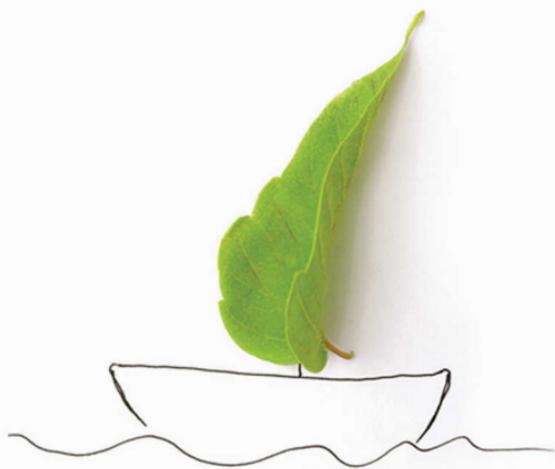


ANGER  
&  
STRESS  
MANAGEMENT  
GOD'S WAY



WAYNE A. MACK

Who hasn't been angry or stressed at some moment in his or her life? Some are that way chronically. More than once, adults have confessed to me that anger was the most characteristic attitude of a mother or father, and that failure to resolve things spiritually brought many additional difficulties into the home. Before this internal tornado causes more damage in your own life, read what experienced biblical counselor Wayne Mack has to say in this book. Take a biblical look at your problem and at the practical plan the Lord has for liberating you from wrong patterns and attitudes.

—**Jim Elliff**, President, Christian Communicators  
Worldwide

Daily we face people who are either stressed or angry or both. All too often they are the faces in our own mirrors. Here is an immensely practical book, well written and easy to read, which you will find personally beneficial and a useful tool for helping others. Dr. Mack deals with the issues of anger and stress biblically, in a manner that demonstrates the sufficiency of the Scriptures and provides a truly helpful alternative to the world's unhelpful "take a chill pill."

—**Peter Sammons**, Pastor, Germiston Baptist Church  
(member of Sola 5), Johannesburg, South Africa

Biblically thorough, practical, and warm—like an unusually careful and concerned physician, Dr. Mack has set about to thoroughly diagnose and treat the often ignored twin maladies that afflict so many. With the heart of a gentle pastor, Dr. Mack has drawn from decades of counseling experience to provide biblical, historical, and personal examples of how to properly handle that which provokes us. But far from giving us a book of anecdotes, these examples are used in service of a thorough diagnosis and plan for proactively responding to one's own stress and anger. In a way that clarifies, convicts, and instructs, this book is immensely

practical, offering immediate “homework” for becoming a James 1 “doer of the Word.”

Dr. Mack has provided not only a manual for progressing in holiness, but also a training manual for those who are counseling others—whether a pastor in his study or a friend over coffee. Key features of this work are its emphasis on the most pertinent biblical passages, its helpful cautions about the use of righteous anger, and the light it shines on the popular means of mishandling stress and anger through such techniques as “venting” and “transference.” It has become my new go-to resource and recommendation for providing perspective in dealing with our everyday troubles. I rejoice that Dr. Mack has shared his wisdom with us all.

—**Ted Johnson**, Pastor, Bible Church of Owasso, Oklahoma

How refreshing to have these very common issues of anger and stress covered so thoroughly and biblically! Dr. Mack uses Scripture to cut to the core and provide real solutions, which are often in contrast to the empty “solutions” so popular in the world and the church. Dr. Mack has provided a valuable resource for both pastors and their churches.

—**Bruce Blakey**, Pastor, Believers Fellowship, San Antonio

Dr. Mack offers much practical wisdom for applying the truth of God’s Word to the life of someone who is struggling with anxiety and anger. This book is a valuable resource for anyone who is struggling with anger and stress as well as for anyone who is discipling a person who is so ensnared.

