

Biblical Psychology 101

Anger

Lesson Four

INTRODUCTION:

- I. Too often, to be considered a "good Christian" we're made to feel we should never get angry about anything – we should repress those feelings.
 - A. Unfortunately, repressed anger, over time, will often transform itself into other monsters like bitterness and revenge.
 1. Perhaps this is why the apostle Paul gave the best inspired advice about handling anger.
 - a. **Ephesians 4:26-27** – *"Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, 27 nor give place to the devil.*
 - b. Notice that verse 26 is actually a quote from Psalm 4:4.
 2. With just a few words, the apostle Paul completely destroys one of the great myths of the Christian faith – namely, that we should never get angry!
 - B. This morning in our series of studies we've entitled "Biblical Psychology 101" we're going to talk about this emotional response - anger.
 1. Since anger is such a potentially dangerous emotion if not channeled properly, we want to take a closer look at the Bible and

see if there are any guidelines to help us avoid letting our anger become wrong and sinful?

II. To truly understand this powerful emotion, it might help to first define the word.

A. However, this poses some difficulties because anger is not just one simple type or kind of emotion.

1. In fact, psychologists tell us there are actually five different levels or phases of anger – and in many instances, we can see these phases illustrated in the Bible.
2. These five levels or phases of anger begin with:
 - a. Mild Irritation – a feeling of minor discomfort or agitation brought on by someone or something.
 - b. Indignation – frustration over something unfair or unreasonable.
 - c. Wrath – a strong desire to avenge or punish, which never goes unexpressed.
 - d. Fury – a state that suggests violence and temporary loss of control.

- e. Rage – the most dangerous form of anger, where acts of violence are often committed by people who are scarcely aware of what they're doing.
- B. Out of the five phases of anger, the ones we fear most are the last three – wrath, fury and rage.
- 1. Let's turn to the Scriptures to see how the Lord wants us to deal with this very powerful emotion.
 - a. First, let's look at when anger is appropriate – even for the Christian.
 - b. And then, let's look at those times when anger is inappropriate, and can actually be sinful.

BODY:

- I. Before we launch into our discussion about anger, let's begin by establishing two fundamental truths about this potentially dangerous emotion.
 - A. First, we need to understand that anger is a God-given emotion – even God Himself gets angry.
 - 1. Unfortunately, we're made to believe that to be like God we should never get angry. Not true!
 - 2. There are many instances in the Old Testament where the anger of the Lord is recorded.

3. In the New Testament we also find where Jesus displayed anger over the moneychangers and other merchants who were profaning the temple of God.
 - a. He took some cords, made a whip, and drove them all out of the temple while at the same time overturning their tables.
 4. Therefore, since anger is a God-given emotion, and since both God and Jesus displayed this powerful emotion, anger is not always inappropriate.
- B. However, on the flip-side, we also need to understand that anger is appropriate as long as we observe the two safeguards Paul mentions in the passage we read earlier.
1. **Ephesians 4:26-27** – *"Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, 27 nor give place to the devil*
 2. So, how is it possible to "be angry" and yet "do not sin"?
 - a. First, Paul says, *"Do not let the sun go down on your wrath (anger)" (v. 26)*.
 - (1). In other words, we must not allow our anger to continue beyond the close of the day.
 - (2). Essentially Paul is saying, "Get over it! Put it behind you, and forget it."
 - b. Second, Paul adds, *"Do not give place to the devil" (v. 27)*.

(1). This is the reason why we must not let the sun go down on our wrath or anger.

(2). If we don't let it go – if we allow our anger to simmer throughout the day – we will give the devil a golden opportunity to turn our anger into the sin of bitterness, resentment, hatred and wrath.

II. With this as a background, let's ask the question, "When is anger justified?"

Obviously we don't have time to examine every instance where anger is justified, so allow me to mention three of the most obvious instances when it's okay to get angry.

A. First, anger is justified when God is deliberately disobeyed.

1. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, after spending 40 days and nights in the presence of Jehovah, he saw something that caused his anger to snap like a twig.

a. **Exodus 32:19-20** – *So it was, as soon as he came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing. So Moses' anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. Then he took the calf which they had made, burned it in the fire, and ground it to*

powder; and he scattered it on the water and made the children of Israel drink it.

