



8

# Jesus Defends God's Honor

## Key Theme

- Jesus rebukes false teachers.

## Key Passages

- John 2:13–25; Matthew 23:1–36

## Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe Jesus's reaction to dishonoring the Father.
- Distinguish between righteous and unrighteous anger.



## Lesson Overview



### Come On In

Students will review the memory verse by completing the Memory Verse Review Sheet.

- Write on the board, "Is anger always a sin?"
- Print one Memory Verse Review Sheet from the Resource DVD-ROM for each student.



### Studying God's Word

Jesus defended God's honor when He drove the sellers and money changers out of the Temple and when He confronted the religious leaders because they were hypocrites—pretending to be holy while their hearts were wicked.

- Study the Prepare to Share section.
- Go Before the Throne.



### Activity: Righteous Anger

The students will examine the idea of anger as a sinful attitude, seeking to understand anger in light of Jesus's demonstration of it in the Temple and other places.

- One Righteous Anger worksheet from the Resource DVD-ROM for each group
- Righteous Anger Answer Key for your use
- Pencils



# Prepare to Share

## SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read Matthew 5–7 along with this background.

In Lesson 7 we discussed and studied Jesus's Sermon on the Mount. In it Jesus addressed the religious leaders who had distorted the Law and made it a list of good works by which self-righteousness could be attained. Many of the Jews perceived God's laws as a call to outward appearance only. But Jesus called attention to the heart issues. He insisted that real holiness comes from a heart that is striving toward obedience and holiness inwardly—a heart desiring to please God. Such a heart comes only through being born again.

We have discussed that Jesus came to earth to do the will of the Father. He was God in the flesh, possessing all of the attributes of deity, though veiling His glory. Christ's divine attributes include justice, holiness, and truth. The passages we are examining this week present Jesus as one who continued to defend the honor of His Father and who showed God's anger against the sin of distorting and maligning God's Word.

Much of the corruption Jesus encountered was among the religious leaders. They had set aside God's Law, invented their own rules, and oppressed the people in the name of God. Jesus was not afraid to address these leaders in the name of His Father. One such rebuke came in the Temple during a Passover celebration (John 2:13–25). Jesus entered the Temple where He encountered money changers and merchants selling animals (John 2:14). But why were these people in the Temple?

Those selling animals were there to provide a service to God's people. The merchants were providing animals for sacrifice during Feast time. This was a convenience for Jews traveling great distances. They would not need to bring livestock with them; they could buy the necessary sacrificial animals right at the Temple. The money changers were also there for a service. A tax was collected from every Israelite twenty years old and up (Exodus 30:11–16). When Jews came to Jerusalem to pay their Temple tax, they could only pay it with a special coin, the half-shekel. It was the only silver coin at that time without the image of a pagan Emperor, and therefore to the Jews it was the only coin acceptable to God. The money changers exchanged unacceptable coins for these shekels. While our text does not mention it, these animal sellers and money changers were probably overcharging the pilgrims and extracting a hefty profit.

When Jesus entered the Temple, He was enraged at what He saw. God's House, His Temple, should have been a house of prayer, worship, and devotion, but they

had made it into a house of merchandise. So Jesus made a whip of rope and chased them out of the Temple overturning their tables and stools. He also verbally rebuked them for the way they were dishonoring God and His Temple (John 2:15–16).

Matthew 23 records Jesus's last public message before He died on the Cross. Here again Jesus showed His righteous anger at the dishonoring of God, His laws, and His Word. Jesus's rebuke was directed toward the religious leaders—the scribes and Pharisees and their religious hypocrisy (Matthew 23:27). Jesus had some very strong words for these religious leaders, calling them blind guides, fools, sons of hell, hypocrites, and whitewashed tombs full of dead men's bones! These leaders had put off God's righteousness and instead were seeking to establish their own means of righteousness (Romans 10:3). And they were demanding others do the same—burdening the common people by insisting they abide by the rules and regulations they had developed as a means of achieving salvation.

Jesus would not have it. He would not allow His Father's name to be dishonored by these false teachers. They focused on the externals of religion—looking pious, saying long prayers, giving tithes—but Jesus said they had "neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith" (Matthew 23:23).

## HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

Throughout the Gospels we see a number of Jewish religious groups mentioned. These include the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the scribes (or lawyers). Who were these groups, where did they come from, and why did many of them oppose Jesus and His teachings?

### Pharisees

The Pharisees were the keepers of the Law. They believed the entire Hebrew Bible (what we call the Old Testament) to be the Word of God. They emerged from the Babylonian Exile as the chief religious faction. They understood that Israel's exile was a result of forgetting God's Law and living in disobedience. As a result, the Pharisees sought to present God's Law and impose it on the people so the nation would never again be exiled as punishment for their disobedience.

