

# Anger at Sin

There are Christians who believe that anger is always sinful, that it is never right to be angry. These tend to be the same people who either do not believe that God is ever angry or they make some sort of wimpy apology for his wrath when they see it in Scripture. Well, this is all wrong.

There is a righteous anger which Christians should hold. Anger is not always sinful, though it often is; there is a just indignation that is a mark of holiness and this anger is a reflection of the anger that God has.

## The wrath of God

Before we look at the righteous anger of believers we should examine the doctrine of God's anger. The Scriptures tell us frequently that God is angry about certain things and, since God is perfect in all his ways, the anger of God is perfect and holy. Those who fail to understand God's anger at sin really fail to understand God's perfect holiness. A perfect, holy, righteous, divine being must be angry with all that is unholy and must hate iniquity; a god who failed to be angry at sin would not be holy.

*Indifference to sin is a moral blemish, and he who does not hate it is a moral leper. How could he who is the sum of all excellency look with equal satisfaction upon virtue and vice, wisdom and folly? How could he who is infinitely holy disregard sin and refuse to manifest his severity toward it? [AW Pink, *Gleanings in the Godhead*, p76.]*

Divine anger at wickedness is perfectly commensurate with God's goodness; indeed there are more references to God's anger, wrath and vengeance than there are to his love. God's anger at sin is a necessity of holiness and is perfect in its expression.

Then we also need to consider that God is not just angry at sin in general, he is angry with those who commit sin. It is impossible to extricate sin from the sinner; sin is committed by people who are sinners. God is, therefore, justly angry with sinner and hates the sin as well as the one who commits sin. Thus we see Scripture declare that God hates certain specific individuals, types of sinners and nations who commit wickedness (Ps 5:6, 7:11, 11:5, Rm 9:13; Rev 2:6, 15).

God's wrath is eternal anger and hatred of all unrighteousness manifested in justice and condemnation. God's holiness ensures that his perfections are motivated to act against all forms of iniquity and lawlessness. The only protection against this activity is the salvation found in the redemption paid for by Christ.

In history God has continually revealed the depth of his anger against sin: in the expulsion of Adam and Eve out of the garden, the cursing of the Earth after the Fall; the global flood which killed millions of sinful people; the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; the instant retribution against Jewish rebels in the wilderness wanderings and the repeated expressions of judgment against Israel. There is no excuse to be ignorant of God's feelings about sin. But apart from these there are very many clear statements of it:

Now *when* the people complained, it displeased the LORD; for the LORD heard *it*, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the LORD burned among them, and consumed *some* in the outskirts of the camp. Num 11:1

The wrath of the LORD was aroused against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very great plague. Num 11:33

Do not forget how you provoked the LORD your God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day that you departed from the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the LORD. Also in Horeb you provoked the LORD to wrath, so that the LORD was angry *enough* with you to have destroyed you. Deut 9:7-8

Your hand will find all your enemies; your right hand will find those who hate you. You shall make them as a fiery oven in the time of your anger; the LORD shall swallow them up in His wrath, and the fire shall devour them. Ps 21:8-9

The wrath of God came against them, and slew the stoutest of them, and struck down the choice *men* of Israel. Ps 78:31

Therefore the anger of the LORD is aroused against His people; He has stretched out His hand against them and stricken them, and the hills trembled. Their carcasses *were* as refuse in the midst of the streets. For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand *is* stretched out still. Isa 5:25

And the peaceful dwellings are cut down because of the fierce anger of the LORD. He has left His lair like the lion; for their land is desolate because of the fierceness of the Oppressor, and because of His fierce anger. Jer 25:37-38

'Therefore wait for me,' says the LORD, 'Until the day I rise up for plunder; my determination *is* to gather the nations to my assembly of kingdoms, to pour on them my indignation, all my fierce anger; all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy.' Zeph 3:8

But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who 'will render to each one according to his deeds'. Rm 2:5-6

For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand? Rev 6:17

There are scores of such examples in the Bible.

