
 - d. **James 1:19–20 (ESV)** ¹⁹ **Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.**
6. Think Before Acting
 - a. **Psalm 4:4 (ESV)** ⁴ **Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. *Selah***

Conclusion:

- A. The question that the Lord asked Jonah is a really good question for us to ask ourselves about our anger.
- B. Our study has reminded us that we must be careful about the motivation for our anger, lest our anger be sinful in itself, and how we express our anger.

Even Jesus Had A Temper

by [Kyle Butt, M.Div.](#)

In most circumstances, Jesus chose to use gentle words and peaceful measures to take care of the Father's business. But on at least one occasion, aggressive action ruled the day.

From the time of Moses, whenever Jewish men presented themselves to the Lord at the Temple, they were instructed to offer a half-shekel of silver. Exodus 30:13 records: "This is what everyone among those who are numbered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary." When Moses issued this decree, the Israelites were a single, cohesive unit that traded with the same form of money. However, that changed as the years passed and the Jews found themselves dispersed into other countries (such as Babylon, Assyria, and Phrygia). Naturally, those Jews who lived in foreign nations began to use as legal tender the money of the country in which they dwelt.

This posed a problem for them when they wanted to present themselves to the Lord at the Temple, because the Law said that they were to present a half-shekel of silver. The priest of the Temple would accept no foreign currency into the sacred treasury. Therefore, greedy moneychangers posted themselves in the court of the temple in order to offer their services. They would exchange foreign currency for a Jewish half-shekel, but in doing so they routinely exacted an exorbitant "commission" on the deal. What was a foreign Jew to do? Where else could he obtain a Jewish half-shekel except in Jerusalem? The moneychangers had a virtual monopoly. Basically, nobody could come to God unless he first went through the moneychangers.

As if that were not bad enough, the moneychangers and Temple brokers also had a monopoly on the sale of livestock suitable for offering to the Lord. Since many of the worshipers who visited the Temple lived so far away, they would purchase livestock at or near the Temple, rather than trying to bring animals on the trip with them. When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were in for a rude awakening because the acceptable livestock was priced outrageously high. They had no choice but to pay the prices, however, since returning home without sacrificing to God was not an option. Once again, the moneychangers and traders came between God and His worshipers.

Upon this scene of fraud and abuse, the Lion of Judah came roaring. In John 2:14-17, the story is told of Jesus experiencing righteous indignation. He formed a whip of cords and reeked havoc on the moneychangers, overturning their tables, pouring out their money, and driving them and their livestock out of the Temple.

Anger and wrath enter the lives of every one of us. But let us learn from Jesus to be "swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath" (James 1:19). Let us also learn that there is a time for righteous indignation. When there are those who stand between God and the true worship that is due Him—whether it be through false doctrine, hypocrisy, or any other vice—let us remember the example of the Lord and "be angry, yet sin not" (Ephesians 4:26).

What Caused Jesus to Be Angry? By Sarah Sumner

It isn't said too often, but Jesus did a lot of rebuking. He had a well developed, robust rebuking ministry. To rebuke (*epitimesan*) literally means to "beat back." It's a strong word that connotes the idea of anger. My observation is that Jesus very deliberately reserved his holy rebukes for the sinister and the privileged. He did *not* rebuke social outcasts such who knew themselves already to be sinners. Curiously, Jesus instead rebuked demons, religious leaders, and his own disciples.

Story 2: Jesus Rebuked a Demon in the Synagogue

Demons hate redemption. They don't cheer when a wayward life miraculously turns around. Demons like destruction, not restoration. Their incapacity for goodness makes them too empty to applaud a positive change. That's why Jesus rebuked them. He beat them back. Never did he merely reprove them. To reprove them does no good. To reprove means "to expose." Demons are, by nature, irremediable.

