

Sept. 21: A Biblical View of Anger (part 2)

Last week we began examining our first worldview topic for this semester, anger. Each of our topics will begin with a look at how the secular world views, explains, understands, and “fixes” these problems, which is what we did last week by exploring several worldly theories and treatment options. I would encourage you to check out the notes if you missed or would like to review, and you can find these notes in the church center app, then go to the bottom right and select “more,” then find Equipping Hour notes and you will find all of them, including what we covered last semester. These are listed by date as a PDF file, which means you can easily print them if you so desire.

Before we continue our conversation on anger, I need to remind us of something rather important. A large part of sanctification is us reorienting our thinking, through the presence, grace, and power of the Holy Spirit, so that everything about us becomes theocentric. We do this by examining our worldview and asking the question, “What does God say about it?” This is where true freedom is found, but it comes at a cost. You might have to confront a belief you have accepted or taken for granted that turns out to be misaligned with what God says. You might be asked to consider God’s glory in the midst of profound pain and loss. You certainly will be asked to confront your sinful heart. You will likely be asked to reorient your idea of anger, fear, forgiveness, and a host of others so that they more accurately reflect God’s Word rather than worldly wisdom. And I hope you will also be encouraged to boldly live out your salvation with fear and trembling. That’s what this class is all about. Are you prepared to have your worldview challenged, reoriented, and strengthened? If so, let’s go.

Now that we have glanced at a secular worldview of anger, it’s time for us to examine what Scripture has to say. Next week we will then put the two together to see how our thoughts on the subject need to be renewed and transformed by God’s grace and His Word in our practical, day to day maturing in Christ.

So what is anger? While the Bible presents no formal definition, it provides us with numerous examples upon which to draw an accurate understanding. All these examples reinforce the fact that anger is difficult to define but easy to recognize. In fact, the Bible doesn’t give a definition of anger but rather shows us through human, and divine, interactions. The definition of anger I will be using comes from Dr. Robert Jones, a pastor and professor of biblical counseling at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. I had the privilege of sitting under several of his lectures in my studies. His working definition of anger brings together the biblical data into helpful categories for our understanding. As Jones puts it, “Our anger is our whole-personed active response of negative moral judgment against perceived evil.” That’s quite a mouthful, so let’s break it down.

First, our anger is an active response. Anger is something we do, not something we have. It’s not a nebulous force outside us. The Bible pictures people who do anger, not have

anger. Anger isn't something I have, therefore it's not something I can tame. Anger is in my heart, and my heart needs renewal and transformation.

Our anger is a whole-personed active response. We need to resist the worldly wisdom that tries to compartmentalize anger to just being an emotion, a belief system, or even just a reaction. God's Word, as we will see, points to the fact that anger is emotional, yes, but also cognitive (meaning a thought we have), volitional (meaning something we choose), and behavioral (meaning something we do). Anger is emotional, including red-hot rage to icy rejection, but it also always includes beliefs and motivations, perceptions and judgments, and evidence of the desires within us. The Bible does not try to divide anger into nice, neat categories because anger is complex. It's made up of our whole person, including our beliefs, feelings, thoughts, actions, and desires.

Our anger is a response against something. It is not random. It does not just appear spontaneously. The world tells us that anger is triggered within us, someone or something provoked your anger as though the provocation is the reason. "He did this and made me angry." I was angry because I stubbed my toe. Later we'll see the Bible reveals the root of anger, the core of anger, is in our hearts. Our active hearts are always responding to the people and circumstances around us as we saw last semester when we talked about the conscience, what we can and cannot control, what comes out of us when we are bumped. Anger comes out because that's what is inside. When Ephesians 4:31 tells us to put away anger, to put off anger, to rid ourselves of anger, it doesn't mean to rid ourselves of triggers. So and so triggers me to anger, so clearly the problem is that person. False. Anger is a response, and that response comes from a judgment we make.

Our anger is a "negative" moral judgment that we make in our dynamic hearts. Anger acts as judge and jury to declare, "You did me wrong! This is unfair! This must stop now!" Anger is a courtroom in our hearts where we scream, "I object!" It's a judgment in the judicial sense of the word, and it's "negative" not because it is necessarily sinful but because it opposes a perceived evil. Anger casts a negative mental vote against unjust actions and determines that the offender must change, be punished, or be removed. Jesus makes a big deal about anger in Matthew 5:21-22 because it is a big deal. "Anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment" because anger is our negative moral judgment we make against someone or something else. If we are angry at someone, we have judged him or her.

And finally, our anger involves judgment against a perceived evil. Personal perception. Me. I decide in my heart that I have been trespassed against. But how do I know I'm right? To muddy the water more, how do I know if my response is godly or ungodly? Our anger, the behavior, comes from a value we have determined. We make the value judgment, "This is wrong and needs to be addressed." But how do we know this value statement comes from a place of biblical truth, and further still, from a biblical reality I have embraced by faith as my worldview?

