

Self-Talk and Anger

John 3:30

Online Sermon:

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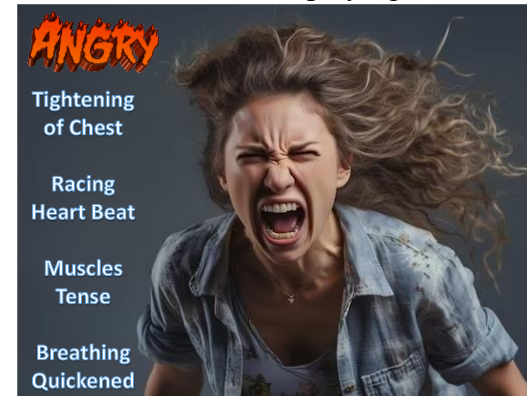
Have you ever felt so angry that you just wanted to scream out in fury? The Israelites, wandering in the wilderness, once again complained to Moses and Aaron about their lack of water, expressing their dissatisfaction by claiming it would have been better to die than to perish from thirst in the desert. This



was just one of many grievances: they had previously complained about bitter water after crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 15:22-24), about hunger (Exodus 16:2-3), about water again at Horeb (Exodus 17:1-3), about a lack of meat (Numbers 11:1-6), and even about Moses' leadership (Numbers 13-14). Despite God's repeated provision and miracles, the people's continual lack of faith ignited a growing frustration in Moses. When God instructed him to speak to a rock to bring forth water, Moses, in his anger, struck the rock twice with his staff, saying, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" (Numbers

20:10). Although water flowed, Moses had disobeyed God by acting in anger, and consequently, God declared that Moses would not enter the Promised Land (Numbers 20:12).

We've all experienced the rush of anger—a surge of emotions that floods our minds and bodies, often beginning with a tightening chest and a racing heartbeat. Our muscles tense, our breathing quickens, and we feel a rise in internal heat as our thoughts race with a sense of injustice. We dwell on the wrongs done to us or others, replaying them over and over in our minds,



with clenched fists and flushed faces, until the pressure builds and erupts in words or actions. But as Christians, is this kind of anger acceptable? After all, we are made in the image of God, and even Jesus became angry—whether in cleansing the temple, calling out its corruption (Matthew 21:12-13), or confronting the Pharisees' hardened hearts (Mark 3:1-5). Doesn't this show that anger, when rooted in a defense of God's holiness and justice, can be righteous? Yet, where is the line between righteous anger and sinful anger, like Moses' disobedient outburst that cost him the Promised Land? And how can we break the strongholds of sinful anger and make it obedient to Christ? By the end of this sermon, we'll see how we can bring our anger under the lordship of Christ and respond in ways that reflect His grace and truth.

Affects of Anger

Anger, defined by the Oxford Dictionary as a "strong feeling of annoyance, displeasure, or hostility" towards someone or something, can be a helpful warning signal against danger. However, when it becomes too frequent, intense, prolonged, or disproportionate to the situation, it can harm both physical and spiritual well-being. Elevated anger is often linked to emotional



disorders like anxiety and depression, and research shows that it triggers stress hormones, which over time impair heart function and increase the risk of high blood pressure, arrhythmias, and heart disease. Anger

can also disrupt the digestive system, causing issues such as abdominal pain, gastroesophageal reflux, and irritable bowel syndrome, while chronic anger contributes to inflammation and immune system dysfunction, heightening the risk of conditions like osteoarthritis, diabetes, and certain cancers. Beyond the physical toll, anger fosters resentment, damaging relationships and leading us to ignore Jesus' command to love our enemies. In our anger, we may feel distant from God, who calls us to focus on what is true, right, pure, lovely, and admirable (Philippians 4:8).

Be Angry and do not Sin

While prolonged anger can negatively affect the body, is it inherently sinful? Some anger is righteous, as seen when Jesus expressed anger at the money changers in the temple (Matthew 21:12-13), the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (Mark 3:1-5), and the disciples who tried to prevent children from coming to Him (Mark 10:13-16). However, there is also sinful anger. For



example, the Apostle Paul, in his anger, persecuted the church before being rebuked by Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). Later, Paul urged believers to put away anger (Colossians 3:8) and warned the Ephesians, "In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give

the devil a foothold" (Ephesians 4:26). Anger becomes sinful when it leads to destructive thoughts or actions, such as violence or a desire for revenge. As John wrote, one cannot claim to love God while harboring anger toward others (1 John 4:20). Anger also becomes sinful when it opposes God's will, as seen with Moses, or when it stirs up conflict, as King Solomon warned (Proverbs 15:18). James also teaches that "human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires" (James 1:19-20). Therefore, while anger itself is not inherently sinful, most people struggle to manage it righteously, which is why Paul emphasized the importance of exercising self-control over anger.

