

Sept. 14: A Biblical View of Anger (part 1)

I don't have a presence on any social media platform, so I'm not sure how long this has been a thing, but there's a weird trend of people recording and posting themselves exploding in fits of rage about this or that social hot topic and then unabashedly sharing this outburst for all the world to see. Grown men and women screaming, just absolutely losing it, in what only two generations ago would have been described as immaturity at best and demonic at worst. Not only have expressions of anger become normalized, but they have also become a sort of moral badge of honor. Outrage somehow signals virtuousness.

According to an article I read, rage posting has become prevalent because social media algorithms intentionally amplify provocative, angry content to maximize user engagement and advertising revenue. Meaning, it pays to rage, either financially or at least socially. Combined with human psychological biases that react strongly to anger and an internet culture that rewards drama, this creates a feedback loop that encourages and rewards rage-filled posts.

So which is worse, the people posting their rage outbursts, or the culture addicted to watching people posting their rage outbursts? That's a value question revealing your worldview, by the way.

Apply the worldview lens. The rage posting is the behavior, what's the values behind the behavior? It is certainly attention. I value attention. Perhaps money. This is the best and easiest way to make money. Perhaps fame. What could these values reveal about their beliefs, what they hold to be true? It could be: this is the only way I will ever be significant. This is the only way people will care about what I care about. This is how my feelings are validated. And ultimately, what worldview question are they trying to answer? Who am I? Why do I exist? Why I am significant? Imagine answering that question without God.

And then there's the "Wellness Focused Rage Rituals." Anyone heard of these? This is a trend, also recently fueled by social media, where people retreat to a camp out in the woods and are encouraged to express their suppressed anger and frustration in a safe, controlled environment for emotional release. These cathartic rituals can involve yelling, screaming, and hitting or breaking objects, all while "guided" by a professional facilitator in a group setting. **A guided and encouraged loss of self-control.** These actually began in the 1970s known as "primal scream therapy," but it went out of mainstream therapeutic use until regaining popularity through, you guessed it, social media.

In my own career as a counselor, I have spent thousands of hours facilitating anger management groups for both juveniles and adults in a variety of treatment settings, so if you struggle with anger, you're in luck because Central's first annual Wellness Focused Rage Ritual is scheduled for the weekend of October 18-19. Be sure to sign-up and pay me the non-refundable \$500 deposit in cash ASAP.

Behavior is terribly revealing if we take the time to consider where it comes from. My hope is that, as you practice asking yourself these worldview questions, you will be instilled with a strong sense of compassion because so much of the world is stuck in a horribly depressing and hopeless reality, one where the light of the gospel desperately needs to shine.

So, let me ask what on the surface might seem to have an obvious answer, but how does the world explain and view anger?

If we are going to challenge our worldview and conform it to a biblical standard, we need to recognize how our view has been impacted, influenced, and distorted by ungodly forces and thinking. And anger is a big one.

I don't want to get too bogged down with all the various secular approaches to understanding and explain anger, but I think it's appropriate to recognize the pervasiveness of differing views. Remember our format for the topics we cover will be week one: what the world says; week two: what God's Word says; and week three: now what?

This week we are examining:

The Secular View of Anger

Anger is typically described as a universal human emotion with both adaptive and maladaptive potential. Adaptive is a fancy way of describing something that would be appropriate or "healthy." Maladaptive would then be considered inappropriate or "unhealthy." How that judgment is made depends on your particular school of thought, but again, let's not get lost in the weeds. As we know, the world has adopted many standards to differentiate between right and wrong, and all of them miss the mark. Without drowning in details, we do need to take a few moments to explore some of the predominant views of anger perpetuated in the world today to see how they have impacted your thinking.

From an evolutionary and psychobiological view, anger is seen as an evolved survival instinct, unconscious, preparing the body for "fight or flight." Since it is evolved, it is automatic and beyond my control. In other words: My biology made me do it. Sound familiar? This view maintains that anger protects personal boundaries, mobilizes us to action, and signals injustice or unmet needs but can sometimes be displaced or projected. Because it is unconscious, an instinct, part of our biology, it is morally neutral.

How has this view inserted itself into the world? How have you witnessed or experienced it?

Another is the social and environmental view, where anger is learned from modeling (for instance family, peers, media), and our culture and society shape how anger is expressed. Since it is learned, it is automatic and beyond my control. In other words: My society made me do it. Sound familiar? This view maintains that societal norms dictate what is and is not

a healthy or appropriate expression of anger. Some cultures discourage open anger, while others normalize it. For instance, the hot-headed Sicilian versus the stoic Brit. It would be inappropriate for one cultural expression of anger to be deemed “right” and another “wrong,” therefore anger is still not a moral issue. How has this view inserted itself into the world? How have you witnessed or experienced it?

