

Anger.

The word normally used in the Bible to refer to an emotion considered sinful. Psalm 37:8, for example, commands: “Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath!” Jesus paralleled anger with murder when he said that “every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment” (Mt 5:22) just as if he had actually committed the murder he felt in his angry heart. Ephesians 4:31 and Colossians 3:8 both list anger, along with bitterness, wrath, malice, and slander, as attitudes which Christians must rid themselves of once and for all. In his list of attributes for a bishop or pastor of a church, the apostle Paul said that a Christian leader should not be prone to anger, that is, easily provoked (Ti 1:7).

Anger of a good sort is also spoken of in the Bible. “Righteous indignation” refers to the extreme displeasure of a holy heart unable to tolerate sin of any kind. The anger of God contains this element: man should be good, yet he sins—and God is angry “because they forsook the covenant of the Lord, the God of their fathers, which he made with them when he brought them out of the land of Egypt, and went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they had not known and whom he had not allotted to them” (Dt 29:25, 26). It was in that sense also that Moses’ anger burned on Mt Sinai and caused him to smash the tablets of the Law on the ground when he saw the golden calf and Israel’s idolatry (Ex 32:19).

In the NT, Mark says that Jesus looked with anger at the Pharisees, who were hoping to catch him breaking their law (Mk 3:5). Jesus’ anger was also shown in his cleansing of the temple (Jn 2:13–22); it should have been a place of prayer but was being used as a place of business—Jesus “drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons” (Mt 21:12). His holy indignation was neither a weakness nor a sin. Such anger is an appropriate response to iniquity and injustice, especially when they are apparently unpunished.

The apostle Paul encouraged that kind of anger with a direct command: “Be angry but do not sin” (Eph 4:26a). Evidently he felt that righteous indignation could easily turn into unholy anger and sinful wrath, so he added some explanatory prohibitions: “Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil” (Eph 4:26b, 27a). The longer a person allows permissible anger to continue, the greater the danger that it will develop sinful qualities, giving Satan a foothold for attack. James cautions, “Be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger” (Jas 1:19).

The proper kind of anger on the human plane is related to the anger sometimes spoken of as “the wrath of God.” In the OT, God’s anger is usually directed against sin and sinners. For example, “Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses” because of his excuses (Ex 4:14); and “so the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel” because of their idolatry (Jgs 2:14). God cannot sin or even be tempted with sin of any kind (Jas 1:13); hence he cannot tolerate sin in his people. God’s anger is not an unreasonable, unwarranted, or arbitrary passion but a result of the conflict between his holiness and sin.

The believer should understand that there is appropriate and inappropriate anger and attempt to insure that his anger, like God’s, is proper to the situation

Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (pp. 90–91). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

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