We should also be careful not to draw a distinction between God, as revealed in the Old Testament, and the Lord Jesus – even though there is less emphasis on God's anger in the NT since the focus is on the Gospel. Though the Saviour came to deliver the elect from wrath (1 Thess 1:10) Christ also expresses the wrath of God against sinners (Rev 6:16; 2 Thess 1:7-9).

The outcome of divine anger against sin is hell, the place where the wrath of God is continually outpoured in vengeance against committed sin. Those misguided preachers who affirm God's love for everyone and ignore his anger have no rational explanation for hell.<sup>1</sup>

**If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives *h*is mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the**

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<sup>1</sup> Supposed 'Calvinists' who claim that God loves everyone fail to see that this contradicts all God's attributes and his decree. How can God love those he committed to condemnation in eternity? How can God love reprobates on Earth and then hate them in hell, thus denying his immutability? Arminians who uphold a universal love of God have to resort to affirming that hell is for those who rejected Christ on Earth, and in doing this they deny God's sovereignty in salvation. God becomes a hostage to fortune regarding his chosen people in this scenario. Both camps utterly deny God's attributes and decree and the reality of hell is difficult for both. The only satisfactory explanation for hell is that a sovereign God chose who would be in it in eternity. Thus he chose those who would be saved and this salvation is utterly by divine gift and power.

holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name. Rev 14:9-11

Notice that this judgment is in the presence of Christ as well as angels; in fact Christ is the judge of the whole earth who condemns men to hell (2 Tim 4:1; Rm 2:16). This condemnation is the fermented fulness of divine anger, which is why it is here described as full strength wine. God's indignation is stored up and concentrated until it is released as condemnation in hell. There can be no doubt about the anger of God.

So, the holiness of God requires the corollary of divine anger against what is unholy. Lawlessness results in the expression of God's justice in anger and condemnation.

### **The outcome of this doctrine**

*Believers need to contemplate the wrath of God and understand how deeply God feels about sin*

Believers are called to theology, to spend time contemplating God and learning more and more about him. We read our Bible primarily to discover more about God and his salvation given to us through his Son. The Christian life is a discovery about God. Growth in grace is a journey of understanding more about God and apprehending his gifts. All God's attributes must be studied, not just one or two. Knowing about God's love is good but this is not a major attribute. People who focus upon God's love to the exclusion of all else will be spiritual dwarves.

It is arguable that God's chief attribute of character is his holiness (his chief attribute of being is his eternal self-existence). It is only holiness that is repeated three times in praise by heaven (Isa 6:3; Rev 4:8). God's perfect, righteous purity and separateness from his creation is a fundamental attribute that must grab our attention. If we ignore understanding this key aspect of God's personality we will suffer greatly from misunderstanding God overall. Those who are not familiar with God's holiness and its outworking will grasp little of who God is and how he operates. Indeed, I believe that they will suffer greatly from weakness in their own life, which will be far too tolerant of sin. Knowing God's holiness is utterly crucial to Christian understanding and growth in grace.

Knowing and appreciating God's holiness will always include a deep understanding of God's anger at sin. If we know about God's holiness we will begin to learn much more about sin. Sadly most believers understand little about the doctrine of sin, even though it is a major part of Biblical revelation. To be clear on salvation (which is from sin) we need to know about what we are being saved from and why. It is impossible to understand God's decree and eternal purpose if we do not understand about sin. To learn about grace, we need to learn about sin. To understand our ransom from sin and judgment we need to know what captivated us and why. In learning what constitutes righteousness, we must know what is evil. Indeed, the growth of the believer can really be summarised in learning to discern between good and evil, 'solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil' (Heb 5:14).

When we understand how God feels about sin and unrighteousness, we will start to get angry when we see this in others and ourselves. It is impossible to properly understand about how God feels about sin and not get angry. When you see unrighteousness with God's eyes, you will be angry. In fact, a crucial part of progressive sanctification is developing a greater sensitivity towards sin and getting angry about it when we commit it. Those who sin should mourn, and grieving over sin includes being angry that it was committed.