So, our anger is our whole-personed response of negative moral judgment against perceived evil. When we view anger this way, we can cut through excuses. Has anyone ever confronted you with the question, “Why are you angry?” and you responded, “I’m not angry, I’m irritated. I’m not angry, I’m frustrated. I’m not angry, I’m hurt. I’m not angry, I’m upset.” We can dance around it all we want, but it all means the same thing. The bottom line is, I am reacting to something I have judged in my heart to be a wrong. And you may be right! Maybe you have been wronged. What do we do with that? Come back next week and most certainly when we talk about forgiveness in November.

For now, consider this: like all thoughts, words, actions, attitudes, desires, and motivations, we *do* anger before God. He sees and weighs it, and when it’s sinful it incurs **His** negative judgment. This is a reality we need to embrace if we are going to have even a remote chance of understanding what God’s Word says about anger. In Jeremiah 17:9-10 Jeremiah the prophet asks the question: “**The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?**” And the Lord God replies: “**I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.**” Let’s take this seriously. We *do* anger before God.

Examples of anger in the Bible fall into three basic categories. The first is Divine Anger, expressed throughout the Old Testament and in Jesus Christ as God in the flesh in the New Testament. By far the most common biblical examples of anger in the Bible refer to this Divine Anger, and in Hebrew there are twenty different words to refer to God’s indignation against evil and evildoers. What does God’s anger look like? God’s anger is a whole-personed response involving His mind, will, affections, and actions. For example, Hebrew terms for expressing God’s anger are sometimes translated as nose, nostrils, and face in reference to God’s wrathful response to wickedness. These biblical descriptions, using human terms, adds color and heat to our understanding of God’s dynamic anger. Consider these examples:

Job 4:9

At the breath of God they are destroyed; at the blast of his anger they perish.

Psalms 18:7-8, 15

The earth trembled and quaked, and the foundations of the mountains shook; they trembled because He was angry. Smoke rose from His nostrils; consuming fire came from His mouth, burning coals blazed out of it...The valleys of the sea were exposed and the foundations of the earth laid bare at your rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of breath from your nostrils.

God’s anger, like ours, is regularly described as hot; it often burns. These are emotional, whole-personed responses. Against what, or whom, does God’s anger burn? Let’s go back to our definition. God’s anger is His whole-personed active response of negative moral judgment against perceived evil. Simply put, God’s anger burns against wickedness and those who practice wickedness.

Romans 1:18

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

God maintains righteous, holy anger against all forms of wickedness. God's anger is His perfect, pure, settled opposition to evil, and His Word guarantees that no one who practices unrighteousness gets away with it in the end because His judgment is inevitable. God's anger flows from His justice. Folks, we are in danger of losing the fear of the Lord because we dress Him up in flowers and rainbows and speak ad nauseum about His love while utterly dismissing and ignoring His anger. We play around with sin because we make grace cheap, neglecting to live our lives in humble gratitude and submission for what it cost to appease God's wrath against MY sin. As David cried, **"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! ³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight."** We love John 3:16: For God so loved the world that He gave His only son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life, but we functionally ignored John 3:36 just twenty verses later:

John 3:36

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

Notice how believing and obeying are synonymous in this verse.

Psalms 2 gives us an excellent look at God's justice and God's anger.

Psalms 2

Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ² The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, ³ "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us." ⁴ He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. ⁵ Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, ⁶ "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." ⁷ I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you." ⁸ Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. ⁹ You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." ¹⁰ Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. ¹¹ Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. ¹² Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

God's anger flows from His justice. It arises from His negative moral judgment against perceived evil, and unlike us, He always perceives evil with utter and complete accuracy. He's God. We are not. His standard is perfect. Ours is flawed.

A biblical worldview of anger needs to start here. Why?

It shapes reality. It rightly places God as the moral judge of all things. It rightly reminds us that God's justice cannot be separated from God's love. It either humbles us or hardens our hearts. You cannot "deal" with your anger problems if you have not been humbled by the realization that God's anger burns against your wickedness, and it's only because of His incredible and unmerited mercy through Jesus Christ that you escape that rightful judgment. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

A second category of anger revealed in Scripture is righteous human anger. Here's an important reality to keep in mind: righteous human anger imitates God's anger. It is our whole-personed active response of negative moral judgment against perceived evil, only in this case it is actually evil. But that doesn't necessarily mean our whole-personed active response is righteous. How do you know it's righteous anger? The evil may be real, but that doesn't mean the anger is pleasing in God's eyes.

