

The wrath of man

How many of you have ever been angry, lost your temper, exploded in wrath? **Tell my story! 2 Timothy 2:24** - “A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone, be able to teach, and be patient with difficult people.” NLT

The day I got into that fight, I was not acting like a good servant of the Lord, and now a man is dead who I may have been able to influence for God. My outburst of wrath did not produce the righteousness of God that day, it did not further God’s kingdom. It never does!

We usually say that when someone **explodes in anger**, he lost his temper. But in reality, that is when he probably found it. When a person loses their temper they are saying it isn’t their fault. What is happening is that they are showing what’s in their heart. *“Whatever you are filled to the brim with will spill out when you are bumped.”* If you were bumped hard today, what would come out of your heart? Are you easily provoked, do you have a hot temper?

James gives a simple prescription for dealing with anger: **James 1:19-20**: “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” NKJV

To be **swift to hear** means to be a **ready listener**. A lot of times we get angry because we do not have enough information. We must learn to listen carefully and get all the facts before we speak!

To be **slow to speak** means to control the tongue, to think before you speak. Hasty words spoken in anger will almost always be regretted.

James 3:7-10: “People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. Sometimes it praises our Lord and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right!” NLT

It has been said that *“the trouble with people who talk too fast is that they often say something they haven’t thought about yet!”*

“Better to be silent and be thought of as a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.”

Proverbs 29:20 - “There is more hope for a fool than for someone who speaks without thinking.” NLT

The third thing James encourages us to do is to be **slow to wrath**. **Anger** is defined as indignation that has slowly built up, it is a lingering, seething emotion, much like a volcano. **Wrath**, however, is a sudden outburst of passionate anger, such as when the volcano explodes. It is a blaze of temper which flares into violent words and deeds, and just as quickly dies. Today we would call this blowing off steam. But the damage done in these few wrathful moments can be catastrophic and sometimes permanent.

There are two types of anger – **Godly anger/wrath** that is set **against** sin and **ungodly anger/wrath** that **is** sin and leads **to** more sin.

As a natural human emotion, anger is neither right nor wrong. It can be used for either good or evil - just as a knife can be a scalpel or a murder weapon. Anger can be a powerful tool for confronting wrong.

When Jesus saw the moneychangers cheating people in the temple, He made a whip and drove them out of the temple, saying, **John 2:16** - “...Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise.” NKJV

Jesus acted out of **righteous indignation**. The church needs more righteous indignation, more Godly anger. We need to be angry about the things that anger God, we need to be angry at the sin that is destroying our world!

But anger as a **destructive emotion** has led to every kind of sin, including murder, as when Cain killed Abel (**Genesis 4:4-8**). The elder brother of the prodigal son “was angry, and would not go in” (**Luke 15:28**).

Anger that leads to malice, rage, and revenge is clearly forbidden and should be handled quickly to prevent sinful and destructive actions.

Bitter anger is unacceptable in the kingdom of God: **Matthew 5:21-22**; “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment...” NKJV

Exploding in an angry outburst is a sinful work of the flesh (**Galatians 5:20**). Can you remember any occasion when angry outbursts of wrath furthered God’s cause between two Christians/spouses/parent-child? Has an angry outburst in a church business meeting ever furthered Christ’s cause? Will Rogers once said - “*People who fly into a rage always make a bad landing!*” These bad landing are the reasons why churches split, the reasons why best friends are lost, the reasons why some marriages break up!

When people explode in anger it’s because the love of the Lord Jesus Christ is not in their heart. **Ecclesiastes 7:9** – “Control your temper, for anger labels you a fool.” NLT

Psalm 4:4 – “Be angry, and do not sin. Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still.” NKJV The only way to be angry and not sin is to be angry at sin; like Jesus with a righteous anger. The danger of unjustified anger is that it gives an opportunity/place to the devil, a half-open door.

Ephesians 4:26-27: “...don’t sin by letting anger control you.” Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil.” NLT

When you have unresolved anger, you give the devil a place in your life, a way to defeat you - you have opened the door to the devil and said “*come on in, wreck my home, wreck my marriage, defile my conscience, ruin my confidence and destroy my communion with God.*”

God clearly teaches us that our emotions are to be controlled, which is done by dealing with our feelings and anger - that day! Otherwise, we may be giving Satan ample opportunity to tempt us to sin.

Christians must lay aside worldly anger: **Colossians 3:8** – “But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.” NKJV

Ephesians 4:31 – “Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.” NKJV

Six things are named to be put away. All of this must go, every trace of unjustified anger.

Bitterness is unresolved hurt and can be real or imagined. When you are bitter you perceive someone has done you wrong. **Bitterness** is the brother of **resentment**, which is repressed anger, bottled-up anger, smoldering pressure-cooker anger that will attack you and hurt your health if not dealt with.

Cardiologists warn: *“Stop worrying and get rid of your resentments; let your anger out or it will destroy you.”* Some heart disease is emotionally induced by unresolved conflict.

Unresolved bitterness leads to **anger** and **wrath**. **Anger** gives the idea of heat, something burning, sort of a slow burn like smoldering oily rags.

Wrath is when someone opens the door and oxygen hits those rags and they burst into flame. An outburst of wrath or uncontrollable **rage** is the explosive result of **bottled-up resentments**.

People are very much like a pressure cooker that can only go so long before blowing its top. When the top blows off and a person loses control, what happens? Sometimes people are hurt, sometimes very badly and sometimes permanently.

“A mother whose anger is under control disciplines her child; but a mother whose anger is out of control abuses her child” (Lewis Smedes).