—**Sybrand de Swardt**, Pastor, Lynnwood Baptist Church,  
Pretoria, South Africa; Director, Strengthening Ministries  
Training Institute

I deeply appreciate the “biblical balance” that Dr. Mack conveys throughout *Anger and Stress Management God’s Way*. He presents

emotions (including anger) not as automatically evil, but as one aspect of our creation in the image of God—this is biblical balance. As Dr. Mack develops his perspective on each topic, he erects a firm foundation of biblical truths and relates those truths relevantly to daily life—this is biblical balance. Perhaps most importantly, what Dr. Mack writes about he also lives out in his relationships—this is biblical balance.

—**Bob Kellemen**, Chair of the Biblical Counseling Department, Crossroads Bible College, Indianapolis;  
Author, *Gospel-Centered Counseling*

Wayne Mack is a pastoral and therefore a practical theologian, and this book is a reflection of his continuing commitment to Christian discipleship. The subjects of anger and stress are dealt with for what they are: spiritually crippling phenomena, which may be cured only by a thorough commitment to, and application of, Scripture. In this, Dr. Mack, as a physician of the soul, does not fail.

—**Joachim Rieck**, Pastor, Eastside Baptist Church,  
Windhoek, Namibia

*Anger and Stress Management God's Way* is what I have come to expect from the heart and pen of Dr. Mack: pure principles from the pages of Scripture written in pure, pithy prose, which are pastorally and powerfully applied to people in their providential problems. Read it. Use it. Give it away to everyone who faces stress—which is to say, everyone this side of heaven!

—**George C. Scipione**, Director of the Biblical Counseling Institute, Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary,  
Pittsburgh

Are you tired of living with your uncontrolled anger? Are you usually stressed to the point of losing control? There is hope! In this well-written book, Dr. Wayne Mack expertly guides us through a

thoroughly biblical way of defeating the response of sinful anger to the stress in our lives. This engaging book also provides helpful discussion questions in each chapter. As a Christian, I have been blessed by Dr. Mack's careful treatment of the Word. As a pastor and certified biblical counselor, I regularly use Dr. Mack's works, and this newest book will be added to the list! Pour yourself a tall glass of orange juice and prepare yourself to be encouraged to biblically respond to life's stresses!

—**Glenn Dunn**, Pastor/Teacher, Cornerstone Bible Fellowship, North Ridgeville, Ohio; Director, Biblical Counseling Institute

*Anger and Stress Management* is theologically sound and efficiently practical. . . . Glorifying to God and edifying to the reader. Great book!

—**Nicolas Ellen**, Professor of Biblical Counseling, College of Biblical Studies, Houston

The strength of this book is its utter dependence upon Scripture. . . . Every biblical counselor should own a copy and have it at the ready.

—**Daniel Kirk**, Pastor, Calvary Bible Church, Fort Worth; Director of Calvary Biblical Counseling Ministries

*Anger and Stress Management God's Way* is truly what it says it is: God's way. . . . I will certainly use it in my counseling ministry, and I thank God for Wayne Mack. He is a gift to the biblical counseling world.

—**Martha Peace**, Biblical Counselor; Author, *The Excellent Wife*

ANGER  
&  
STRESS  
MANAGEMENT  
GOD'S WAY

WAYNE A. MACK

  
P U B L I S H I N G  
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# FOREWORD



ANGER AND STRESS are a familiar part of contemporary life. On the news we hear about road rage. We know people who have been subjected to physical abuse. Each year, businesses invest thousands of dollars in stress management programs to help managers deal with the pressures of life and work. Christians are not immune to these struggles ourselves. We have two needs: First, to have applicable passages on anger and stress management identified in the Scriptures. Second, to have them explained to our hungry hearts.

The wise apostle exhorted his son in the faith, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15 NRSV). This book represents the faithful labors of a pastor, teacher, and counselor who has made the mastery of Scripture the pursuit of his life. Each page of this book references, unfolds, and applies the truth of the Word of God. You can give yourself confidently to the insights and truth you will find here, knowing that they reflect the biblical understanding of a safe spiritual guide. Even if there were nothing else to be gained from reading *Anger and Stress Management God’s Way*, the book will expose you to scores of texts that address the problems of anger and stress.

But you will gain far more than that. Not only does Dr. Wayne Mack understand the Bible’s teaching about anger, he also brings decades of counseling experience to this book. He has obviously

listened to and helped people who have been crippled by anger. His insights are not theoretical; they reflect the practical understanding of someone who knows people, the Word of God, and the practical art of spiritual warfare.