Myths on How to Handle Anger

There are many misconceptions about how we should manage our anger. For instance, Freud theorized that much of what we do is controlled by our unconscious mind, which he believed harbors destructive impulses.¹ According to this view, suppressed anger eventually erupts in unpredictable ways. Similarly, the "reservoir theory" suggests that anger builds up inside us like water in a dam, and if it isn't released, it will



eventually burst, often damaging important relationships. While these theories leave a person hostage to anger, other psychologists suggest a person can

control one's anger and get better outcomes. For example, some psychologists advocate for venting anger through physical activity, such as running, or even destructive actions like throwing dishes or hitting pillows, to release tension.² However, while these methods might provide temporary relief, they often fail to address the root causes of the anger. Likewise, the suggestion that one can "talk over your anger" to release its hold on one's emotional and physical wellbeing can backfire, as it may simply reinforce a person's hostile feelings and justify their

¹ You are what you Think, Loc. 960.

² Ibid., Loc. 994

anger. Ultimately, these approaches offer limited success because they focus on surface-level symptoms rather than resolving the deeper issues driving the anger. Surely, there must be a better way to handle anger!

Getting rid of Demands on Others

Anger often stems not from our circumstances, but from the self-talk that fuels our emotional responses.³ We tend to feel hurt and bitter when people or situations don't align with our



desires, leading to frustration as we attempt to control what is beyond our reach. Thoughts like "he/she shouldn't be so unreasonable" or "they should have included me" only intensify these feelings when

others fail to meet our expectations. Moses, for example, grew angry when the Israelites disobeyed his calls for faith and holiness, illustrating how unmet demands can spark frustration. Dr. Stoop suggests that resolving anger involves challenging these internal demands and transforming them into wants or

³ You are What you Think, Loc. 1043

desires.⁴ Recognizing that only God can place demands on us,⁵ as He alone has the power to enforce them, helps shift our perspective. When we change our demands into hopes for change and see others through the lens of God's image, anger is reduced, and we can pray for their growth and righteousness instead.

Jesus' Role in Controlling One's Anger

Jesus plays a central role in transforming our anger by providing both an example of righteous anger and the power to overcome sinful anger through His grace. When Jesus expressed anger,



such as in cleansing the temple or confronting injustice, it was always focused on defending God's holiness and justice, never motivated by personal offense. Through His example, we learn how to

discern when anger is justified and how to express it in a way that honors God. Most importantly, Jesus' sacrifice on the cross transforms our hearts, demonstrating that loving others, made in

God's image, must not be conditional on their thoughts or actions. Christ's open-armed death for the many shows the depth of His grace and calls us to extend that same grace and unconditional love to others. In difficult situations, instead of simmering in anger or resentment, we are invited to release our desire for control and trust in God's sovereignty, allowing His peace and love to replace our anger. As Jesus continues to work in our lives, He helps us reflect His character, responding to frustration with compassion and understanding, rather than with outbursts of rage.

Practical Steps to Self-Talk that Curbs Anger

In closing, we all face moments where anger tries to take control, but through God's help, we can learn to respond in a way that honors Him. Here are some practical steps to help you control anger:

Pause and Pray: When you feel anger rising, take a moment to pause and seek God's guidance. Ask Him to calm your heart and give you wisdom before reacting. James 1:19 reminds us to be "quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry."

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1127.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1159.

Challenge Your Thoughts: Examine the self-talk that fuels your anger. Ask yourself, "Is this demand reasonable? Am I trying to control something that only God can?" Replace demands with desires, surrendering your expectations to God's will.

Practice Forgiveness: Anger often lingers when we hold onto offenses. As Jesus forgave us, we are called to forgive others (Ephesians 4:32). Let go of grudges and ask God to give you the grace to release any bitterness.

Seek Accountability: Share your struggles with a trusted friend or mentor who can pray for you and hold you accountable. Sometimes an outside perspective can help us see our blind spots and guide us in better managing our emotions.

Reflect on Christ's Example: Remember that Jesus, who faced injustice and betrayal, controlled His anger and responded with love and grace. Follow His example by trusting in God's justice and focusing on His peace rather than seeking personal vengeance.

When we commit to these practical steps and rely on the power of the Holy Spirit, our anger can be transformed from a destructive force into an opportunity for growth, reflection, and deeper reliance on God. Let's ask Him daily to fill us with His

peace, patience, and self-control, allowing us to respond to life's challenges with grace and compassion.