

## Understanding Anger

**INTRODUCTION** – "Anger is bad" - this seems to be the notion of many people, including psychologists and some religions that teach meditation. Thus they try to cut out all anger from a person's life. No matter how hard they try, they will never succeed. When God first created mankind, anger was part and parcel of man's image. In other words, the emotion called anger is not a sinful emotion that came into man's life after the fall.

How do we know that anger was an emotion given to us by God? The reason is that the LORD has this same emotion. **Exodus 4:14** (KJV), "*And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses, and he said, Is not Aaron the Levite thy brother? I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he cometh forth to meet thee: and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart.*" (Emphasis added. See also Numbers 11:10; 12:9; 22:22; 25:3, 4; 32:10, 13, 14; Deut 6:15; 7:4.) The LORD also gets angry. Therefore when the Bible says that man was made in God's image, it logically follows that man was made with the emotion of anger as well.

Why does the world think that anger is a bad emotion? The reason is that most of the time man gets angry for the wrong reasons. In a fit of anger, a man can commit acts of crime and sins. Thus he thinks that by getting rid of anger, he will not sin or commit crime. The faulty logic is that the root cause of felonies and the problems of society is anger. Get rid of anger, get rid of problems! The root cause of sin is not anger but the sinful nature. Anger can never be eradicated because it is part of man's make-up.

This means that anger is a good emotion to have. It has to be properly regulated and not denied. Without this emotion we become like robots that cannot love. The deeper the love felt, the greater the anger will be. For example, a wife has every right to be angry with her husband if he betrays her trust and breaks the marriage vow by committing adultery. For her to not feel anything is foolishness. It is as if she has been commanded to not love him and to have no feelings for him. However, though she is justified to be angry, it does not give her the right to sin or do wrong out of anger. The distinction must be clear. There may be just cause for anger but the act that comes from righteous anger must also be righteous and not sinful. The Bible warns in **Ephesians 4:26** (KJV), "*Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.*" Let the righteous anger come but let it be controlled as soon as possible so that any action taken is carefully considered and not done out of anger. Any decisions made in a fit of anger are almost always wrong. We all get angry now and then. But we need to keep our anger in check for the sake of our testimony as Christians and our loved ones!

Having explained anger in its biblical context, let us examine some aspects of anger as taught in the Book of Proverbs.

### I. Anger Reveals – What does bad anger reveal about a person?

- **Proverbs 12:16**, "**A fool's wrath (ca-'as – vexation or provocation) is presently known: but a prudent man covereth shame.**" (antithetical parallelism) – *A fool would let everyone know that he is angry. When he is provoked he shows it readily and easily. He shows it by his demeanour and by his words. He would do or say something that is wrong. The word "presently" means "daily." He "flies off the handle" easily. This is bad anger. It must be kept in check at all times.*

*Conversely, the man who keeps his anger in check is a man who covers his shame, i.e. disgrace. He is careful with what he says and does. (How many times has an angry word spoken in the office resulted in the loss of job or the colleagues' estimation?) His testimony,*

*built up over the years, goes out the window because of an outburst of words or deeds that cannot be undone. The Bible calls a man who controls his anger "prudent" because he knows how to cover his shame.*

- **Proverbs 14:17, "He that is soon (i.e. short) angry dealeth foolishly: and a man of wicked devices is hated."** (synthetic parallelism) – *The one who gets angry easily will act foolishly. His foolish acts include rash speeches and actions. He has a short fuse. He does not take time to reflect before he acts. He sends off emails in anger. He posts on facebook, or such public domains, his rage which will result in life changing experiences that will ruin him for life. He will be hated because he will soon plan wicked devices, fuelled by his anger, to get back at people. He will be hated by others because of his destructive and harmful actions.*
- **Proverbs 11:23, "The desire of the righteous is only good: but the expectation of the wicked is wrath ('ev-rah - outburst of passion)."** (antithetical parallelism) – *Only believers are righteous. They have been imputed with the righteousness of Christ. They are able to do righteous deeds. Therefore their desires, i.e. longings, are righteous; the heart and mind of the righteous think of right things all the time. The believer will then carry them out by doing good to others. The goodness he does will be in accordance with Holy Scriptures. This means that his good deeds must be in truth, God's Truth. It does not mean that he condones sins. It means that he will always do what is right and what is best for others in accordance with God's Truth.*