Some Christian books are heavy on the side of practical tips and light on foundational biblical teaching. This book is different: it provides the reader with both. It offers responses to anger and stress that are immanently doable and embedded in biblical truth. You will learn how to discern between sinful and holy anger. Dr. Mack supplies the reader with vivid biblical descriptions of the characteristics of sinful anger. He will walk you through responding constructively to anger and will train you to know the grace of God to turn from sinful anger. You will learn penetrating questions to help you to evaluate and understand your anger. These questions will illuminate the heart issues that push and pull us into giving angry responses to the stressors we encounter in life.

You will be amazed at how much the Bible says about stress and its effects on you and others. In two wonderful chapters, Wayne Mack will show you several factors that will enable you to respond to stress in constructive ways.

The book you are holding looks at anger and stress with straightforward, unvarnished honesty, but it also retains a hopeful and optimistic confidence in grace. God's people have hope because God has given us not only truth but also enablement. God has revealed truth in the Bible and has empowered His people through the grace of the gospel. There is good news here: God gives us biblical ways to manage anger and stress.

Tedd Tripp  
President  
Shepherding the Heart Ministries

# INTRODUCTION



ANGER! STRESS! These two words are used frequently in the course of our daily lives. They are used so commonly because they describe a very common phenomenon. Who of us has not been on the giving and receiving end of anger? Unfortunately, the same is true of stress. We all know people, or perhaps we're the people, who have been "stressed out." Yes, we are all too familiar with the experience of both anger and stress. Who of us has never observed, or even been a participant in, the devastating consequences of either of these two destroyers?

Yes, I call them destroyers, because that's what they are and what they do. Nothing good has ever come out of mishandled stress or sinful anger. Scripture says, "Wrath is fierce and anger is a flood" (Prov. 27:4). How picturesque and how true is that description of sinful anger! An unbiblical kind of anger is like a flood that destroys people and property. Truly, "the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God" (James 1:20). In fact, it does the opposite. It never does anything good, but it surely does a lot of damage. So we must learn how to control it, or it will destroy us and other people—either literally or figuratively.

Likewise, it can be said that stress is much like anger in its effects on the individual and his relationships with people. *Eustress* (good stress—a certain amount of concern) is good, but eustress can quickly and easily become *distress*, which by definition causes sorrow, misery, pain, or suffering. Dictionaries

indicate that stress is closely associated with agony and anguish—with things that cause torment and can be excruciating.

Because of the prevalence of these two problems and the damage they can cause, we are constantly hearing about anger and stress management seminars. Because business executives know of the ways that these two destroyers can hurt their companies, they regularly contract with so-called experts in these areas to come and present seminars to their employees. Legal authorities will sometimes require people who have become threats to other people to attend seminars or take courses on the subjects of anger and stress.

Most of these courses and seminars are based on humanistic approaches to these issues. They completely ignore the option of turning to Scripture for the counsel of our great, all-wise God, who is the world's greatest expert on how to handle anger and stress. That this is how the world approaches these issues shouldn't surprise us, but the appalling thing is that many Christians are not aware that the Bible contains the most valuable, authoritative, and trustworthy information about how to handle ungodly anger and stress.

After many years of counseling and study on these subjects, I have written this book to provide the kind of help that is based not on man's opinions, but on the solid truth of God's infallible, relevant Word. I encourage you to read it carefully, look up and study the Scriptures used, and answer the study questions that are included for every chapter. Then, evaluate your own life and behavior using the material in this book as an evaluative grid. Finally, confess your sins and ask God and others whom you have sinned against for their forgiveness, seek the help of God for change where you need to change, and put the principles of this book into practice in your life. You don't have to be overcome and destroyed by ungodly anger or stress. By God's grace, you can be an overcomer.

# 1

## SOMETIMES IT'S RIGHT AND SOMETIMES IT'S WRONG TO BE ANGRY



Is it always a sin to be angry? Some people sincerely believe that it's always a sin to be angry. From childhood, they were taught that it was wrong to express anger in any form.