- b. Moses became intensely angry – enraged, if you please – over the Israelites willful and open rebellion.
2. This same kind of justifiable anger should be aroused in the hearts of every Christian today when we see the will of God openly disobeyed – especially when it is flagrantly disobeyed by those who claim to be Christians.
- B. Second, anger is justified when we are robbed of the liberty we enjoy in Christ.
1. A good example of this is found in Galatians chapter two when Paul came face to face with certain legalists (*"false brethren"* as Paul calls them).
 - a. **Galatians 2:4-5** – *And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), 5 to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.*
 - b. Although Paul didn't describe himself as being angry in this instance, listen to the tenor of his words one more time:

*"We did not yield submission even for an hour! – the NIV says
"we did not give in to them for a moment!"*

- c. These false brethren were demanding that the Galatians keep certain rules and regulations that God had not made. They were binding things God had not bound.
 - d. I get the feeling that Paul was ready to take the gloves off over these false brethren trying to rob new Christians of the liberty and freedoms they had in Jesus Christ.
2. In fact, Paul went on to say in verses 11 through 13 that even Peter was influenced by these grace-robbers. Notice how Paul handled Peter.
- a. **Galatians 2:11-13** – *Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; 12 for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. 13 And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.*
 - b. Something tells me that conversation between Paul and Peter was probably not very pleasant – and Paul probably had a word or two to say to Barnabas as well.

- c. Paul was angry – he was outraged that Peter and the others didn't have the courage to stand up against these judgmental hypocrites.
3. We have just as much right to get angry when false brethren today try to bind their narrow-minded opinions on others, or when they condemn brethren who refuse to give in to their judgmental demands.
- C. Third, anger is justified when parents are unfair and unreasonable with their children.
1. This is a very sensitive issue between children and their parents – especially since the Bible says children need to obey their parents.
 2. But listen as the apostle Paul reminds parents (primarily fathers) of something we should never forget.
 - a. **Ephesians 6:4** – *And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath...*
 - (1). **Ephesians 6:4** (NIV) – *Do not exasperate your children...*
 - b. **Colossians 3:21** – *Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.*
 - (1). **Colossians 3:21** (NIV) - *Do not embitter your children...*

3. If we're not careful, those of us who are fathers can provoke our children to anger – we can exasperate and embitter our children and cause them to feel defeated and discouraged, which can easily turn into feelings of bitterness and resentment.
 - a. This usually happens when dads become impatient and don't take time to understand the feelings of our children.
 - b. Paul is warning fathers who have a "steamroller" mentality – who won't listen to their kids, and who make demands that are simply unfair.
 - c. When dads are impatient and intolerant, over time our children will become completely exasperated and respond with anger.
 - d. And their anger will be totally justified.
 - e. By the way, moms can be just as guilty of being impatient and intolerant with their children.
- III. Now let's see what the Bible has to say about unjustified, sinful anger. Once again, we don't have time to explore every instance, so allow me to suggest what I call "The Big Three!"
- A. First, anger is unjustified when it comes from the wrong motive – such as jealousy.

1. In Luke chapter 15, we find a familiar story with a somewhat less familiar character – but nonetheless, a character that is the perfect picture of jealous anger.
2. Jesus tells the story of a father who had two sons, and the younger wanted his inheritance so he could leave home and live his own life.
 - a. The father granted the younger son's request, and gave him and his older brother their inheritance in advance.
 - b. The younger son immediately left home; went into a distant land; and spent his entire inheritance living an immoral life and throwing party after party until his inheritance was completely gone.
 - c. When a severe famine struck that land, the only job this young man could get was feeding pigs.
 - d. And when he finally came to his senses all he could think about was how much better his life had been when he lived at home. So, he humbled himself and returned.
 - e. As he approached his home, his father saw him coming, had compassion on him, ran to him and welcomed him back by throwing a party in honor of this son.
3. This is where we pick up the story.