*Conversely, the expectation, i.e. the attachments, of the wicked is wrath. He wishes ill on others. He likes to see others fail and fall by the wayside. He is destructive. He plots and plans to bring others down. He is full of venom. His words are caustic and sarcastic. He is consumed with destroying relationships, others' testimonies and good deeds. He hates goodness. Everything that the righteous loves and does, he hates and refuses to do. He is characterised by anger and destruction.*

**II. Anger Power** – There are certain individuals whose anger impacts many people. The king's anger is of great significance, to say the least. A father's affects the whole family. The Chief Executive Officer's anger affects the entire company. An angry ruler of a country can bring war upon his people like kings of old. These people need to subdue their anger. The more powerful they are, the greater will be the impact from their anger.

- **Proverbs 14:35, "The king's favour is toward a wise servant: but his wrath is against him that causeth shame."** (antithetical parallelism) – *The king finds pleasure in a wise servant who knows when to speak and when not to speak. He helps the king to run his palace affairs. He is trusted to get things done on time and properly. But the king's wrath, i.e. burst of passion, is against the one who causes shame or brings disgrace to him. The servants of the king not only help but also represent the king. So when the servant speaks out of turn, he embarrasses the king and he will be severely punished. As king, he can even impose the death penalty on the bad servant, and many kings have done so in the past. Only a fool would enrage a king into an outburst of anger that may result in his own death.*
- **Proverbs 16:14, "The wrath (che-mah – hot displeasure) of a king is as messengers of death: but a wise man will pacify it."** (antithetical parallelism) – *The word "wrath" means a slow,*

*deliberate and intensified anger. It is not like an outburst but a gradual simmering until it overflows and turns into a fierce display of anger. It comes from a root word (verb) which means "to curdle milk." Once the king gets into a fit of anger that has been simmering for some time, he passes a series of orders that could have devastating effects on the nation and its inhabitants. The king has absolute power. He can destroy villages, towns and even an entire country if he so chooses.*

*But the wise man will pacify the king's wrath. The word "pacify" means to "cover." He is able to smother the wrath of the king. He knows what to say and in a convincing manner that will pacify the king. Such wise men are hard to find but very needful to assist a king to take care of the welfare of the people.*

- **Proverbs 19:12, "The king's wrath (za-'aph – indignation) is as the roaring of a lion; but his favour is as dew upon the grass."** (antithetical parallelism) – *The king's wrath is compared to a roaring lion. The word "wrath" means "indignation." It comes from a verb which means "to boil up." This verb has the idea of an anger that boils over. When the king's anger boils over, it is as a roaring lion. The roaring lion is a hungry lion. Anything that stands in its way is destroyed and consumed. A roaring lion devours at will. There is no letting up until the prey is dead and eaten.*

*But when the king is pleased, he is like dew upon the grass. Grass needs the morning dew to survive. The dew refreshes and nourishes the grass. The grass in turn becomes food for the animals, like the sheep and goats.*

- **Proverbs 20:2, "The fear ('ey-mah – fright or terror) of a king is as the roaring of a lion: whoso provoketh him to anger sinneth against his own soul."** (synthetic parallelism) – The word "fear" means terror. There is no meaning of reverence attached to this word. The one who makes the king angry is a fool and he sins against his own soul because to anger the king is as good as asking the king to kill him. He provokes the king to anger, i.e. he crosses the line and deliberately makes the king angry. If the king is still not angry, he would taunt him until he gets angry! Such a fool deserves death. He asks for it. The king's terror is backed up by the might of his power as king.