There are other people who seem to believe that anger is never sinful—unless it's directed at them. For example, some parents will not tolerate their children expressing anger at them or at each other, but will quickly excuse their own anger toward their children. There are husbands and wives who have one standard for themselves and another standard for their spouses. A man once told me that his anger against his wife was always justified. These people think that anger is wrong mostly when it's someone else's anger, not their own.

The truth of the matter is that *anger is sometimes sinful and sometimes righteous*. Ephesians 4:31 says, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice” (ESV). In other words, let every kind—all forms—of anger and wrath be put away. Colossians 3:8 teaches

the same. “But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.”

According to these verses, there is a kind of anger that is sinful and must be excluded from the life of a believer. This is the kind of anger that we find in Genesis 4, when Cain became angry with his brother Abel and murdered him. We see it in the life of King Saul, too: in 1 Samuel 18, Saul was angry with David when David did well in battle and was praised by the people. Later, Saul became angry with his son, Jonathan, for being friends with David (see 1 Sam. 20:30). These were all expressions of sinful anger.

In Mark 6:19, we are told that Herodias “had it in” (this is the literal translation from the Greek) for John the Baptist. Because of her sinful anger, John the Baptist was beheaded. In Acts 7:54, the Jewish leaders were enraged against Stephen. As a result of their sinful anger, they took up stones and killed him. In Acts 23:3, the apostle Paul went before the high priest of the Sanhedrin and said, “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?” The context and Paul’s later confession indicate that this was sinful anger on Paul’s part. As the Bible indicates in these and many other verses, there are times when our anger is sinful.

The Bible also teaches that there are times when our anger is not sinful. There are times when it’s proper, righteous, and necessary to be angry. In the same passage in Ephesians 4 where we are instructed to put aside bitterness, wrath, and anger, we are told that there is a way to be properly angry. Ephesians 4:26 commands us, “Be angry, and yet do not sin.” It’s clear from this verse that there is a kind of anger that is not sinful. These verses do not contradict each other; they are simply teaching us how to handle two different kinds of anger—anger that is sinful and anger that is not sinful.

There are many times in Scripture when God—who cannot

sin—is said to be angry. Psalm 7:11 says, “God . . . has indignation every day.” Exodus 4:14 tells us that the anger of God burned against Moses. Deuteronomy 29:27–28 declares,

Therefore, the anger of the LORD burned against that land, to bring upon it every curse which is written in this book; and the LORD uprooted them from their land in anger and in fury and in great wrath, and cast them into another land, as it is this day.

God was extremely angry at the Israelites on this occasion and on others.

The gospels of Mark and John describe two situations in which the Lord Jesus, the meek and lowly one, became righteously angry. Mark 3:5 says that He was deeply grieved and became angry because of the Pharisees’ hard hearts. We know that Christ’s anger was sinless—holy and righteous—because “in Him there is no sin” (1 John 3:5). In John 2:13–17, Jesus angrily drove out the sellers and money changers from the temple courts because zeal for His Father’s house had consumed Him.

Acts 17:16 relates an example of righteous anger on the part of the apostle Paul. While ministering in Philippi, Paul had been beaten, falsely accused, and thrown in prison. His life had been in danger from an earthquake, and he had eventually been thrown out of town (see Acts 16:16–40). From Philippi, Paul went on to minister in two cities and was threatened and chased out of both (see Acts 17:1–15). Paul arrived in Athens alone and had to wait there for his companions, Timothy and Silas, to join him.

We can only assume that Paul arrived in Athens physically and emotionally exhausted. Very likely, he anticipated a time of rest and recovery while waiting for Timothy and Silas. Though this may have been his intention, the Scripture says that “his spirit was *being provoked within him* as he was observing the city full of idols” (Acts 17:16). *The Expository Dictionary of New Testament*

*Words* indicates that this phrase means that Paul's spirit was roused to anger.<sup>1</sup> *The Christian Counselor's New Testament* translates the sentence this way: "He was *enraged within* as he looked at the city filled with images."<sup>2</sup> In other words, Paul was righteously angry.