However, many of the Pharisees presented a law that was greatly compromised by their belief that oral traditions of their culture passed down for generations held the same significance and authority as God's Word. This is clearly forbidden in Scripture (e.g., Deuteronomy

4:2). These Pharisees sought to strictly obey these traditions themselves and demanded the same from others. Many of the traditions they held to are seen throughout the Gospels (Matthew 9:14, 15:1–9, 23:5, 23:16, 23:23; Mark 7:1–23; Luke 11:42).

Many of the Pharisees were not fully devoted to all of God's Law and had added their own beliefs and traditions to it. Because of this, they missed the Messiah when He was in their very midst. They saw Jesus's miracles and heard His words, but instead of believing in Him, they did all that they could to stop Him, eventually calling for His crucifixion because He claimed to be the Son of God, making Himself equal with God.

### Sadducees

Not much is known about the Sadducees, since the only historical information we have comes from the New Testament and some writings from the Jewish-Roman historian Flavius Josephus. Sadducees were more affluent than the Pharisees. They tended to be wealthy and held powerful positions, including that of chief priest and high priest. They also made up a majority of the 70 seats of the ruling council called the Sanhedrin. The Sadducees were more sympathetic to the Hellenistic movement, a movement seeking to combine Jewish religious tradition with elements of Greek culture. They were more willing to submit to the prevailing powers (Rome) because they realized it was economically and politically advantageous for them to do so.

Religiously, the Sadducees were more conservative than the Pharisees in that they did not give oral tradition equal authority to the written Word of God. However, they were misguided on a few other issues. For example, they denied God's involvement in everyday life. They denied the resurrection of the dead. They denied any afterlife, believing that the soul perished at death, and they denied the existence of a spiritual world (i.e., angels and demons).

Because the Sadducees were more concerned with politics than religion, they were unconcerned with Jesus until they became afraid He might bring unwanted Roman attention. Finally, they joined with the Pharisees in their opposition to Jesus.

### Scribes

The earliest scribes of Israel served as official secretaries, writing and issuing royal decrees (e.g., 2 Samuel 8:17, 20:25; 1 Chronicles 18:16, 24:6; 1 Kings 4:3). After the return from the Babylonian captivity, the scribes concentrated their activities on the Law, becoming "teachers of the law," or "lawyers."

Scribes in Jesus's time were men whose primary occupation was writing out copies of the Jewish Scriptures and teaching the people the Law. Because they copied the Old Testament books, they were familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures and were respected in society for their literacy and knowledge. The scribes took their job of preserving Scripture very seriously; they would copy and recopy the Bible meticulously, even counting letters and spaces to ensure each copy was correct. We can thank God for using the Jewish scribes in preserving the Old Testament.

The scribes were closely associated with the Pharisees and are often mentioned together in the Gospels. Throughout the life of Christ, the scribes were among His most vigilant and determined opponents. Their many accusations are recorded in the Gospel accounts.

The scribes complained that Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners (Mark 2:16; Luke 5:30). When Jesus pronounced forgiveness of sins, the scribes charged Him with blasphemy (Mark 2:5–7). When Jesus cast out demons, the scribes said that He cast them out by Beelzebub, "the ruler of the demons" (Mark 3:22). They sought to accuse Jesus if He healed on a Sabbath day (Luke 6:7). And finally, the scribes took counsel with the chief priests as to how they might destroy Jesus (Mark 11:18), and when Jesus was brought before Herod, they vehemently accused Him (Luke 23:10).

These three sects of Jewish leaders often went beyond the written word of God, incorporating their own doctrines, beliefs, and traditions. And in so doing, they were blinded when the Messiah they had read about and waited for finally came.

What we can learn from these leaders is that we need to make a commitment to God's Word, with a heart for God, as our final authority by which our lives and decisions are made.



### BEFORE THE THRONE

Lord Jesus, you are strong, mighty, and wonderful! You defended your Father's honor. Help me to be more vigilant to defend your honor in my home and sphere of influence. May my students come to understand the importance of loving you with all their heart, mind, and strength. Use this lesson to show them that it's not enough to look good on the outside. Change their hearts by the power of the gospel to desire to please and glorify you in all they do.



# Review

We have been focusing on how Jesus demonstrated His authority during His ministry on earth. We have looked at His power over nature, death, disease, and life. We have seen Him point people to the authority of the Word of God rather than the traditions of men. And we have seen Him tear back the façade of outward obedience and point His hearers to obedience from the heart. In all of these things, Jesus's authority was put on display. Today we are going to see Jesus exercising His authority in a way that many today would say is not Christ-like.