The Gospel of Luke includes a story about a man in the synagogue who was possessed by the spirit of an unclean demon. This man cried out with a loud voice, "Ha! What do we have to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!" (Luke 4:34, NASB). Luke says Jesus then "rebuked" the demon. Jesus ordered the demon out. He said, "Be quiet, and come out of him" (4:35, NASB). Notice, Jesus said nothing more. He did not take time to teach or explain anything at all to the demon. In other words, *Jesus did not get hooked into an unfruitful conversation with this demon.*

The response from other onlookers was pure astonishment. They discussed with one another, "What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out" (4:36, NASB). Strikingly, they said nothing about Jesus' anger. The reason for this, in my view, is that his anger was a different kind of anger. *His anger was so moral that it looked like moral authority.*

Stories 3 and 4: Jesus Rebuked a Fever and Rebuked Demons

As soon as Jesus arose and left the synagogue where he exorcised the demon from the man, he went straightaway to Peter's house, where Peter's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever. Jesus rebuked that fever (Luke 4:39). As a result, the fever left her. That very day, while the sun was setting, Jesus healed many others as well. As Luke describes it, the demons were coming out and crying out to Jesus, "You are the Son of God!" (Luke 4:41). Jesus then rebuked them, silencing them, because they knew him to be the Christ.

That's three rebukes in a row: He rebuked the demon in the man in the synagogue, the fever in Peter's mother-in-law, and the demons who were rebelling by prematurely revealing who he was. Three rounds of rebuking anger, all of which resulted in correction. The demon-possessed man was delivered from the demon; the mother-in-law with the fever was made well; and the demons who were broadcasting Jesus' unique identity were not allowed to speak anymore.

It's simply not enough to know that Jesus is the Christ. To know he is the Messiah, even to know that he is God, is not the same as being submitted to him in a loving relationship. The demons know that Jesus is God's beloved. They believe that, and they shudder (James 2:19).

Story 5: Jesus Rebuked the Storm

Sometime later, Jesus got into a boat along with his disciples. According to both Mark and Luke, “a fierce gale of wind” arose such that waves of heaving water were breaking over the boat and engulfing them and threatening to drown them (Mark 4:37; Luke 8:23, NASB). Everyone aboard panicked, except Jesus. He was in the stern, asleep on a cushion, until his disciples interrupted to awaken him. They said, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” (Mark 4:38).

Aroused then from his sleep, he rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Hush! Be still” (Mark 4:39). And the wind died down, and the sea became peaceful and calm. At the sound of Jesus’ rebuke, there came another positive change. Yet Jesus didn’t leave it at that. The more pressing issue, I believe, was not so much the weather as it was the disciples’ doubt. So, Jesus magnified their doubt in order to help them see the needlessness of their faithlessness. Dulled by unbelief, the disciples responded with more fear. In Mark’s words, “They became very much afraid” (4:41).

Thus, they distanced themselves from him because he had a power that they didn’t understand or have themselves. “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?” (Mark 4:41) they wondered, thinking about power more than truth. When people focus on power rather than truth, inevitably they feel intimidated. Perhaps that explains why Jesus never said, “I am the Power.” **He said, “I am the truth” (John 14:6, NASB). Truth sets people free.** Truth puts everything into right perspective. Power does not require people to think. Whereas truth is unintelligible unless people think, power makes its point without stimulating even a single thought.

Let’s think this through together. Anger is a source of power. Psalm 62:11 (NASB) says, “Power belongs to God.” No doubt, power is ultimately of God because God is omnipotent. Yet God’s power is intertwined with God’s truthfulness. God’s power is legitimate because it overlaps entirely with truth. Truth is what legitimizes power. Power untied to truth is rogue. Thus, when anger is oriented around power, not truth, anger itself is rogue.

Think about it. The anger of wounded pride is basically the reaction of a bruised ego. Having wounded pride is not a legitimate reason to be angry. Human pride lies. It deceives itself into thinking that I am greater than I am. Pride lies to others as well. So, God is opposed to the proud (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5). Pride is the root of all sin.

We can see in Jesus that righteous anger is proactive, not reactive. It is purposeful and Godward. It is stabilized by its commitment to the truth. It reposes in the truth of God’s unchanging character and acts in the fear of the Lord. That’s why godly anger is so powerful.

Story 6: Jesus Rebuked James and John

According to Luke’s chronology, after Jesus rebuked the storm, there came a day when he resolved to go to Jerusalem: And He sent messengers on ahead of Him. And they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him. And they did not receive Him because He was journeying with His face toward Jerusalem. And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, “Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” But He turned and rebuked them and said, “You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; *for the Son of Man did not come to destroy people’s lives, but to save them.*” And they went on to another village. (Luke 9:52-56, NASB)

What stands out most to me in this narrative is the very striking difference between Jesus and his disciples, James and John. Whereas Jesus made no hint of feeling any type of misgivings toward the people who refused to receive him, James and John felt so insulted that they plotted to annihilate a whole village. James and John had wounded pride. In their pride, their hearts caught flame with sinful anger.