Another example of righteous anger is found in 2 Corinthians 7:9–11. In his previous letter to the Corinthians, Paul rebuked the people for various sins. In this passage of his second letter to them, Paul describes their response to his first message:

I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; . . . for the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation. . . . For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong!

The believers in Corinth had responded to Paul's teaching both in action and in mind. They took steps to avenge their wrongs (to pursue justice within their midst), and they also became sorrowful over their sin to the point of zealous indignation, or anger. Paul commended them for their anger because it was for the right reason and was expressed rightly. In essence, he said to them, "Good job! I'm glad you became angry over your sin."

The passages that we just looked at clearly indicate that there are two kinds of anger. There is a sinful kind of anger that is destructive and ungodly, and there is a righteous kind of anger that is constructive and godly. What, then, distinguishes godly

1. See "Provocation, Provoke," in *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (1940; repr., Lynchburg: The Old-Time Gospel Hour, 1952), 900.

2. Jay E. Adams, *The Christian Counselor's New Testament* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1977), 366 (emphasis added).

anger from ungodly anger? When is our anger sinful and when is it righteous? How can we be sure that our anger is used constructively rather than destructively?

To answer these questions, we first need to carefully study the characteristics of sinful anger—anger that is displeasing to God and destructive to us, other people, and other things. We will study these characteristics throughout the rest of this chapter and all of chapter 2. In chapters 3 and 4, we will consider how to respond to our anger in a way that is godly and constructive.

— APPLICATION QUESTIONS —

- What do you think about the idea that anger is sometimes righteous and sometimes sinful?
- What biblical statements support the concept of righteous anger?
- Which of the two types of anger do you think occurs more frequently?
- Which of the two types of anger do you think you experience more frequently?
- What biblical examples of righteous anger were given in the previous section?

**WHEN IS OUR ANGER SINFUL? WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SINFUL ANGER?**

*Our anger is sinful when we become angry for the wrong reasons.* In many cases, our anger is aroused because of our *selfishness*. Selfish anger is always a sin. Cain's anger toward his brother Abel was a sinfully selfish anger (see Gen. 4). Cain had not brought a proper sacrifice to the Lord, and when God rejected his offering, Cain became angry with God and jealous of his brother. His anger stemmed from both selfishness—at God's rejecting his offering—and jealousy—at his brother's offering being accepted. When we become angry because someone else

is receiving attention or appreciation that we are not, our anger is sinful. If we are honest, we will recognize how frequently we get angry for this reason!

In 1 Kings 21, Ahab became sinfully angry because of his selfishness. Ahab, the king of Israel, wanted to buy the vineyard of a man named Naboth. Naboth refused to sell it, angering King Ahab. The Bible says, "So Ahab came into his house sullen and vexed" (v. 4). In other words, he was depressed (sullen) and angry (vexed). In my experience with counseling, I have found that depression and anger often go together, as one frequently leads to the other. Ahab was angry because he was denied the vineyard that his heart coveted, and which he thought he had a right to. How often do we become angry because our "rights" have been denied?

Some time ago, I made an effort to be friendly to another person who was riding with me on an elevator. I gave the man standing beside me a cheerful hello and asked him, "How are you doing today?" The man ignored me; he never blinked an eye or acknowledged my greeting. He never answered my question. He just flat-out ignored me. My reaction to his lack of response was a bit of irritation. I thought, "Who does he think he is, treating me like that?" I interpreted his nonresponse as a put-down and a slap in the face. In my sinful pride, I started to become angry.

At the time, I wouldn't have called it that. If I admitted that I was at all affected by that little episode, I would probably have used some euphemisms such as, "I was hurt, or a little upset, or mildly disturbed, at being snubbed that way." After all, I was nice to him. I went out of my way to show an interest in him. I thought I deserved a certain amount of politeness. I never considered that he might have had a lot on his mind, a problem with his hearing, or a severe headache, or that he was reticent to interact with strangers. I just assumed that I had a "right" to be acknowledged, and that he was denying that right. When I was denied that

perceived right, I experienced a mild form of anger. I thought that I had a right to be recognized. I thought I had a right to be treated as though I was worthwhile, as though I was important enough for this man to at least respond to me. That's what happened with Ahab, and that's what frequently happens with us. Though my experience and expression of anger were not as severe as those of Ahab in 1 Kings 21, they were still the same species and had their roots in the same soil of pride and selfishness. That kind of response is sinful, selfish anger.