“Rage is displaced and misplaced anger.” The real sin of rage is not the **intensity** but the **direction**. In its blind eruption, it attacks people rather than problems and can hurt them, sometimes badly, for life. Collateral damage lies in the wake of rage.

How should we deal with **rage** and its explosive outbursts? First, **defuse** the anger before it explodes in rage. When the raging fire of anger burns within **us**, walk away from the situation and allow time for the embers of emotion to cool before doing or saying anything – **count to ten!**

When rage burns within **another** person toward us, try not to be threatened by it so as not to start a fire within us. Humor can sometimes disarm and extinguish the blaze.

Proverbs 15:1 – “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” NKJV

Anger leads to **clamor** which is loud quarreling, speaking loudly – *“you’re wrong, don’t you yell at me, I’m not yelling!”* When you start clamoring, you begin to say things, get on a roll.

Clamor turns to **evil speaking** where you say things you never would have said otherwise. *“I wish you were dead, I wish you had never been born, I hate you, I want a divorce.”* **Titus 3:2** – “...speak evil of no one...” NKJV **James 4:11** – “Do not speak evil of one another...” NKJV

Evil speaking develops into **malice**, which is the desire to hurt and/or abuse someone, whether financially, emotionally, physically. **Titus 3:3** – “For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.” NKJV

“Hating someone is like setting your house on fire to get rid of a rat!”

“You Cannot Shake Hands with a Clenched Fist!” Indira Gandhi

“Anger is an acid that can do more harm to the vessel in which it is stored than to anything on which it is poured.” Mark Twain

“When you strike out, you always strike in. Any weapon you use to strike - clenched hand, angry voice, closed heart withholding love - is double-sided with one edge always cutting deep into yourself. Sometimes a weapon is necessary, but use it wisely - and remember that the cost of using one are your own wounds.”

How are we supposed to act?

Job 18:4 - “You’re only hurting yourself with your anger.” GNT

Psalm 37:8 – “Stop being angry! Turn from your rage! Do not lose your temper - it only leads to harm.” NLT

Proverbs 14:29 – “People with understanding control their anger; a hot temper shows great foolishness.” NLT

Proverbs 15:18 – “A hot-tempered person starts fights; a cool-tempered person stops them.” NLT

Proverbs 16:32 – “Better to be patient than powerful; better to have self-control than to conquer a city.” NLT

Proverbs 19:19 – “Hot-tempered people must pay the penalty. If you rescue them once, you will have to do it again.” NLT

Proverbs 22:24-25: “Don’t befriend angry people or associate with hot-tempered people, or you will learn to be like them and endanger your soul.” NLT

Proverbs 27:4 – “Anger is cruel, and wrath is like a flood...” NLT

Ecclesiastes 7:9 - “Keep your temper under control; it is foolish to harbor a grudge.” GNT

Ephesians 4:32 – “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” NKJV

1 Peter 2:1 – “So get rid of all evil behavior. Be done with all deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and all unkind speech.” NLT

A resentful person who has repressed bitterness and anger in their heart and soul is like a person living with cancer. If that describes you this morning, you must understand that you are killing yourself and could seriously hurt those you say you love. If you are struggling with bitterness and anger this morning and want to stop, here is what you should do. There are four simple yet difficult steps for dealing with resentment: **admit it - address it - forgive it - forget it.**

Admit your resentment. When you become aware that something is not right in a relationship, when you are struggling with repressed bitterness and anger, admit the problem and face the resentment growing within you – don’t pretend it isn’t there – stop denying it: **Matthew 18:15** – “**If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back.**” NLT

Address that resentment. **Matthew 18:15** – “**If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back.**” NLT

Drop what you are doing, go to the person, and talk it out. Don’t put it off. Don’t let the sun set on unresolved conflict for it will only fan the flames of resentment.

You might say: “*But the cost of dealing with resentment openly is too great. It might cost me the relationship.*” The cost of not addressing the resentment is even greater. It might cost you your health, your life, your soul!

Some marriages might not have broken up had both partners learned to deal openly with their anger rather than allowing it to smolder in resentment.

As one philosopher (Bulwer) said: *“Anger vented often hurries toward forgiveness; anger concealed often hardens into revenge.”*

Forgive the person you are angry even if they are wrong and will not admit it.

Luke 6:37 - **“...Forgive others, and you will be forgiven.”** NLT

One of the most basic yet neglected facts about life is that we cannot live healthy lives if we are not forgiving people. You might say: *“But I can’t forgive him/her!”* The truth is that you won’t forgive him/her. We are able to forgive; we choose not to forgive. All of us **can** forgive but not all of us **will** forgive. Forgiveness must be given or else resentment will strangle and eventually destroy that relationship.

The final step in dealing with resentment is to **forget it** and to leave it behind and to move on with life.

Colossians 3:13 – **“Make allowance for each other’s faults (never hold grudges), and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.”** NLT

Leave behind the wounded pride, leave behind the personal disappointment, and leave behind the smoldering resentment. If you carry it with you, you will be the one who suffers from it the most.

After The Civil War, Robert E. Lee visited a woman who took Lee to the remains of a grand old oak tree behind her mansion. She cried bitterly that its limbs and trunk had been damaged by the Union cannon fire. She looked to Lee for a word of condemnation against the North or at least sympathy for her loss.

After a brief silence, Lee said, *“Cut it down. Cut it down and forget it and move on with your life.”* We must learn to handle anger, resentment, bitterness and wrath before they handle us!