

## “TEMPER, TANTRUMS & TESTIMONY” (Ephesians 4:22-32)

Many lives have been destroyed by the loss of self-control in a fit of anger. Uncontrolled anger is a huge problem, not only in the world, but also in the Christian home, and even in the church. Anger and self-control is something we all struggle with, especially in personal relationships. Jay Adams states, “Anger is a problem for every Christian; sinful anger is probably involved in 90 percent of all counselling problems.” But learning to control our anger is critical to a successful Christian life, “*He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.*” (Proverbs 16:32)

Many Christians try to justify their anger by arguing “It is my temperament” and “I just have a short fuse.” But, the truth of the matter is that you *can* control it. You just do not *want* to control it, because controlling it means judging your own fleshly attitudes. A fiery lady once came to Billy Sunday and tried to rationalize her angry outbursts. She sought to excuse herself by arguing, “There’s nothing wrong with losing my temper. I blow up, and then it’s all over.” Billy Sunday shook his head and replied, “So does a shotgun, and look at the damage it leaves behind!”



### REALITY OF SINFUL ANGER

The Bible clearly teaches that there is a sinful form of anger that we must avoid. This can be two types of anger:

- (1) A brooding, simmering anger that is nurtured and not allowed to die. It is exemplified in the spirit of a man like Joab towards Abner who holds grudges and refuses to forgive or seek reconciliation.
- (2) An impulsive passionate anger that leads people to striking acts of rage like murder. We see this in Moses murdering the Egyptian taskmaster and Cain flaring up to butcher Abel.

Cain was the first in the Bible that we read that exhibited an evil anger. God graciously warned him that his anger was sinful and dangerous, “*And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.* (Genesis 4:6) Cain refused to deal with his sinful anger. The unchecked anger progressed to hatred and then to murder. His story

unfolds what a heart of anger can lead to in a person's life. It is a solemn warning to the latent dangers lurking in our own thought life. The way of Cain begins in the heart. One man observed, "There is a little Cain in all of us and a lot of Cain in most of us."

The church in Ephesus was full of new Christians. Many had been saved from paganism. They needed to be patiently taught the values of a mature spirit-controlled Christian testimony. Paul commanded them to avoid sinful anger, "*Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.*" (Eph. 4:26) Apostle Paul was very blunt, "*Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.*" (Eph. 4:31) Paul doesn't make any excuses or provide and cover for those who try to dilute the sinfulness of anger. Twice he repeats the word "all" to make it clear that bad temper and tantrums must go from our lives. As Christians we must label sin by what the Bible labels it. Anger is sin and we must put away *all* of it from our lives.

## **RIGHTEOUS ANGER**

There is a form of anger that is not sinful. It is an anger against sin modelled after the righteous anger of God. The Bible is replete with examples of God's anger and its consequences. Those who are outside the righteousness of God are under His holy anger, "*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.*" (Romans 1:18) This wrath is not an explosive anger that man is prone to but God's settled and controlled indignation toward all sin and sinners. The anger of God is perfectly directed against sin and sinners and is always judicially exercised, unhindered, and consistent.

Not only is God's wrath real and focused on sin and sinner, but we should not imagine that this wrath is simply referring to the outpouring of it on the Day of Judgment (although it certainly includes this). God often shows His anger during the lifetime of sinners on earth. Paul revealed this in his words to Timothy, "*Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after?*" (1 Tim. 5:24). God is not sitting idle or is indifferent to sin. Throughout history He actively intervenes to judge sin and sinners. We see this outpouring of the wrath of God in the Fall when Adam and Even were driven from Paradise in Eden; when they were forced to exist by the sweat of their brow; when the ground was cursed; and when sickness, disease and death became part of their lives. We see God's wrath poured out against sin in the Global Flood, which destroyed almost all of humanity; when God scattered the people at Babel; and when He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone. Observe how God removed the Canaanites; how He destroyed the armies of the arrogant Pharaoh; and how He humbled the proud Nebuchadnezzar and Sennacherib. Indeed, look at the wrath He exhibited in His judgments upon His elect people Israel in two captivities.

The Lord Jesus showed us an example of this righteous anger when He drove out in anger the moneychangers in the temple who were desecrating the holy place (John 2:13-16). Believers can also be angry for the glory of God and against the rebellion of sinners against God. In fact, believers should be angry at sin. This is not a sin if we do it with the right motive and in the right manner. Moses was rightly angered at the Israelites for their rebelliousness and complaining spirit. David was angered when he heard the blasphemies of Goliath against the honour and glory of Jehovah. However, we must be careful and prayerful in practicing anger against sin because our emotions are all too easily tainted by the corruption of sin and we lack the wisdom and knowledge of God in coming to judgment on many situation. Our anger must always be under the control of the Holy Spirit. John Phillips notes the right balance between righteous anger and unrighteous anger,

“There is nothing wrong with being angry for a righteous cause. Anger can be wholesome. There are times when we should be angry. Anger can be kindled by the fire of Hell or by the fire from the altar of God. Anger kindled by the old man is always sinful, destructive, and devilish. Anger kindled by the Holy Spirit at the sight of some injustice, some great depravity, or some monstrous iniquity, is intended to give those who are engaging in the sinful activity reason to fear. The person who cannot get angry at the seduction of an innocent girl, at the corrupting of a child, at those who practice and propagate perversion and pornography, must either be spineless or wholly without moral conviction.”