Now this does not mean getting angry with fellow believers who sin and being nasty or malicious towards them. It means that sin causes anger at the rebellion against God and the pain it causes to men. We are to be patient with one another and cover faults with love in church, but we should still be angry at sin. It is the sin in the world that should really concentrate the mind. We should, like righteous Lot, be very unsettled living in this sinful place (2 Pt 2:7); indeed this ‘oppressed’ Lot; literally Lot was tormented and tortured by living in the world. Being happy in the world is a sign that a person is not content being in the kingdom. Those who love the world are enemies of God (1 Jn 2:15; Jm 4:4).

*There is a righteous anger*

Some emotions have good and bad counterparts when expressed either from the new or old nature. Love can be both good and bad. It is good when it is an expression of divine love but bad when it is a love for sin. Similarly, there is a righteous anger and a sinful anger.

Anger which gives vent to the flesh is unrighteous and should be controlled and not tolerated. This is an anger which leads to sinful expressions; such as impatience, unkindness, lack of self-control, intemperance, violence, vengeance and so on. The anger of man is not part of the new nature and must be put off.

But there is a righteous anger, as taught by both testaments (Ps 4:4; Eph 4:26). Godly saints expressed righteous anger when appropriate (Lev 10:16). The Lord himself manifested his righteous anger towards specific individuals with great condemnation (Matt 23:27). We can develop this doctrine as follows.

*Believers need to be angry at their own sins*

We can never tolerate or excuse our sin. When we sin we need to immediately confess it to God and be honest about what it is – rebellion. Those who make excuses to themselves about their sin will never grow in holiness. The response to our sin may well involve a degree of anger; anger at my foolishness that I committed the sin at all. Now this anger is not vengeful, malicious, loud, or such that expresses itself in any overt way. It is not the anger of man; it is not fleshly; it is an indignation that I let God down and dishonoured his name.

We do not need to get angry about our sin but we do need to mourn over it, we do need to deal with it. Anger is not absolutely necessary in dealing with our own sin since we can do something about it. However, the presence of sin in the world has many repercussions which involve us and which we can often do nothing about. This leads to righteous anger.

*Believers need to be angry when they see the effects of sin in the world*

When God chose David to be the king of Israel and the forerunner of Christ, he did so because he was a man after his own heart. David was chosen because he was a responsive person with a musician’s sensitivity. David had a sensitive heart. Now this sensitivity of David is clearly revealed in the many psalms that he wrote. If you examine these carefully you will see that he was not only full of praise to God and very open about his vulnerabilities, but he was also passionate in his hatred of sins and the enemies of God.

**Do I not hate them, O LORD, who hate you? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies. Ps 139:21-22**

The Psalms contain many expressions of hatred against sin and sinners; indeed there are some parts which are so violent in their expression that some have found them hard to accept as inspired – but this is the manifestation of God’s hatred and anger against sin.

If we do not get angry when we see the ravages of sin and the resulting pain imposed on the world, then there is something wrong with us; we are not advancing in our knowledge of God as we should. The more a person understands God's holiness, the more he develops sensitivity to sin and a loathing of the damaging effects of it.

But the other attributes of God also come into play here. If you understand the love of God then your love will reach out to the victims of sin: the poor, the needy, the sick, the frail, the sufferers of injustice. It is useless to teach about God's love doctrinally and yet have no compassion on the poor in reality. A man who knows the love of God will do something, and he will be angry at the effects of sin in all its forms. A man who understands God's justice will not only be desirous of helping those affected, but will also hate all the forms of injustice manifested in this world. This does not mean that he will become set on changing the world, a forlorn hope since God has decreed that it will get worse and be destroyed, but he will do what he can for his neighbour as God allows. A man who knows the kindness, compassion and mercy of God will get angry when he sees the world filled with iniquity that deprives men of freedom and enslaves them in various ways.

We could continue; all the attributes of God work towards developing an anger against sin and those who commit it, especially those who prey upon others and damage men who were created by God for his purpose. When children are exploited and hurt, when women are manipulated and damaged, when the old are ignored and neglected, even when nature is ruined by greed, we should be angry that God's creatures have been despoiled by sinners. To have no anger in the face of these travesties is to have no sensitivity about the way God sees the damage caused by sin.