Godly anger lobbies for God's agenda. Sinful anger, by contrast, vies for human agendas that may seem justified but are not. That's the operative nature of sinful anger. Cruelly, it dehumanizes people—not only the victims, but the perpetrators. Ironically, in their anger, James and John dehumanized themselves. That's why Jesus rebuked them—to save them from themselves. In one fell swoop, he saved the Samaritans and also two disciples.

Herein lies the genius of Jesus' godly anger: it corrected sinful anger. These two disciples were harboring murderous anger; they were murdering Samaritans in their hearts. They had the vilifying anger that Jesus warned against in Matthew 5:22 in his Sermon on the Mount. Vilifying anger seeks vengeance. God says, "Vengeance is Mine" (Romans 12:19, NASB).

Story 7: Jesus Zealously Cleansed the Temple

This narrative is recorded in all four Gospels, yet none of the gospel writers mention the word *anger* in it. Scholars therefore debate whether Jesus was angry or not. I, for one, believe that he certainly was. According to the wording in Scripture, when Jesus cleared the temple, he was "consumed with zeal" for his Father's house (John 2:17, NASB). From the apostle John's description, it appears that Jesus' zeal was demonstrably demanding— unyielding and resolute.

The temple was a sacred space for prayer. But the buyers, sellers, and moneychangers converted God's house of prayer into a house of merchandise that operated for the sake of ill-gotten gain. Jesus wasn't merely half-attentive to the irreverence he discovered in God's house. Jesus was "consumed" with zeal. His jealousy for God—that is, his zealousness for God—moved him to take action against all the religious imposters in the room.

According to the Gospel of John, Jesus "made a scourge of cords and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the coins of the moneychangers and overturned their tables" (John 2:15, NASB). Jesus drove them out all by himself.

I wonder if there were bouncers in the temple. I would think, with all that money right there in the room, that someone would be stationed to guard the place. Yet no one tackled Jesus or ganged up on him to kick him off the property. Instead, Jesus ousted them. Jesus boldly dumped their coins onto the floor and then sent the sellers out without their money. On account of Jesus' anger, the merchandisers fled. Almost instantly, it seems, Jesus got the wrong people out of the temple and the right people in. As unrepentant sinners were spilling out of the room, the blind and lame poured in. Children poured in, too. What a marvel! Hardened hearts were repelled, and soft hearts were attracted—all in the same scenario. Matthew puts it this way:

And Jesus entered the temple and cast out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who were selling the doves. And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a robbers' den." And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were crying out in the temple and saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became indignant. (Matthew 21:12-15, NASB)

By clearing out the buyers and sellers and moneychangers, Jesus made it clear that serving mammon is unacceptable, especially in God's house. No church, no Christian ministry, no religious organization should ever prioritize money above God. That kind of prioritization is idolatrous, even apostate. It therefore kindles Jesus' anger and jealous love.

Story 8: Jesus Became Indignant at His Disciples

It is safe to say that all of Jesus' disciples were tacitly taking anger lessons specially from him. After all, nothing that made them angry angered Jesus. Whereas the disciples saw themselves doing a favor for Jesus, for instance, when they shielded him from swarms of babies and children, Jesus took offense at their intervention. Mark's Gospel offers this concise report:

And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all." And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands on them. (Mark 10:13-16, NASB)

Jesus was delighted to be bombarded by little kids. Jesus was beside himself, so thrilled by the children's willingness to believe. Faith comes easily to children. They're open to the realm of the supernatural. In fact, it's sensible to them to think a supernatural God would do supernatural things. What else would a real God do? *Kids aren't loaded down with all the weighty rationalizations that are used by boastful people to discredit and explain away God.* It's no problem to little kids for God to be invisible. To them, the idea of God makes perfect sense. Jesus understood that. He celebrated that. He recognized that preschoolers don't make good atheists. They're just too honest.

Perhaps emboldened by their adult sense of importance, being that they had disciple status, the disciples muscled up and rebuked the imposing parents, policing them to move back and get their kids out of the way. But surprise! Jesus didn't like that idea. He became indignant with them.

The Greek word for "indignant" is *aganaktasen* (from the root *aganakteo*), which literally means "to have much grief." Here's the breakdown of the syllables: *agan* (meaning "much") and *achthos* (meaning "grief"). I believe Jesus felt grieved by his disciples' disregard for little ones.