When children fail to do something exactly as their parents want them to, even if their actions are not definitively sinful, parents sometimes become angry. After all, they think, "Children are supposed to obey and show respect to their parents. And the fact that they didn't do something exactly as I wanted them to shows disrespect." Never mind that the Bible says, "Love suffers long and is kind; love . . . is not provoked" (1 Cor. 13:4–5 NKJV). Their children don't treat them the way they want to be treated. So they become peeved and upset and openly express their annoyance to their children. When that happens, the parents' anger has nothing to do with what is best for the children. It's simply due to the fact that the children are not doing what they want them to do. They become upset because the "rights" they have, as the boss of their home, are being denied. That kind of anger is sinful, selfish anger.

The anger of Herodias against John the Baptist was a sinful, selfish anger. She was upset with John the Baptist because he had told her that she was sinning by living with her husband's brother. Herodias did not want to hear the truth about her sinful lifestyle because she felt that she had a "right" to live as she pleased. Likewise, Saul's anger against David was sinfully selfish. When Saul heard the women singing, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (1 Sam. 18:7), the Bible says that Saul, from that time forward, was angry with David. He was jealous of

the praise and recognition that David was getting. His anger was sinfully selfish.

How frequently do we become angry when someone else receives more credit than we do? We may think about how regularly we attend church services, how dedicated we are to serving others, how faithfully we teach Sunday school classes week after week, or how much money we give to the work of the church. Then, when someone else is recognized for something in the church more than we are, we respond with sinful, selfish anger. "It's not fair! I deserve recognition, too!"

In Luke 15:11–32, Jesus told the parable of the prodigal son. In this parable, a young man treated his father unfairly. He demanded his inheritance and then ran away from home with it. He wasted the money on wicked living, quickly using it up. After hitting rock bottom and realizing he had nowhere else to turn, he returned home. His father welcomed him back with open arms, dressed him in fine clothes, and threw a big party to celebrate his son's return. But when his older brother found out what his father had done, he became resentful and angry. He refused to even come into the house. Why? He was hurt by his father's attention to his younger brother and jealous of the honor that he was receiving. In other words, he was selfishly angry.

Our anger is always sinful when it's caused by our selfishness. Whether we have had our feelings hurt, or we are jealous, or we are not getting recognition, or we believe that our "rights" are being denied—all of these things lead to sinful, selfish anger. In the application exercise that follows this paragraph, I will include a practical application study from my *Homework Manual for Biblical Living* that will help to identify how this issue of denied "rights" might be part of an anger problem.<sup>3</sup>

3. Taken from my study of anger in Wayne A. Mack, *Homework Manual for Biblical Living*, vol. 1, *Personal and Interpersonal Problems* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1979), 5–8.

— APPLICATION QUESTIONS —

- What did the statement mean that our anger is sinful when we become angry for the wrong reasons?
- Identify what, in many cases, arouses our anger and makes it sinful.
- What does the issue of rights have to do with sinful anger?
- Which of the following do you consider to be your “rights”?
  - Right to have and control personal belongings
  - Right to privacy
  - Right to have and express personal opinions
  - Right to earn and use money
  - Right to plan your own schedule
  - Right to get respect from others and be obeyed by others
  - Right to have and choose friends
  - Right to belong, be loved, and be accepted
  - Right to be understood and treated fairly
  - Right to make your own decisions and determine your own future
  - Right to be successful
  - Right to have good health
  - Right to date / be married
  - Right to have children
  - Right to be considered worthwhile and important
  - Right to security and safety
  - Right to travel
  - Right to have the job you want
  - Right to a good education
  - Right to be a beautiful person and to be desired
  - Right to have fun and be free of problems
  - Right to raise your children your way<sup>4</sup>