- a. **Luke 15:25-30** – *"Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 27 And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.' 28 "But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. 29 So he answered and said to his father, 'Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. 30 But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.'"*
4. Did you notice that the older brother refused to call his younger sibling "my brother," but rather referred to him as "this son of yours!"
- a. The older brother was jealous and outraged. He deeply resented his younger brother getting all the honor – especially when it had been the younger brother who had deserted his family and wasted his inheritance.

4. Jealousy can do the same thing to us.
 - a. When someone we know receives a commendation, or gets a promotion or gets the job we thought we deserved, it's hard not to be jealous.
 - b. When that happens, we need to stop and ask ourselves: "Why am I jealous? What's my motive? Am I filled with pride because I feel I'm more deserving? Do I secretly hope this person will fail?"
 5. Recognizing anger that comes from wrong motives – like jealousy, pride and a desire for revenge – is obviously the first step toward dealing with it properly.
 - a. However, recognizing our jealousy is one thing, but admitting it and confessing it to God is something else.
 - b. But if we want to bring our jealous anger under control, that's what we must do – we must confess it to the Lord and ask Him to help us deal with it.
- B. Second, anger is never justified when we're angry for not getting our way, or when things didn't turn out as we planned.
1. When things don't go our way it's easy for some to get upset and angry – perhaps even filled with rage.
 2. This is similar to the kind of anger Jonah experienced.

- a. **Jonah 1:1-3** – *Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me." 3 But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.*
3. God had commissioned Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh and preach to them in an effort to get them to repent.
 - a. But Jonah had other plans – he wanted God to destroy these wicked people because they were the enemies of Israel.
 - b. The last thing Jonah wanted was to offer the people of Nineveh a chance to repent.
 - c. So, instead of doing what God told him to do, Jonah decided to hop on a ship at Joppa and sail away in the opposite direction to Tarshish – on the other side of the Mediterranean.
4. As the story unfolds we read that a violent storm arose during his journey, and when the men on the ship learned that Jonah had disobeyed God, they felt they were all about to perish because of Jonah's rebellion against God.

- a. So to solve the problem, they tossed him overboard and Jonah was immediately swallowed by a great fish.
 - b. After sloshing around in the stomach of that great fish for three days, Jonah was eventually vomited up on the shore of the very land from which he had been trying to flee.
5. So, Jonah did as God commanded – he preached to the people of Nineveh, and they all repented.
- a. **Jonah 3:10** – *Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.*
6. You would think Jonah would be happy about the conversion of a whole city, but instead Jonah fumed with anger.
- a. **Jonah 4:1** – *But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry.*
 - b. He didn't get the destruction he wanted, so he stomped off, built himself a shelter and sat down to pout – hoping that the conversion of the people of Nineveh would be short-lived so he could turn around to God and say, "See, I told you so!"
7. But that's not the end of the story:
- a. **Jonah 4:6-9** – *And the Lord God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to*

deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant. 7 But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered. 8 And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint.

Then he wished death for himself, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live." 9 Then God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "It is right for me to be angry, even to death!"

8. Jonah was consumed with the kind of anger a person feels when they don't get their way, or when things don't turn out the way they planned – the anger from arrogance and pride.
 - a. That's the kind of anger that is common in prideful, conceited, selfish, self-center people – people like Jonah – who feel everything needs to go the way they want.
 9. The next time you don't get your way, let it go.
 - a. If you don't let it go, then don't be surprised if God humbles you by making matters even worse for you.
- C. Third, anger is unjustified when we get angry before we have all the facts.

1. Has that ever happened to you – have you ever gotten upset over something before you investigated the facts, or got upset over something you thought would happen, but it didn't?
 2. Both Solomon and James offer some very practical advice in this area.
 - a. Solomon says: **Ecclesiastes 7:8-9** – *"The end of a matter is better than its beginning, patience of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit. Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, for anger resides in the bosom of fools."*
 - b. James says: **James 1:19b** – *"Let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger."*
 3. Unfortunately, instead of being *"quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger,"* far too many of us have it all turned around – we're *"slow to hear, quick to speak and even quicker to anger."*
 - a. Until we get this problem straightened out, we will never become mature men and women of God.
- IV. So, before we close let me suggest some practical ways to deal with our anger – especially when our anger is not justified.
- A. The great American statesman, Thomas Jefferson, had a home-grown way of dealing with anger.

