

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. James 1:19-20 (NIV)

Don't say, "I will get even for this wrong." Wait for the LORD to handle the matter. Proverbs 20:22 (NLT)

These are not mere suggestions; these are commands from a holy God! Anger is a sin that leads to other sins, including wrath, envy, jealousy, and murder. Put these things away from you!

Initially, you may wrestle with your thoughts and emotions, because you have learned a habit, or pattern of response. It will take some time for you to master new responses, but take heart. You can see change beginning today!

If you are accustomed to blowing up when you're angry, you must learn to enact new responses that will direct the energy of anger toward fixing the problem instead of using your anger to hurt people and objects.

If you typically clam up or bury your anger, you must begin to appropriately verbalize what has caused you to become angry and then take steps to correct the problem. At first you may find it difficult to respond appropriately to anger, but it will become easier as you grow in your understanding of the righteous responses to anger and as you continue to practice the right responses. There may be many failures at first, but don't be discouraged my friend! God is a patient and loving Father, and He will bring you many opportunities to succeed.

I would also encourage you to grow in your understanding of the sovereignty of God. God is completely trustworthy and is completely aware of the circumstances that caused you to become angry. As you gain even a rudimentary understanding of the sovereignty of God, it will totally revolutionize your thinking. You will begin to understand that true wisdom comes from looking at life from God's perspective. When you do this you take yourself out of the center of your universe.



Here's a challenge: look again at the above list on "rights" and write down what you believe you have a "right" to; then see how many of the rights on the list you can righteously back up with Scripture. This exercise is often the key to assisting my counselees in understanding sinful thinking.

You too can experience heart change in response to your angry.

If you choose not to deal with your sinful anger, it will not simply go away. Anger becomes more deeply entrenched and leads us to the next sinful heart attitude: bitterness.

¹ Mack, Wayne, *A Homework Manual for Biblical Counselors*, Vol 1I (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.).

Ganschow, Julie. *Seeing Depression through the Eyes of Grace* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 2006).

Anger

The Heart of

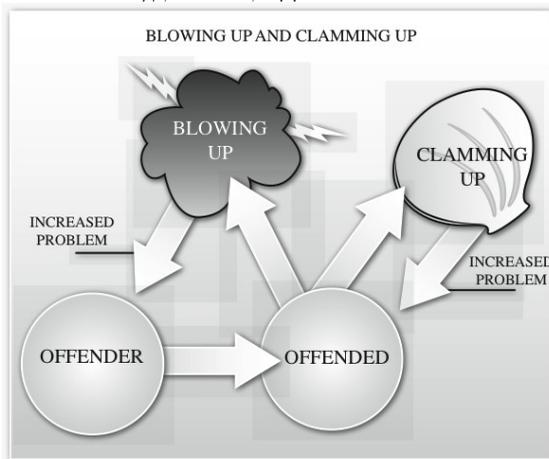
Anger



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The Heart of Anger

A wise man fears the LORD and shuns evil, but a fool is hotheaded and reckless. A quick-tempered man does foolish things, and a crafty man is hated. Proverbs 14:16-17 (NIV)

An angry man stirs up dissension, and a hot-tempered one commits many sins. Proverbs 29:22 (NIV)

The root of sinful anger grows in a heart that is self-centered and idolatrous. Because we live in a society that screams constantly about “rights,” when our perceived rights are violated, we become angry.

Women champion their “right to choose,” homosexuals fight for the rights of marriage, children claim a right to privacy, and husbands claim a right to sexual relations. How many of these are biblical rights?

Examine some common perceived rights listed below against your own belief system. I would encourage you to support your beliefs with Scripture.

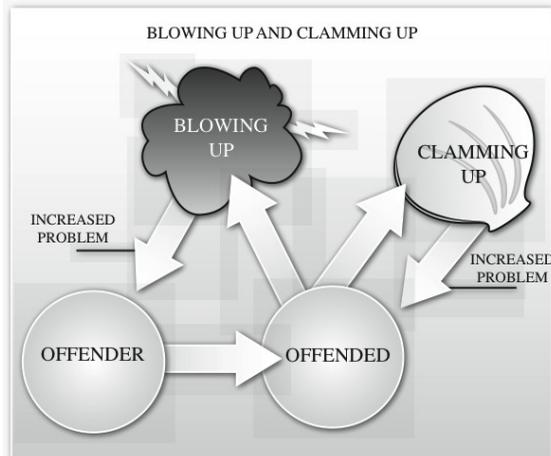
- Right to have and express personal opinions
- Right to respect
- Right to be understood
- Right to have good health
- Right to be appreciated
- Right to be treated fairly
- Right to belong, to be loved, to be accepted
- Right to make your own decisions
- Right to determine your own future
- Right to be considered worthwhile and important
- Right to be protected and cared for
- Right to have fun
- Right to security and safety
- Right to have others obey you
- Right to have your own way
- Right to be free from difficulties and problems¹

