

Righteous Anger

In John 2 it is clear that Jesus was angry when He cleansed the Temple. The question we need to answer is whether or not anger is always a sin. Examine the following passages to gain a biblical perspective on anger. For each passage, note what you learn about anger.

Psalms 7:11–13 —

Nahum 1:2–3 —

Matthew 2:16 —

Mark 3:5 —

Ephesians 4:26–27 —

James 1:19–20 —

Based on this small sampling, how would you describe anger from a biblical perspective?

DISCUSSION

For each of the following scenarios, discuss with your class whether it is an example of righteous anger or sinful anger. If it is not righteous, describe how it could be redeemed by responding differently.

1. A child loses the grip on his cup, and it falls to the table spilling its contents onto the table and his mother's skirt. She yells at her son for being so clumsy and making a mess that will probably make her late for an appointment. With sharp words, she reminds him of how often he spills and what a burden he is to her this morning.
2. Noticing a teenage girl walking toward an abortion clinic, a woman considers what may happen. She becomes angry at the condition of her society where killing babies is normal. She approaches the teenager and begs her to reconsider what she is about to do. The woman offers to help counsel her and support her in her trouble, hoping to point her to Jesus.
3. As he returns from getting drinks, a man sees another man apparently flirting with his wife. He pauses and watches as the man enters something into his phone. Angered, he approaches the two, yelling slurs at the man only to find out it is his wife's cousin whom she has not seen for years.
4. A man gets angry at the hypocrisy of false teachers who claim to be teaching people to follow God. He calls them names in public and warns those who follow them that they are headed for destruction. He is grieved over the way they are blaspheming God and leading people astray.

Righteous Anger Answer Key

Print one Righteous Anger worksheet for each student. Keep the answer key for your use.

Let's talk about your conclusions about anger from each of these verses.

Psalm 7:11–13—This passage teaches us that God is angry with the wicked for their sin. This is a righteous anger since it comes from God, and He is the standard of righteousness.

Nahum 1:2–3—This passage teaches how God is angry about sin but is "slow to anger" as He prepares His judgment. Again, this is a righteous anger and a righteous response to that anger.

Matthew 2:16—Herod's anger led him to kill many children. This is an unrighteous response to his anger resulting in the murder of many children just to hang onto his own power.

Mark 3:5—Jesus was angry with the Jewish leaders for the hardness of their hearts and then healed a man in their presence. His anger was righteous anger, and He responded by glorifying God through the healing.

Ephesians 4:26–27—Do not let anger lead you to sin; deal with the situation as soon as possible. This passage gives us guidance about directing our emotion of anger to dealing with the problem in a way that glorifies God. Anger as a characteristic is condemned in verse 4:30.

James 1:19–20—Anger that is from man does not bring about the righteousness of God. Anger that is selfish or directed at self-promotion is not righteous because it is not directed toward glorifying God.

Based on these truths, how would you describe anger from a biblical perspective? Allow discussion. Anger is an emotion that leads to actions or thoughts of judgment. In God, anger is directed toward acts of righteous judgment. In humans, anger is often directed to selfish and destructive ends that are not righteous, as James indicates. However, it is possible to have a righteous anger in line with God's will that is directed toward redeeming a situation for God's glory. We can make a distinction between righteous anger directed toward fighting sin for God's glory or defending God's honor and sinful anger directed toward compounding sin for our own glory.

With that in mind, let's think about the scenarios in your activity. Go over these as a class.

1. A child loses the grip on his cup, and it falls to the table spilling its contents onto the table and his mother's skirt. She yells at her son for being so clumsy and making a mess that will probably make her late for an appointment. With sharp words, she reminds him of how often he spills and what a burden he is to her this morning. *This is obviously sinful*

anger as the mother is upset about being inconvenienced, and her son did not sin by accidentally dropping his cup. She really has no justification for being angry. She could use the opportunity to show patience and grace to her son and provide some training in how to hold his cup to avoid spills. She should repent of her anger and seek her son's forgiveness.

2. **Noticing a teenage girl walking toward an abortion clinic, a woman considers what may happen. She becomes angry at the condition of her society where killing babies is normal. She approaches the teenager and begs her to reconsider what she is about to do. The woman offers to help counsel her and support her in her trouble, hoping to point her to Jesus. Here the woman seems to be acting righteously in response to the anger she felt about the murder of babies and what she knew could potentially happen if the teenager entered the clinic. She directed her anger toward redeeming a potentially evil situation by offering love and hope to the girl rather than lashing out at her or the clinic workers. She was angry and spoke truth in love, seeking to glorify God in a potentially bad situation.**
3. **As he returns from getting drinks, a man sees another man apparently flirting with his wife. He pauses and watches as the man enters something into his phone. Angered, he approaches the two, yelling slurs at the man only to find out it is his wife's cousin whom she has not seen for years. This is an example of sinful anger as the husband assumed he knew what was happening. He is right to be jealous for his wife's affection, but he responded in a way that was not in line with the truth of the situation. He would have done better to direct his emotions toward gathering more information before reaching a conclusion and then responding to it in a way that honors Christ rather than slandering the man.**
4. **A man recognizes the hypocrisy of false teachers who claim to be teaching people to follow God and gets angry. He calls them names in public and warns those who follow them that they are headed for destruction. He is grieved over the way they are blaspheming God and leading people astray. Assuming the man's motives are for God's glory, this is an example of righteous anger, as long as he did not sin in his "name calling." (This is the next segment of Scripture that will be discussed as Jesus announces the eight woes on the Pharisees.)**