Angry Jesus, though, did not gripe at his disciples. Rather, he mentored his disciples. He corrected them, even in the presence of the babes, kids, and parents. He explained to them that children are actually good exemplars for adults. That is one of the ironies of God's kingdom and of this story. The very children whom the disciples had intended to dismiss were the people whom Jesus pointed to as role models.

Story 9: Jesus Rebuked Peter

When Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day, Peter fell into a trap. Without realizing he was sinning, Peter "took him aside and began to rebuke him" (Matthew 16:22, NASB). With the same good intentions that pave the road to hell, Peter said to Jesus, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You!" In other words, Peter's pride made him presumptuous and caused him to react to the sovereign plan of God by beating back Jesus' willingness to fulfill it.

In response to him, Jesus physically turned around. Matthew says he “turned” (16:23). Jesus turned his body directly toward Peter’s. Imagine the contrast. Whereas Peter took Jesus aside and presumably stood next to him shoulder to shoulder, Jesus positioned himself toward Peter face-to-face. Then Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s” (Mark 8:33, NASB).

I get a pit in my stomach thinking about this scene. When Peter rebuked Jesus, Jesus rebuked him back. How silencing was *that*? If you think about it, saying “no” and “Lord” to Jesus, all in one breath, does not make logical sense. Yet I empathize with Peter, even though I realize Peter was sinning. How gut-wrenching would it be to watch Jesus, of all people, be mistreated?

That’s what sinful anger does to people. As the Stoic philosopher Seneca said, it seizes them with “temporary madness.” Sinful anger is senseless. It makes us stubbornly say no to things we should say yes to. It says “No!” to submitting to God. It says “No!” to sovereign things that stab our egos. It says “No!” before it even knows what it rejects. Sinful anger simply doesn’t listen. It’s presumptuous. Filled with hubris. Willfully deaf.

Godly anger, by contrast, has good hearing. It is teachable. It is open to hearing more truth. *Unlike sinful anger, which acts arbitrarily, godly anger operates with purpose.* It is mindful. It’s productive. It bears fruit. **Godly anger stages interventions.** Godly anger, regardless, isn’t sidetracked. It overlooks ingratitude and sets its face like flint toward restoration.

When Jesus rebuked Peter, he didn’t rebuke him in private. He staged an on-site public intervention. Instead of saving Peter’s face, Jesus rebuked him face-to-face. I believe Jesus did this because that is what it means to stage an intervention—to intervene “onstage” so that Peter and everyone else there could learn in that same moment what Jesus was about to teach Peter. After saying to him, “Get behind Me, Satan!,” Jesus said, “You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s” (Matthew 16:23, NASB).

Peter’s problem is emblematic of our problem. We all have trouble listening well to Jesus. We all have selective hearing. We all tend to jump to premature conclusions, especially when we feel threatened personally. Peter wasn’t listening fully to Jesus. Once he heard the words “suffer” and “be killed,” he kicked into high-gear revolt. Peter didn’t have the patience to hang with Jesus long enough to listen to the rest of what he said: “And after three days, rise again” (Mark 8:31, NASB).

Peter missed the high point. He missed what put the rest into perspective. How many times have you and I missed the high point? How often have we reacted before hearing someone out and checking to make sure we really heard them? How often have we replaced the truth of actual facts with the distortions of our own personal insecurities?

Peter’s heart was wrong. His heart was almost right, but it was wrong. The torturous thought of Jesus being killed by bullying bureaucrats sent Peter through the roof. He couldn’t stand it. Because his heart was set on himself, on his own agenda for Jesus, Peter recklessly rebuked the Lord of Lords. In his emotional impetuosity, Peter failed to listen because he failed to be respectful enough to listen. That’s the nature of sinful anger—it’s disrespectful.

Peter’s rebuke of Jesus amounted to a selfish reaction. By contrast, Jesus’ rebuke of Peter amounted to a protective proclamation.²

² Sumner, S. (2015). [*Angry like Jesus: using his example to spark your moral courage*](#). Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

Results of Unrighteous Anger

Bitterness can occur when...

The angry person refuses to be pacified, holds a grudge, or keeps it all inside - Ephesians 4:26-27.

This can cause depression and irritability over little things, often things unrelated to the underlying problem.



Don't be tellin' me to calm down!.. I've got another good **6 MINUTES** before **SUNDOWN!**



Don't let the sun go down on your anger. **Eph 4:26**