The LORD Jesus Christ will come as King. The world has been taunting Him by killing God's children and worshipping idols. The terror of the King is fearsome. The roaring lion will not stop until the prey is in its mouth! Who are the fools who make Christ angry?

**III. Anger Controlled** – Although anger is an emotion that is part of man's makeup from the time of creation, believers must learn to keep their anger under control. There are many benefits when one's anger is under control. Believers have been endowed by God with the ability to control their anger.

- **Proverbs 14:29, "He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly."** (antithetical parallelism); **Proverbs 15:18, "A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife."** (antithetical parallelism) – *The person who is slow to wrath, i.e. longsuffering to anger, is of great understanding. A man of great*

understanding possesses the ability to control his anger, or rather to possess an even temper, for long periods no matter how vexed. The word "wrath" has its roots in the noun "nose or nostril." This means that he is huffing and puffing with his nostrils flaring. But the man of great understanding is one who does not allow himself to get to this stage.

The person who is hasty (short of spirit) exalts (promotes) folly. The word "folly" means "silliness." A person who is short of spirit cannot control his anger. His anger controls him. He bursts into a rage easily. This person promotes silliness which includes regretful words and actions. He hurts and destroys lives instead of building up. But the believer who can control his anger has been endowed with a mind to understand the folly of losing his temper.

- **Proverbs 15:1, "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger."** (antithetical parallelism) – *There will be times when angry words are hurled at us. The response is crucial. It could inflame and make the situation ten times worse or it could subdue the flames and save a relationship. A soft answer is a tender reply. The result is that it turns away wrath, i.e. hot displeasure or indignation. The angry person probably feels that he has been unjustly wronged. He believes that his anger is justified. He confronts in anger and demands justice! The believer has to reply in tenderness. He must not aggravate the situation by grievous or hurtful words. Instead of calming him down, using grievous words could very well stir him into greater anger.*

Grievous words usually include absolutes like "always" or "never" or the reference to "the last time" when something else happened. The intention is to hurt the other person! But the power of the believer's tender reply can turn off the "anger switch" in the other person!

- **Proverbs 16:32, "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."** (synonymous parallelism) – *The believer who is slow (long suffering) to anger is better than the mighty. He who is able to control his anger is better than one who has all the physical strength or power in the world. It is better than conquering a city! The mighty men and weapons and planning required in conquering a city are tremendous but pales in contrast to one who can control his spirit. We need to take whatever steps are needed to keep our tempers in check, for the strength of the believer lies in his ability to control his anger!*
- **Proverbs 19:11, "The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression."** (synthetic parallelism) – *Sometimes, or rather, most of the time when we are provoked, we respond too readily to provocation. Proverbs 19:11 says that this must not be the case. The discretion of a man, i.e. his intelligence, defers (holds back) his anger like a man who delays it and stops his anger from coming out into the open. It is to his credit (glory or ornament) to pass over a transgression. He must not be lured into an angry response. He lets the transgression pass over him. He does not retaliate. His non retaliation is like an ornament that he wears!*

Note: When the testimony of Christ and the Word of God come under attack, it is necessary and right to defend them. The above does not apply in this scenario. Proverbs 19:11 is with

reference to personal attacks and injury and is in tandem with what Christ taught in the Sermon on the Mount.

**IV. Anger Destroys** – Sinful and uncontrolled anger has destroyed innumerable families and relationships. Countries have been destroyed by uncontrolled anger. This is not an emotion that can be underestimated. We have to realize the destructive nature of anger.