How about the cognitive-behavioral view? This theory holds that anger is learned from appraisals and relies upon a person’s beliefs, expectations, and interpretations of events for understanding the cause of anger. Value assessments such as “This is unfair,” and “They disrespected me” form the basis for interpreting and understanding how to respond. In other words, “I decide why I am angry.” Dysfunctional thought patterns (e.g., catastrophizing, overgeneralizing, hostile attribution bias, which is a fancy way of describing paranoia) fuel excessive anger. But anger is still morally subjective, which is another way of saying morally neutral because I decide if and when anger is a problem in my life.

Once again, how have you witnessed or experienced this view of anger?

How does the world view and explain anger? Depending on certain criteria, your anger could be considered a disorder. Excessive or poorly managed anger can appear in diagnoses such as Intermittent Explosive Disorder (IED), Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) in youth, and Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). All of these focus on emotion dysregulation, which is a fancy way of saying a loss of control.

The real issue is, of course, authority. Who has the authority, who is authorized to decide what is real about anger?

Is anyone familiar with this book?

This is the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, or the DSM, and this is the fifth version, making this the DSM5. An updated Text Revision, or TR, of this came out in 2022, but I don’t have that one. This is the holy bible of the secular world. This is ***THE*** authority, the American Psychiatric Association, by which every aspect of our society is governed. Politics. Law. Justice. Healthcare. Education. Insurance. Your life has been radically impacted by this book, and you perhaps had no idea of its existence before today. This is the fifth iteration of this manual, and it’s about 950 pages long. The first version I was introduced to 25 years ago was half this size. Each version is expanded as new diagnoses are added. We will be referring to this book several times during this worldview class to help us better understand how and why the world views the topics we will cover the way they do.

I want to read portions of one of those three disorders I mentioned, the **Intermittent Explosive Disorder**.

But anger is more than explosive, right? I'm going to ask you to be real vulnerable for a moment and consider sharing the ways you experience or express anger. I'll start. Anyone?

How does the world "fix" the problem of anger? How does it treat the problem of anger? It's important to recognize that in all the secular "anger treatment" approaches, the goal is not to "eliminate" anger but to manage, regulate, and express it constructively. The goal is to domesticate anger. To tame it. Make room in your house for it, just make sure it's house-broken and doesn't decide to devour you during the night.

For the evolutionary/psychobiological view, you really only have one option: physical intervention. Since it's a physical problem, it needs a physical solution. What might that be? Well, makes sure the person cannot reproduce. That's a thing, mind you. Since the problem is your genes, we need to ensure your line ends with you. The fancy term for this is eugenics. Folks, I could take you down a really deep, really dark rabbit hole surrounding this theory, and it goes way farther back than the Nazis though certainly includes them. Perhaps the most terrifying aspect is how much it still permeates politics, law, justice, healthcare, education, and insurance **TO THIS DAY**. What other physical interventions? Lobotomy, physically removing parts of the brain. And of course medication. Many other interventions have been used through the years, including sleep deprivation, cold therapy, spinning, blood-letting, electroshock therapy.

What about the social and environmental view? Since anger is learned, it needs to be unlearned and relearned in a more constructive, or adaptive, way within a social context. This would include your anger management teaching skills-based interventions, self-monitoring, relaxation techniques, assertiveness, and conflict resolution. This would be your psychodynamic therapy exploring roots of anger in early relationships and unconscious conflicts with the goal of helping increase insight and reduce destructive patterns. Often this would include family and other key figures in the person's life like extended family. And of course, your group therapy which helps provide accountability, peer feedback, and a place to practice your skills. This is the anger intervention most commonly used in the community, especially in correctional settings and treatment settings. This was my bread and butter for almost ten years before we moved to CBT.

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is the solution for the Cognitive-Behavioral view. Unlike the social/environment view, this one is very individualistic. The goal is to identify and challenge distorted thinking because anger is a thinking issue. Treatment includes learning relaxation techniques, problem-solving, and coping strategies designed to changing your thoughts. This would include mindfulness and acceptance-based approaches emphasizing awareness of emotions without judging and choosing value-based responses. Change your thoughts and you can change your world. Think about your life, your situation, your "triggers" differently and you will have a different response.

Of these three worldly views we have covered this morning, the cognitive-behavioral view is the most dangerous. Why?