Let's begin with a humbling observation: most human anger is sinful. The biblical record confirms this to be the case. The most frequent Hebrew term to denote human anger is used forty-seven times in the Old Testament, and almost 90% of the time it clearly indicates sinful anger. While we tend to assume the best about ourselves, the Bible frequently warns against self-deception, which is a drum I am constantly beating in this worldview series. We want to think well of ourselves, but the reality is we are wicked, wicked beings, and **we can easily deceive ourselves into thinking our anger is justified and right just because the evil is real.**

The prophet Jonah is a brilliant example of this deception. Twice God confronts Jonah with a question, "Have you any right to be angry?" It was a rhetorical question. The answer was obviously no, but both times Jonah responds, "Yup. I have every right. In fact, I'm angry enough to die right here and now." God's reply and the flow of the narrative makes it abundantly clear that Jonah was wrong. He had no real justification for his anger, but he had deceived himself into self-justification. We need to ask ourselves several questions to check to see whether or not we have deceived ourselves into thinking our sinful anger is actually righteous.

Question one: Is my whole-person active response in response to actual sin? This requires looking at the situation from God's point of view as revealed in His Word. What does God's Word say about this situation? That's an important worldview question.

Question two: Is my whole-person active response focused on God and His kingdom, His rights, and His concerns, or is my response about me, my kingdom, my rights, my

concerns? Who was trampled? Who was violated? Was it me, or what is the righteousness of God? Mind you, God doesn't need you to defend Him, but we are certainly invited to be indignant to God being robbed of glory, slandered in character, and mocked in purpose.

Question three: Is my whole-person active response accompanied by other godly qualities and expressing itself in godly ways? Is the "righteousness" of my anger an excuse to respond in unrighteous ways, such as cursing, punching walls, disregarding or disrespecting my family. Or is my righteous anger accompanied by patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and here's a big one: self-control.

Based on this standard, your anger is going to be rarely righteous. If you cannot objectively respond with a firm and confident "yes" to all three questions, and be affirmed by those around you, then your anger is actually sinful.

Let's go to God's Word for examples of righteous anger as demonstrated by our ultimate example, Jesus the Messiah.

Mark 3:1-6

Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. ² And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. ³ And he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come here." ⁴ And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. ⁵ And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. ⁶ The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Consider our criteria. Jesus accurately identified their hardened, sinful heart. They lacked mercy. They lacked compassion. To put it simply, they lacked love. Jesus responds to their actual sin. They were also testing His lordship over the Sabbath in order that they might accuse and oppose God's work, God's redemptive plan. How did Jesus demonstrate anger? With perfect self-control and with grief in His heart because of their hardness of heart. Jesus accurately assessed their worldview, past their behavior, past their values, past their beliefs, and recognized the issue was their hardened hearts, and He grieved for them in His anger.

How about Mark 10 where we see this anger directed at His own disciples?

Mark 10:13-16

And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. ¹⁵ Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." ¹⁶ And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

We don't know what was motivating the disciples to keep the crowds from bringing their children to Jesus, but we do know it was directly hindering what Jesus came to do, and this fueled His righteous anger and he rebuked them for it. He didn't punch anyone in the mouth. His motives were the kingdom of God, not His personal fame or approval.

Then, of course we have John 2 when Jesus drives out the merchants and moneychangers from the temple courtyard.

John 2:13-17

The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. ¹⁵ And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

The word "zeal" carries with it the flavor of anger and indignation. Jesus burned with a righteous jealousy for the holiness of the house of God. The people were polluting His Father's house. It was in response to actual sin. It was in response to the people violating God's holy place. It was measured to accomplish exactly what needed to be accomplished and nothing more.

Jesus perfectly displayed righteous anger, and what's incredible is that when the attacks were lobbed against Him personally, He did not respond with anger.

1 Peter 2:21-23

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

They mocked Him. They beat Him. They pulled out His beard and spat on Him, pressed a crown of thorns upon His head and whipped Him to the point His organs were showing, then they nailed Him to a cross, and the shame of the cross wasn't just that it was for criminals, but you were also naked. The almost unrecognizable as a human anymore Son of God, the Messiah, hung naked upon that tree totally exposed and totally entrusting Himself to the Father who judges justly.

Consider the criteria for righteous anger. How does your anger measure up to it? What about the anger in your heart that you think is hidden from the world because you're not blowing up, yelling, cursing, and punching holes in walls? What about the icy, withdrawing anger that acts as an invisible barrier? Based on our working definition, there are multiple

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ways we can be sinful with our anger, but ultimately anger reveals what is in our hearts. Come back next week as we see how God's Word address what to do with sinful anger. As you traverse this week, I would encourage you to use a concordance, either in the back of your Bible or online, to examine examples of anger in the Bible. Scripture richly reveals anger in vivid detail from Genesis 4 with Cain's conversation with God all the way to Revelation 6 when the nations hide their faces from the one seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.

When it comes to our struggle against sinful anger, praise God His Word also contains the solution. Come back next week as we see how God's Word "fixes" the problem of anger, along with some commonly misunderstood concepts and biblical passages, in particular Ephesians 4:26.