- **Proverbs 25:28, "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls."** (emblematic parallelism) – *The literal translation is, "A city broken down (and) without walls is a man who is without control of his spirit." A city without walls is defenceless. In biblical times, all cities had walls. The nature of battles and weapons of war at that time demanded that cities be built on a hill and surrounded by walls. To build a city without walls around it is immense foolishness. It is like a person leaving his gold in plain sight for all to take at will. In addition, a city is supposed to have buildings that are upright. No one in their right minds would live in a city that is broken down and unsecured.*

*The person who has no control over his own spirit (temperament, thoughts, actions) is like that broken down city! He can surround himself with all the wealth and education the world has to offer him but if he cannot control his spirit, his entire life is like the city exposed and waiting to be looted. One can control only his own spirit; no one else can do it. He cannot control what others say or do to him. If he does not control his spirit, he will destroy lives. He may destroy the lives of those who are dear to him. He may destroy everything he touches in business. His friends will avoid him calling him a loose "canon". He may get himself into trouble and others may get "dragged in" as well. He will lose his friends. His family will tolerate him and perhaps long for the day when he will disappear from their lives, either by his leaving home or this world! What a sad life.*

- **Proverbs 30:33, "Surely the churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood: so the forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife."** (emblematic parallelism) – *The three verbs (churning, wringing, forcing) used in this verse have the same meaning. In the first emblem, the churning of milk will definitely bring forth milk. The violent agitation to the milk will inevitably turn it into butter or buttermilk. A nose constantly being wrung or twisted will inevitably bring forth blood. Using these two emblems that all Israelites can identify with, the LORD says that the one who agitates anger (i.e. the flaring of the nostrils plus huffing and puffing) will inevitably bring forth strife or contentions. This will result in friendships and lives destroyed. Sadly there are people who do this as a way of life! They leave behind a trail of destroyed lives and ruined relationships. They will not stop, like the constant and unceasing agitation of the milk, until they do the most damage. Everything in their path will be ruined, one way or the other.*
- **Proverbs 29:22 (KJV)** "An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression." (synonymous parallelism) – *A man who huffs and puffs with his nostrils flaring will stir up strife (quarrels and brawling.) The word "stir" has the idea of a person who meddles in people's affairs. He seems to create trouble for others when there is no trouble to be found. He grates them into existence like one grates a carrot. The furious man is one who*

*exhibits hot displeasure. His life is filled to overflowing with transgression. Sins abound in his life. He is like a person whose clothing is made of sin. He is a walking trouble maker. His hot temper creates trouble everywhere he goes. He will stir up trouble at home, places of work/study, and even when he is on holiday.*

**APPLICATION** – One of the best ways to deal with one's anger is to avoid angry people. Somehow, one's anger rubs off on others. **Proverbs 22:24-25, "Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go: Lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul."** (synthetic parallelism). Choose your friends and the people you hang around with carefully. Very soon you will become like them and they will become like you. Their vocabulary becomes your vocabulary. You will speak in the same angry tones as well. Stay away from angry people. How serious is the LORD in this commandment? Note **Proverbs 21:19, "It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman."** (synthetic parallelism). The wilderness is a place of immense loneliness where wild animals, poisonous snakes and creepy crawlies live.

All God's children have been endowed with the Spirit of God and the Word of God to guide and help them. Soak your mind with the Word of God by memorizing and obeying His holy and perfect Word. Pray without ceasing so that you do not lean on your own strength to overcome your anger. When you least feel like praying, that is the time you need to pray the most. Be led by the Spirit of God and not by self and carnal desires. A tender reply will put out the flames of anger in a person. There are many in our lives who need us to help them put out these flames. We need others to help us put out ours too.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Has there been a marked improvement in the control of your temper before and after salvation? What evidence do you have to show for it?
2. Have you used absolutes like "never", "always" or any similar words in your quarrels? Why do you do that? Is it for the purpose of inciting anger and hurting the person?
3. Is it true that when it comes to family we have "shorter" tempers; but when it comes to friends we are more longsuffering? Why is that so? Do you think that this is a terrible double standard that is sinful?
4. Do you think that a person should raise his voice in anger when he argues? Who is more deadly, a person who is angry in a soft toned voice or a person who shouts loudly? Which kind are you?
5. Do you think that to be angry at times and for the right reason is a biblical and healthy experience of every believer? Have you had such experiences before? Why do you have them?