What do images of Jesus as He is portrayed in paintings often look like? *Most of these images are peaceful images that might include a little lamb or Jesus surrounded by rolling hills or a group of children. He is generally presented as a meek and mild man in serene settings.*

While those may be accurate snapshots of who Jesus was at moments, there are other snapshots that don't sell so well in the knick knack section at the local Christian bookstore. That is what we are going to look at today.



- Write on the board, "Is anger always a sin?"



## Studying God's Word

### READ THE WORD

**John 2:13–25**

Let's read John 2:13–25 together. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

### EXAMINE THE WORD

#### Observe the Text

- ? What event gives us a time marker for when this happened? *It was at Passover that Jesus came to Jerusalem.*
- ? Which Passover in the timeline of Jesus's ministry is this? *Based on the preceding passage that flows from Jesus turning the water to wine (2:11) to moving to Capernaum (2:12), the phrase "now the Passover" must mean it is the first Passover of Jesus's earthly ministry. Point this out on the New Testament History Poster shortly after AD 30.*
- ? What additional time marker does John 3:12–13 give us? *John tells us that "after these things" Jesus had gone with His disciples to Judea where John the Baptist was baptizing. The "things" refers to His interaction at the Temple and His discussion with Nicodemus in John 3.*

**Matthew 21:12–17**

There was another event in Jesus's ministry that was very similar to this one. Turn to Matthew 21:12–17. Some people believe this was the same event, so let's look at the text to see if we can decide if these are two different events or parallel accounts of the same event.

- ?
  - What is described in verse 12?** Jesus went into the Temple, driving out the people buying and selling and overturning tables.
  - ?
  - What event is described in the verses just before this?** The Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem a week before His trial and Crucifixion.
  - ?
  - How can you tell whether the cleansing described in verse 12 is before or after the Triumphal Entry?** The verse begins with "then," so it must occur after.
  - ?
  - Was John the Baptist alive at the time of the Crucifixion?** No, he had been killed by Herod about one year earlier, just before the third Passover (Matthew 14:3–12).
- These facts place this event in the synoptic Gospels about three years after the cleansing of the Temple described in John 2. They are two different events, so be careful to distinguish the two. The accounts in Matthew, Mark, and Luke are parallel (synoptic) accounts. Now that we have the timing, let's look back at John 2.
- ?
  - What did Jesus find when He entered the Temple?** He found people selling oxen, sheep, and doves as well as those changing money.
  - ?
  - Why would there have been oxen, sheep, and doves sold in the Temple?** These animals were used for the sacrifices offered at the Temple. As travelers came to Jerusalem for the Passover, they could buy the animals there for the sacrifices.
  - ?
  - Why was there money being exchanged in the Temple?** There was a tax paid by the Jews for the service of the Temple as described in Exodus 30:11–16. The exchange was likely related to the paying of this half-shekkel tax as people came to Jerusalem for the Passover observance.
  - ?
  - How did Jesus get the people and animals out of the Temple?** He made a whip out of cords and chased them out.
  - ?
  - What did Jesus do to the moneychangers?** He poured out their money and overturned their tables.
  - ?
  - What did Jesus communicate about His authority by His comments and actions?** He was claiming authority to remove people from the Temple by referring to God as His Father and the Temple as His Father's house.
  - ?
  - Who should have been controlling what was happening in the Temple?** The priests and Levites should have been ensuring the proper use of the Temple area.
  - ?
  - What charge did Jesus bring against those selling in the Temple?** He accused them of making the Temple a "house of merchandise."
  - ?
  - How was Jesus's behavior described by John?** He was zealous in His actions.
  - ?
  - What passage of Scripture came to mind as the disciples watched Jesus cleanse the Temple?** Psalm 69:9 is quoted by John to describe what they were witnessing. Jesus was zealous for the proper use of the Temple and the honor of His Father.
  - ?
  - What did the Jews request from Jesus?** They requested a sign or miracle.
  - ?
  - Why did they request this sign?** Since Jesus was making a claim of authority and identifying Himself as the Son of God, the Jews wanted Him to provide a sign to authenticate His claims. This was common of the prophets throughout the time prior to Jesus and continued with the Apostles.

► If time allows, look quickly at Mark 11:15–19 and Luke 19:45–48 where the accounts parallel to Matthew 21 are given, both of which are preceded by the Triumphal Entry.

