

“Why We Must Not Become Angry”

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Understanding a Gospel-Driven Christian Life

I continue to find this topic perplexing. On the one hand you have Old Testament narratives clearly depicting those in leadership and exercising oversight of the nation showing anger. In addition, you have the expression of anger by God the Father (Rom. 1:18) and the Son (Mark 3:5). These two examples provide enough fodder for some to support the idea that believers can be angry without sin, and it is called “righteous indignation.” Yet throughout the Proverbs and New Testament the word against expressing anger is thorough. It is to be put off (Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8; 1 Tim. 2:8).

I personally do not believe Christians can establish a platform for the justification of anger. I believe this principle is valid for the following reasons.

First, the Old Testament narrative does not demand that it become normative or binding. Just because they were angry does not demand or allow me to be angry any more than David’s sins of adultery and murder justify such acts on my part.

Second, in the Old Testament narrative, anger and its outworking are often seen in those who occupy positions of leaderships or who function as mediators within the kingdom of God.

Third, simply because God expresses anger does not mean His expression and mine are the same. Regardless as to what God does, it is always without sin (Heb. 4:15). I can never use God’s workings as justification for mine. God as Creator and Sovereign has the right and authority to do whatever He wants with what is His and when He does it, it is always right. The same cannot be said of us.

Fourth, nowhere in the New Testament are we ever commanded to be angry. In fact, the opposite is true.

Fifth, the one text of Ephesians 4:26, “Be angry and not sin,” in context argues against the call to be angry, but rather invites us to put anger off.

Put Off	Put On	Be Renewed
Falsehood (v. 25)	Speak The Truth	Member One Of Another
Anger (v. 26)	Deal With It	No Opportunity To The Devil
Stealing (v. 28)	Work	Share With One Another
Corrupting Talk (v. 29)	Build Up	You Are Sealed (v. 30)
Bitterness, Wrath, Anger, Clamor, Slander, All Malice (v. 31)	Be Kind, Tenderhearted, Forgiving (v. 32)	As God In Christ Forgave You

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“The context here shows that Paul is speaking of anger in the usual meaning of the word. Such anger or wrath in our heart against our neighbor is in itself sin, which Jesus also in His Sermon on the Mount condemns as a transgression of the Fifth Commandment. It is simply incredible that Paul here makes a concession to a sinful weakness of the Christian, though some have assumed that. Christians are to consider seriously that abiding wrath in the heart is the effort of the devil to stir up one brother against the other, to cause strife and contention and thus to create all manner of harm in the Church.” (George Stoeckhardt, *Ephesians*, Concordia Classic Commentary Series, 222).

Finally, to be angry toward sin does not mean you can carry out the sentence against it unless you are in an oversight position (i.e. government, church leader and parent). It is biblical to “hate sin,” but even here care must be taken so that it is the sin and not the sinner that is hated. Only God is capable and justified in hating both sin and the sinner; you and I cannot. Because of who we are as fallen and finite people, all expressions of anger and hate must be tempered by caution and care. Anger and hate are never to be in the absence of justice, mercy, love and grace. Only God “blends” such attributes/qualities or emotions flawlessly. Because of the fall, we are flawed and must guard ourselves from encouraging and entertaining such qualities.

We must always remember the words of James. May the Holy Spirit refrain us from such divisive sin.

¹⁹“This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and **slow to anger**; ²⁰**for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.** ²¹**Therefore**, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, . . .” (James 1:19-21).

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