## RESULTS OF ANGER

Even the greatest of God’s servants can succumb to sinful outbursts of anger. This can harm our mental and spiritual wellbeing as well as those around us. As someone has well said, “Don’t fly into a rage unless you are prepared for a rough landing.” It is always good to remember that **anger** is only one letter short of **danger**!



## MOSES & THE ROCK

Moses struggled with anger throughout his life. In his younger days, he murdered a man in a fit of uncontrolled anger. Then towards the end of his life, he completely lost control with the Israelites when the people murmured because of a shortage of water at a place called Kadesh. In Numbers 20 we are told that God instructed Moses to speak to the rock, “*And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water.....*” (Numbers 20:7-8a) But Moses in frustration and pride instead of speaking to the rock, spoke angrily at the people, and struck the rock with his staff twice,

**And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. (Numbers 20:10-11)**

Psalm 106:32-33 revealed how the people provoked Moses here. But that was no excuse for him lashing out at the people with an attitude of anger and contempt for the people of God. In doing so, he distracted the people from the Lord and over-magnified his own partnership with God, “*Must we fetch you water out of this rock?*” Moses misrepresented God by his self-willed actions. His punishment was severe to emphasise the danger of his fit of pique.

## DAVID & NABAL

A believer must learn to only have righteous indignation for the Lord’s honour such as when Goliath blasphemed the God of Israel on the battlefield. We must overcome the strong emotions of anger when we are personally offended. Throughout his life, King David struggled to moderate his strong passions. In this incident, Nabal provoked David by humiliating him personally, “*And Nabal answered David's servants, and said, Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master.*” Nabal sarcastically asks, “*who is David?*” knowingly full well the esteem and respect this man was owed for delivering Israel on many occasions from the Philistines and especially in defeating Goliath. Likely he questioned, “*who is the son of Jesse?*” to emphasise David’s lowly origins compared to his as the ancestor of Caleb. He implies then that David is a rebellious and lawless servant of Saul, “*there be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master,*” which is completely untrue of David who was a very loyal subject of Saul.



David was so enraged by the insult of Nabal that he wanted to murder Nabal and massacre his whole family, “*Now David had said, Surely in vain have I kept all that this fellow hath in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that pertained unto him: and he hath requited me evil for good. So and more also do God unto the enemies of David, if I leave of all that pertain to him by the morning light....*” ( 1 Samuel 25:21-22a) Only the wise intervention by Abigail, providentially stopped David from this terrible sin. David was so moved by her actions that he admitted it fully, “*And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: And blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand.*” ( 1 Samuel 25:32-33)

## REMEDY FOR ANGER

James warned the early Christians to exhibit self-control, “*Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.*” (James 1:19-20) James gives no “opt outs” to those who have a fiery nature or short fuse. The fact that

James writes to instruct Christians to live this way implies this is doesn't just happen naturally because we are believers. The Apostle Paul is equally blunt, "*But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.*" (Colossians 3:8)

**SO HOW DO WE DO IT?** No doubt, many sincere believers wants to stop losing their tempers but just keep falling into this sin. What is the secret? It is interesting to note that Paul places the command, "*Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath*" (Eph. 4:26) after the command in the preceding verses, "*And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.*" (Eph. 4:24-25) He is letting us see that it is all too easy for us to say wrong things when we are angry. But Paul is going further. He is making clear that a spiritual battle within the heart needs to be fought to overcome anger, "*And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man.....*"

The Bible never commands us to do what we cannot do by the power of God. There are a number of things we can do to deal with anger and root it out of our lives:

(1) **REMINDE YOURSELF THAT ANGER IS A CHOICE** – We lie to ourselves when we concede that losing our temper is inevitable. Refuse to allow your emotions to be fuelled with wrong thoughts. Paul urges us to filter our thought life, "*Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.*" (2 Cor. 10:5) In other words, we are called to reject the evil thoughts before it becomes a stronghold in our mind. The Apostle is making it clear that we can choose what we are going to think and dwell on. Ray Pritchard makes a helpful point,

"Sometimes we talk of "blowing up" as if it happened against our will. But that's a cop-out. Anger is an emotion we control. Here's the proof. Have you ever had an argument with your spouse and the phone rang right in the middle of the argument? You were raising your voice and getting red in the face and then, "Hello, how are you? I'm so glad you called. Goodbye." You hang the phone up and go at it again. That's because anger is an emotion you can control."