The world is so full of pain that a sensitive person can find it very hard to read the news. The effect of sin in society is so ravaging that an observer can find it hard to avoid being saddened by such suffering. This should make a righteous man angry. Those who are cold and untouched by the pain in the world are not following Christ. The Lord himself was angry with those who caused suffering to others by their hypocrisy (Matt 23:31-36) and wept at the death that sin brought (Jn 11:35).

*Believers should also be angry at the damage caused to the interests of God in the church.* If we really are committed to God's purposes, then we will be concerned about the outcome of God's work in the church at large. Believers must secure the testimony of God, not only in their personal lives but also in the witness of the church in the world. We should care a great deal about how the Lord is presented through the testimony of the church. The chief purpose of the local church is to manifest the glory of God in a Biblical manner.

Now a quick survey of the testimony of what calls itself 'church' will make us very angry indeed.

The name of the Lord is universally dishonoured by these who call themselves Christians, and this is not limited to those who preach heretical doctrines and adopt aberrant practices. Many conservative churches, who pride themselves on preaching a sound Gospel, are guilty of some grievous aberrations of testimony.

Without doubt the picture that the world has of evangelical Christianity is pretty appalling. To most ordinary people this conjures up televangelists seeking financial donations on false pretences of healing. It sees the hypocrisy of powerful leaders who drive new cars have large homes and live affluent lifestyles when their flock is generally poor. It sees the lily-livered press releases of compromised church leaders utterly failing to deal with the real issues of society because they are afraid to stand out and affirm Biblical doctrine and

instead issue wishy-washy statements and superficial platitudes. It sees the sexual sin, fraud and abuse committed in certain denominations with regularity. It sees the psychological abuse continually perpetrated on vulnerable people under the pretence of healing, exorcism or counselling. We could continue ad nauseam.

Now how is the true believer to react to this? With anger! There is no other righteous reaction; the godly man will be deeply offended by this behaviour since the testimony of God has been besmirched. As Jesus was angry when the temple was abused for the purposes of commercial gain, so the believer today should be angry when the church is used as a vehicle for men's hubris, power-seeking and greed. To fail to be angry at the sin manifest in the church today is a sign that a person has little understanding about God's honour and character.

### **Warning**

The need to be righteously angry at sin is no excuse for men to express fleshly anger. Christians must be extremely careful not to let anger ever lead to expressions of the flesh. The anger of the old man is sin, 'for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God' (Jm 1:20). Anger, being a part of the old nature, must be put off, 'put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth' (Col 3:8). Fleshly anger is the expression of temper and means that a man has already lost his self-control. An angry man is not meek.

### **Examples of godly anger at sin**

**The Lord:** The LORD would not spare him; for then the anger of the LORD and His jealousy would burn against that man, and every curse that is written in this book would settle on him, and the LORD would blot out his name from under heaven. Deut 29:20 Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God. 2 Sam 6:7

**Moses:** Then he went out from Pharaoh in great anger. Ex 11:8 So Moses' anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. Ex 32:19

**Samson:** Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon him mightily, and he went down to Ashkelon and killed thirty of their men, took their apparel, and gave the changes of clothing to those who had explained the riddle. So his anger was aroused. Jud 14:19

**David:** David's anger was greatly aroused against the man. 2 Sam 12:5

**Jonathan:** Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and ate no food the second day of the month, for he was grieved for David, because his father had treated him shamefully. 1 Sam 20:34

**John the Baptist:** But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, 'Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?' Matt 3:7

**Jesus:** And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other. Mk 3:5

### **Conclusion**

Ordinarily believers should not be angry; it is the province of fools (Eccles 7:9). As an expression of the flesh, anger is a sin that must be put off and denied. However, there is a righteous anger and this is anger at sin, and especially anger expressed whenever God's honour is impugned. An increasing sensitivity to sin and a developing understanding of God's holiness will lead to a better understanding of righteous anger and how it is to be expressed. Anger is a passionate feeling of displeasure, and it is quite normal for Christians to be passionately displeased at the many expressions of rebellion against God's name

visible in our world today. Indeed, if this wickedness does not give rise to passionate feelings, we should question how deeply we really understand the things of God.

**You who love the LORD, hate evil! Ps 97:10**

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