4. See *ibid.*, 5–6.

- Which of these “rights” are you being denied, and by whom? Discern which “rights” you think are being denied or neglected when you start to become angry. Do you think you have a right to be respected, and is that why you are becoming annoyed at someone when that person doesn’t show you respect? Do you think you have a right to be appreciated, and is that why you are becoming resentful toward someone who has criticized you or is not showing appreciation toward you? Think through the list of “rights” above and identify the ones that are most important to you; then reflect on how you tend to respond when these so-called “rights” are withheld from you.<sup>5</sup>
- Add to this list of “rights” any other items that are important and can be problematic to you.
- Consciously recognize that, if you are a Christian, you and all that you have and are (including your rights) belong to God (see Ps. 24:1; Rom. 12:1; 1 Cor. 6:19). You are not your own. He knows what you need (see Phil. 4:19). Trust Him to take care of you and to provide whatever you need. Believe that God is much wiser than you. Acknowledge this and dedicate all that you are and have, including your “rights,” to God. Trust Him to take care of His property. Cease to think in terms of your “rights,” and concentrate on God’s will and purpose and promises. Make it a point to specifically dedicate your “rights” to God on a regular basis.<sup>6</sup>
- Turning your so-called “rights” over to God doesn’t mean that you must become a doormat. It doesn’t mean that you never make your desires known, or that you never

5. See *ibid.*, 8.

6. See *ibid.*, 7–8.

oppose, rebuke, insist, exhort, or seek to correct a person. It does mean that you seek to do what you do in a biblical, God-honoring fashion, and that you do it for biblical, unselfish reasons out of biblical, God-honoring motives. It does mean that, after you have done all that you may legitimately do, you leave the results with God and believe that He will bring to pass what is right and good for you. It means you believe God's promise that those who fear the Lord shall not lack any good thing (see Ps. 34:8–10). It means that you must fulfill your biblical responsibilities and then be content to leave your “rights” to God. It means that what you formally considered to be “rights” you will choose to think of as privileges instead.<sup>7</sup>

*Our anger is sinful when we allow our anger to control us.* Proverbs 16:32 says, “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and *he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.*” In other words, a person who controls his anger is better than a conquering general. Indeed, it's often harder to conquer our own passions than to conquer a city. Proverbs 25:28 declares, “Like a city that is broken into and without walls is a man who has no control over his spirit.” An uncontrolled spirit can be as destructive to our souls as an attacking army is to a city.

These verses are warning us against being controlled by our spirit, which is partly made up of our emotions, rather than being in control of our spirit. We usually find it easier to allow the emotion of anger to control us than to maintain control of our anger. How often have we heard someone say (or said ourselves), “I was so angry I just couldn't help myself!”? What do people really mean when they say this? In reality, they are excusing themselves—both for being out of control and from the actions that resulted from

7. See *ibid.*, 8.

their anger. People who say this are claiming no responsibility for what they have done, because they were at the mercy of their anger. The truth, of course, is that their actions were sinful. Any time we allow our anger to control us, we are sinning.

This is precisely what happened to King Ahab. When Ahab did not get what he wanted, he became angry. Instead of accepting Naboth's refusal and going about his duties as ruler of the country, he went to his bedroom and stewed in his anger. Later, Ahab's anger led to the death of Naboth by the conniving Jezebel, Ahab's wife (see 1 Kings 21). Ahab was controlled by his anger rather than in control of his anger.

By way of application, let's consider this scenario. A certain man likes things to be neat and orderly. He likes his house to be cleaned up when he's there. He has expressed his wishes to his wife: a neat house, a neat yard. He has asked that the children's toys be put away and the family room not left in shambles at the end of the day. He has asked that the children's bicycles not be left all over the front yard, the backyard, and especially the driveway.

One night, this man comes home after a difficult day at work. As he approaches his house, he notices that the yard is full of toys. As he attempts to pull into the driveway, he finds that it's blocked by several bicycles. Seeing that his express wishes for the yard and the driveway have not been followed, he starts to become sinfully angry. As he moves the bikes and pulls into the driveway, he recites to himself what he has asked of his wife countless times: "Keep the yard and the driveway cleaned up." By the time he enters the house, he is stewing in his anger. Determined not to say anything to his wife, he greets her with a peck on the cheek, grunts a "hello," and heads down to the family room to cool off.