Much of the problem of depression is wrapped up in wanting to control God—and anger at being unable to do so. God’s will violates your perceived rights. When He¹ makes decisions you don’t like, you become angry. You internalize that anger, becoming full of self-pity because God is not doing things your way. Angry people do not understand the sovereignty of God, or if they do understand it, they refuse to accept it.

Such thoughts reveal a prideful, idolatrous heart. Believing you can override the sovereignty of God is untrue and leads to anger, bitterness, and eventually feelings of depression. In fact, depression is anger turned inward. When a person becomes angry and does not repent of it or address it biblically, depression is the result.

The typical angry response comes from something you wanted and didn’t get, or you are angry about something you got and didn’t want, but in both cases, you have never dealt with the anger biblically.

Feelings of anger are generally (wrongly) handled in one of two ways: blowing up (screaming, ranting, raving, hollering, hitting, breaking things, driving too fast or recklessly) or clamming up (quietly internalizing the emotions, seething). Those who clam up are more prone to depression.



In either case, this anger is usually self-centered and idolatrous and comes from your wanting to control God but being unable to do so. God makes decisions that you don’t like; if you’re a blow-upper, you explode and make everyone’s life miserable, and if you’re a clam-upper, you internalize the anger and become full of self-pity because God is not doing things your way.



The bible has this to say to those who become angry at the will of a sovereign God:

But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? “Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, “Why did you make me like this?” Romans 9:20 (NIV)

Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorant words? Job 38:2 (NLT)

Then the LORD said to Job, “Do you still want to argue with the Almighty? You are God’s critic, but do you have the answers?” Job 40:1-2 (NLT)

The earth is the LORD’S, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him. Psalm 24:1 (NLT)

I, the LORD, search all hearts and examine secret motives. I give all people their due rewards, according to what their actions deserve. Jeremiah 17:10 (NLT)

Understand, that the Bible does not prohibit becoming angry. Not all anger is sinful. The Lord Jesus Christ experienced and demonstrated anger, but in no way did He ever sin in His anger. When Jesus saw the moneychangers in the temple of God, he was filled with anger because they were violating the holiness of the temple. Their wickedness filled Jesus with a righteous indignation and drove Him to action. (Matthew 21:12-13 (NIV))

He looked around at them angrily, because he was deeply disturbed by their hard hearts. Mark 3:5 (NLT)

Like Jesus, you are able to express righteous anger. Righteous anger is justified when we see social or personal evils, or when we see God’s holy standards being violated. This kind of anger does not have its root in “self” because the one being sinned against is God and His standards and principles, not you and me. That, however, is rarely the kind of anger we demonstrate.

Curing the Angry Heart

“Don’t sin by letting anger gain control over you.” Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry. Ephesians 4:26 (NLT)

God has not asked us to do something He has not equipped us to do. Since God’s Word says “be angry but don’t sin,” it must be possible to do just that. The encouraging truth is that you do not have to sin when you’re angry.

The heart change begins when you acknowledge before God that you struggle with sinful anger; simply confessing it to God. You might pray a prayer similar to this:

Dear gracious Father, I confess to You that I struggle with sinful anger, and Lord, that I sin deeply in my anger. Help me to see this sin the way You see it. I confess to you that I have hurt others by my angry words and actions. I ask You to give me the courage to confess my sin to those I have hurt and to seek their forgiveness. by Your grace, dear Lord, I commit to changing my ways. Help me to overcome this sinful pattern in my life. I choose to put off my sinful anger and to learn and practice new behaviors by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thank You for the forgiveness that is mine through the Lord Jesus Christ. I pray these things in Jesus’ name, Amen.

Now you must begin to renew your mind by studying what Scripture says regarding anger. Consider the biblical commands we are given regarding anger:

But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Colossians 3:8 (NIV)

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Ephesians 4:31 (NIV)