HOLY  
JUST

- ?
- What sign did Jesus offer the Jews? *He said if they tore down the Temple He would raise it in three days.*
- ?
- How was this sign interpreted by John? *John noted that it was a reference to His death and Resurrection, which would happen about three years later.*
- ?
- Was Jesus angry with the people selling and changing money in the Temple? *His words and actions make it clear that He was angry.*

### Discover the Truth

Jesus demonstrated a zeal for the honor of His Father's house. He came to a place that was dedicated to the worship of God—a form of worship that was clearly prescribed by God—and found it being defiled and misused. The Jewish leaders had consented to the abuse of God's holy Temple, and it angered Jesus when He saw the abuses. While the people bought and sold in the Temple, presumably making a profit from the sales and from exchanging the money, they were defaming God and blaspheming His character. An act of holy worship had become an occasion to make a profit.

- ?
- What attributes of God was Jesus demonstrating as He drove the people and animals from the Temple with a whip in His hand? *Holy—Jesus was zealous for God's glory that was tarnished by the sins in the Temple. Just—Jesus recognized the sin and sought to judge the sin. God's wrath toward sin is an appropriate response that is consistent with His justice and holiness. Refer to Attributes of God Poster.*

Jesus would absolutely not stand for the Temple, which was the residence of God's glory, to be defiled. As the Temple was defiled, the name and character of God was blasphemed. In His zealous anger, Jesus defended the honor of His Father's glory.





# Righteous Anger

## MATERIALS

- One Righteous Anger worksheet for each group
- Righteous Anger Answer Key for your use
- Pencils

## INSTRUCTIONS

We have seen Jesus angry in this passage. If this rubs you the wrong way, you might be thinking that anger is a sinful emotion. If Jesus committed a sin, He can't be the spotless Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. And that is the point of our activity today. In your Student Guides is an activity called Righteous Anger. You will be looking at some passages of Scripture that will help you to think through the biblical view of the emotion of anger and its relationship to sinful actions and thoughts. Then we'll discuss some various scenarios to try and identify righteous and unrighteous anger.

## CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

*Use the Righteous Anger Answer Key to go over the passages of Scripture with the class. Next, discuss the four scenarios to identify righteous anger and unrighteous anger.*

I think that true righteous anger directed toward exalting God's holiness is pretty rare. It is surely the mark of a mature Christian, but most of our anger is probably rooted in sinful and selfish desires. As we have those

angry reactions to circumstances, we need to stop and make sure that we take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. We can ask ourselves, "Is how I am about to respond to these feelings intended to defend God's glory or my own glory?" When we do fail, we cannot forget to preach the gospel to ourselves, repenting of our sinful actions and looking to Christ for forgiveness.

Another example of an emotion that is not necessarily sinful is jealousy. God describes Himself as jealous (Exodus 20:5). He is jealous for His own glory and for His own name. Surely we cannot think of His jealousy as sinful, but as righteous and holy. He deserves all worship and praise. So, when people worship something other than God, He is right to be jealous for their worship. We can imitate God's righteous jealousy when we are jealous for the affections of our spouse or even in defending God's name. The problem is that our sin nature tends to make us jealous for the wrong things and for the wrong reasons—and that is sinful jealousy. Jesus was able, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to direct His anger in ways that were absolutely holy and pleasing to God. He is our perfect example and our perfect substitute when we do sin.



## READ THE WORD

We are going to look briefly at our final passage today, getting a big-picture view of another expression of Jesus's anger. Turn to Matthew 23:1–36, and let's read about another example of Jesus rebuking the Jewish leaders only a few days after His second cleansing of the Temple. As we begin reading, keep in mind that the passages just before this describe

the series of discussions with the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes we looked at a few weeks ago. Have someone read the passage aloud.