1. He said, *"When angry, count to ten before you speak; if very angry count to a hundred."*
 2. While that may work for some, it's probably not going to dispel really intense anger.
- B. So let's listen to Solomon as he gives us five divine instructions for dealing with anger.
1. First, we need to ignore petty disagreements.
 - a. Pride has a way of making even the smallest offenses appear to be unforgivable sins.
 - b. So, Solomon said: **Proverbs 19:11** – *"The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, and his glory is to overlook a transgression."*
 - c. So instead of nurturing petty offenses, leave them alone to shrivel up and die.
 2. Second, don't associate with anger-prone people.
 - a. Few things have as much influence on us as friendships.
 - b. So, Solomon said: **Proverbs 22:24-25** – *"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."*
 - c. It's really that simple. To avoid a lifestyle of anger, avoid the company of people who are prone to anger.

3. Third, keep a close check on your tongue.
 - a. When the tongue is used in anger, it can strike with all the destruction of a lightning bolt, and it can spread fires through relationships that leave only charred memories.
 - b. So, Solomon says: **Proverbs 15:1-2** – *"A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. 2 The tongue of the wise uses knowledge rightly, but the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness."*
 - c. If you don't keep a close guard on your tongue, you'll soon find yourself saying things you wish you hadn't.
4. Forth, cultivate honest communication without getting angry.
 - a. Solomon says: **Proverbs 27:6** – *"Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful."*
 - b. Remember one thing. Honest and open communication is a two-way street – it goes both ways.
 - c. That means you may need to hear about your own faults as much as you may need to tell others about theirs.
5. Finally, control your anger or it will destroy you.
 - a. Wrong motives; things not going our way; hasty reactions – these are just a few of the many ways unrighteous anger can overpower our hearts.

- b. So, Solomon says: **Proverbs 25:28** – *"Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls."*
- c. Ultimately it all comes down to self-control. Because without it, anger, bitterness and resentment will eventually take over our lives.
- d. The best way to acquire self-control is to pray fervently for it.

CONCLUSION:

- I. Remember the admonition of the apostle Paul regarding anger? He said, *"Be angry, and sin not"* (**Ephesians 4:26**)
 - A. That verse really sums it all up.
 - 1. There must always be balance in our lives as Christians – especially when it comes to handling such a highly-charged emotions as anger.
 - a. Unfortunately, some of us may be way off balance because our lives are characterized by only the first half of that verse – "be angry!"
 - b. Others may be out of balance in the other direction – thinking there is never a place for anger, and so they do their best to repress their anger rather than deal with it in a Biblical way.

II. Although there were instances in the life of Jesus where He clearly became angry – there was one notable time when He could have gotten angry, but didn't.

A. It was when He was hanging on the cross, being mocked and insulted by the crowds.

1. If it had been you or me, we probably would have called down fire out of heaven to consume them all on the spot.
2. But Jesus simply looked at them and said, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*" (**Luke 23:34**)

B. At a time when Jesus could have become angry, He didn't.

1. Do you know why?
 - a. All those who were inflicting Him with such unimaginable pain, and all those who were hurling insults – all of them were dying in their sins, and didn't even realize it.
 - b. Jesus didn't bring down the wrath of God on those people because they were the very ones He had come to save.
 - c. And that salvation could only be accomplished by His suffering and death.
 - d. Jesus was their only hope because He was the only way to the Father in heaven.

C. Jesus said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*" **(John 14:6)**

1. He is our only hope, and the only way to our Father in heaven.
2. The only way you can secure the hope of heaven is by coming to the Father through Jesus Christ.
 - a. For some, it means you need to come to Christ in faith and obedience, being baptized into Christ for the remission of your sins, and thereby being added by the Lord to His church.
 - b. For others, it means you need to come back to Christ and recommit your life to Him through repentance, and by confessing your sins to the Father, so that you can once again be cleansed by the blood of Christ.