(2) **BE SLOW TO SPEAK** - one of the things James emphasises is for every Christian to discipline himself to listen more and talk less, "*Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.*" (James 1:19) The more we are willing to listen, the slower we will be to speak and then the slower we will to fly into a rage. But a rush to speak leads to being quick to anger. Pride leads to anger and vengeance but humility and faith lead to leaving God to right every wrong, "*Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.*" (Romans 12:19)

(3) **RENEW THE MIND** – The way the mind is renewed is to "*put on the new man.....*" That new man is to put on the mind of Christ. We need the living Christ working in us by the power of the Holy Spirit. To do that requires us to fill our minds with the thoughts and words of Jesus Christ (Philip. 4:8; Col. 3:1-2). That is by prayer and reading of the Word. Pray for yourself and for those things and people that anger you. Live a life of self-denial, seeking the glory of God in all things, and actively seeking to serve others.

(4) **CONSECRATE YOURSELF EVERY DAY** – the Lord’s Prayer reminds us that it is a daily prayer, “*Give us this day our daily bread.*” In the midst of that prayer is the daily petition “*And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.*” Every day we must bow the knee and seek God’s grace to deal with temptation like anger. This requires a daily taking up the cross and putting down the flesh, “*And He said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.*” (Luke 9:23) There is nothing more difficult for a believer to do than to deny self.

(5) **RUN TO CHRIST** – The Bible reveals that Christ lives in us from the moment we are converted, “*To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*” (Col. 1:27) We have available to us His mighty power we can draw from like a well of grace to neutralise the power of temptation. When we feel flaring up irritation and anger towards others, we can cry to the living Saviour for the grace we need at that moment. In moments of anger we must give the Lord the things that upset us and leave it there. Discipline your mind and actions to walk in moment by moment dependence on the Holy Spirit, yielding complete control of your life to Him. FB Meyer urges his readers,

“And when the tempter comes, look instantly up and say, “Jesus, I am trusting You to keep me.” This is what the apostle Paul calls using the shield of faith. The upward glance of faith puts Jesus as a Shield between the tempter and yourself. You may go through life, saying a hundred times a day, “Jesus save me,” and He will never let those that trust in Him be ashamed. He is able even to guard you from stumbling (Jude 24). There is something better even than that. It was first taught me by a gray-haired clergyman, in the study of the Deanery at Southampton. Once, when tempted to feel great irritation, he told us that he looked up and claimed the patience and gentleness of Christ, and since then it had become the practice of his life to claim from Him the virtue of which he felt the deficiency in himself. In hours of unrest, Your peace, Lord. In hours of irritation, Your patience, Lord. In hours of temptation, Your purity, Lord. In hours of weakness, Your strength, Lord. It was to me a message straight from the throne. Until then I had been content with ridding myself of burdens; now I began to reach forth to positive blessing, making each temptation the occasion for a new acquisition of gold leaf.”

(6) **BE PREPARED** – Constantly remind yourself that this is a lifetime battle that must be waged. There must be no room for complacency or self-confidence. Always be on guard. The great reformer Zwingli has said, “The Christian life, then, is a battle, so sharp and full of danger that effort can nowhere be relaxed without loss.” The grace for previous trials cannot be relied on to sustain us in future trials. We may control our temper yesterday under incredible pressure on one moment but snap over a trivial incident today. Moses who the Bible testified in Numbers 12 was the meekest man on the planet lost his temper and smote the rock in Numbers 20.

(7) **REPENT WHEN YOU ARE WRONG** – King David flared up in a burning murderous rage with Nabal. Providentially, the Lord used the wisdom of Abigail to correct him. Her gracious words match up to Scripture and this convicts David’s heart along with her Christ-like character. David was wise enough to see his sinful attitude and repented before her. He immediately realized how foolish and evil it would have been for him to take his own personal revenge on the household of Nabal. It is good to recognize this and thank God for people He places in our way to restrain us from sin. He later wrote, “*Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness.*” (Psa. 141:5). Not many

men, especially warrior fugitives, would take this rebuke from a woman. Most of us refuse to take rebuke or advice from those we deem our inferiors. David gives us the wrong example here how to control his temper – but he give us the right example in how to repent. It is no wonder that David subsequently wrote, *“Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil”* (Psalm 37:8).



Anger management is a spiritual discipline we must learn and implement in our lives. Don't accept it or excuse it as normal. The devil has a foothold in our lives to use when we fail in this area, *“Neither give place to the devil.”* (Eph. 4:27) We are to be angry with sin, but not sin with the anger. Sin is always a threat no matter our spiritual maturity. And it is always a greater threat when we are angry. Steve Cole points out the blessings to ourselves and those around us if we get this delicate balance right,

“Think of what would happen if everyone learned to deal with their anger! Child abuse and divorce would be eradicated. Murder, terrorism, and war would stop. And many health problems would clear up. Doctors believe that anger can harm the heart as much as smoking and high blood pressure do. The number one predictor in cardiovascular disease—more important than cholesterol—is mismanaged anger. Besides high blood pressure and heart disease, anger can result in many other serious health problems.”

We will face difficult people and difficult circumstances in this world. The Bible has promised. In fact, if you don't have opposition from the world, the flesh and the devil, then something is wrong with your walk with Christ. Anger can easily rage out of control and become a very destructive force. Our testimony is too important to allow it to be spoiled by fits of temper and unruly tantrums. Seek God's grace and wisdom to deal with this area of your life.