## EXAMINE THE WORD

### Observe the Text

- ?** **To whom did Jesus direct his first comments?** He turned from discussions with the Jewish leaders to the crowd gathered around Him, including His disciples.
- ?** **What was the main point of His statement in verses 1–12?** He directed the crowd to obey those things that came from the Scriptures (the authority of Moses's seat), but to not do those things which were made up from tradition. The leaders had added so many works to God's commands that they had created a false and hypocritical authority structure. Rather than seeking to be exalted as great teachers and leaders, the people should be humble and seek praise from God rather than man.
- ?** **Who did Jesus direct His statements toward in the rest of the passage?** He turned back to the Jewish leaders to rebuke them.
- ?** **How many times did Jesus pronounce "woe" to the scribes and Pharisees?** Eight times (verses 13, 14, 15, 16, 23, 25, 27, and 29).
- ?** **What words did Jesus use repeatedly to refer to them?** Hypocrites, fools, blind guides, blind.
- ?** **What other ways did Jesus describe them?** Condemned, sons of hell, unjust, unmerciful, unfaithful, extortioners, self-indulgent, filthy inside, whitewashed tombs filled with death and uncleanness, guilty of killing men, serpents, brood of vipers.
- ?** **Was this demonstration of anger directed at defending God's glory?** Yes.
- ?** **How did His words promote righteousness rather than lead to sin?** He was warning the crowds not to follow them to hell and warning the scribes and Pharisees of their condemnation if they continued in the same path. He was pointing from error to truth.
- ?** **What prophecy did Jesus make in verses 34–36?** He prophesied that the Jewish leaders would continue to kill those Jesus sent as messengers and prophets.
- ?** **How was this prophecy fulfilled?** The Apostles and other Christians were killed and scourged and persecuted by many of the Jews. Saul's persecution is a perfect example of this, including the stoning of Stephen.

### Discover the Truth

As Jesus drew near to the end of His earthly ministry, He knew He needed to offer a clear warning to the crowds of people in Jerusalem and a strong rebuke to those Jews who were leading others astray. Their false teaching provoked anger in Jesus, but He directed that anger at drawing out their errors and pointing to righteousness. He did not do it in a self-serving way, but in a way that demonstrated His zeal to defend righteousness and holiness and the name and commands of God.





# Applying God's Word

## WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

Had someone been there to record these events and post them on YouTube, we can only imagine how many people would condemn Jesus for being too harsh or too unloving in the way He spoke the truth to these false teachers. But we cannot understand His anger to have resulted in any sinful thought or action—His response was holy, righteous, wise, and true. Strengthened by the Spirit, He was able to direct His anger toward a direct and loving rebuke of those leading people astray.

But that doesn't mean we should use righteous anger as an excuse to be harsh and brutal to others who are in sin—brothers and sisters in Christ or unbelievers. Paul commands us in Ephesians 4:15 to speak the truth *in love*. He also commanded Timothy and Titus to exhort, rebuke, and convince people who are in error. But all of this must be done to promote God's glory and not our own agenda. It must be done to promote righteousness in others without causing us to sin. Anger is a God-given emotion that reflects part of His character, but we must take care to direct it to the right ends—the promotion of God's glory and the defense of His holy name and character.

Our anger toward the sin we see around us, and inside of us, does not promote righteousness unless it is truly directed by the Holy Spirit to glorify God. We can make that our prayer as we consider this lesson, asking God's Spirit to guide us into a hatred of sin that calls people to repent and look to Christ, glorifying the Father. We can seek to imitate Jesus by honoring God in all we think, say, and do.

## GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ?
- How do the ideas we have studied today help you to love and honor Jesus as your Savior and example? *Discuss various answers, focusing on the fact that He was able to express His anger in a way that was truly righteous when that is a struggle for us, a sinful people.*
- ?
- Does the fact that Jesus chased the money changers and animal sellers out of the Temple mean that we should not allow the sale of anything on Sunday or in the church building? *The answer to this question will depend on various views of keeping the Sabbath/Lord's Day. The passage does not give an exact parallel to things like selling helpful books and resources in a church building (a part of equipping the saints for the work of ministry).*
- ?
- As you read the direct and sharp words Jesus has for the false teachers, what kind of reaction do you have? Do you think He is unloving? Do you

think this gives you warrant to go stand on a bench and yell at all of the sinners walking by? Discuss various answers, encouraging the students to sincerely wrestle with their reactions on either end of the spectrum. They should be seeking to be obedient to Christ's command and example without going to extremes. All of this should be done to warn of error, point to righteousness, and honor God above everything else.

- ?
- Do you tend to lean toward avoiding confrontation over sin and not even get angry at sin, or do you tend to get angry and lash out in a sinful way? How can you seek to find a balance between these responses and glorify God in your actions? Discuss various answers, encouraging the students to avoid extremes on either side. Use Ephesians 4:11–16 as a passage to reflect on.
- ?
- In light of the two different accounts of Jesus cleansing the Temple, how could you answer a skeptic who thinks the accounts contradict one another? You could open the Scriptures with him and show him the context and timing of the events. You can demonstrate that they were separate events, so there are no contradictions in the accounts. This will provide a perfect opportunity to point him to sinful anger and ask him if he has sinned in that way, pointing to Jesus as the Savior who can cleanse him from all sin.



### MEMORY VERSE

**John 14:6** Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except through me.”



### GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for Jesus as the example of perfect obedience and holiness.
- Praise God for perfect justice and mercy.
- Ask God for courage and wisdom to speak the truth in love.