The family room, of course, is also a mess. Toys are everywhere, and he cannot even sit down. His anger is now full-blown,

and as he clears off his favorite chair he thinks to himself, *She doesn't pay any attention to what I say. She knows that I think this is important. She doesn't respect me as the head of this home. I'm under tremendous pressure at work, and when I come home, all I want is some peace and quiet and a semblance of order. I can't handle this mess. Why doesn't she think about what I want?* For the rest of the night, he stews and sulks silently, ignoring his family.

What happened here? This man was controlled by his anger. He allowed his spirit to rule his actions, rather than ruling his spirit as he ought to have done. Whenever we allow our anger to dictate how we act and to keep us from fulfilling our biblical responsibilities, our anger is sinful.

— APPLICATION QUESTIONS —

- What did the statement mean that our anger is sinful when we allow it to control us?
- What happens when we allow our anger to control us?
- Apply this to yourself: in what situations have you been controlled by your anger and done something sinful and destructive rather than being in control of your anger (see James 1:20)?
- Write out one of the verses in this section that describes this controlling kind of anger.

*Our anger is sinful when it becomes the dominant feature of our lives.* If other people's first impressions of us are that we are touchy, irritable, or easily annoyed, then we may have a problem with sinful anger. If we find that people seem to be constantly "tiptoeing" around us, it could be an indication that we have a chronic problem with sinful anger.

Proverbs 19:19 refers to a person of "great" anger: "A man of great anger will bear the penalty, for if you rescue him, you will only have to do it again." Proverbs 22:24 presents a similar idea

when it says, “Do not associate with a man given to anger; or go with a hot-tempered man.” These verses describe the type of people who we could call “anger addicts.” They have turned the reins of their lives over to anger and are completely under its control. It’s the norm—the pattern of their lives—for them to be angry.

In 1 Timothy 3:3, the Bible teaches that an elder of the church must not be “given to wine” (NKJV). In other words, he must not be addicted to alcohol. Drinking alcohol must not be the dominant feature of his life, such that he turns to it for satisfaction and relief from problems. The natural reaction for a person addicted to alcohol is to seek relief from life’s pressures in it.

The two verses from Proverbs refer to the same idea, except the addiction is to anger: anger is the immediate, natural response when the pressure is on. When this is true of someone, he or she is exhibiting sinful anger.

I have dear friends who I love to be around because they’re sweet, easy to spend time with, and easy-tempered. There are other people, however, who make certain words immediately pop into my mind when I think of them: *hostile*, *angry*, and *easily provoked*. These people are very difficult to get along with, and I don’t enjoy spending time with them. If that kind of anger is characteristic of our lives, we need to recognize and deal with it because it’s sinful anger.

— APPLICATION QUESTIONS —

- What did the statement mean that anger is sinful when it becomes the dominant feature of a person’s life?
- What happens when anger becomes the dominant feature of a person’s life?
- Have you personally dealt with your anger in this way? When? In what circumstances or situations?
- Write out one of the verses in this section that describes this kind of anger.

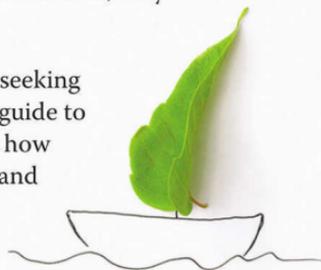
In summary, anger can be godly and constructive or it can be ungodly and destructive. When God expresses anger, it's always righteous. When we express our anger, it's often—if not usually—unrighteous. In our study of anger thus far, we have learned that anger that occurs for sinful reasons, such as jealousy, is sinful anger. Anger that controls us—causes us to act out of passion—is likewise sinful anger. And anger that is the dominant feature of our lives is sinful anger as well. There are several other characteristics of sinful anger, and we will continue to look at these in chapter 2 of this book.



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