



The Good News

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Anger

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Fire casting soothing heat from a confining fireplace is a good thing. Flames burning out of control is a destructive thing. Likewise, aroused anger can embody an effective force resisting the advances of evil, or it can burst out of control, rolling with scorching destruction. Therefore, anger can be an essential and good thing, or it can be a soul-damning bad thing.

The Christian boils with zeal for good works, and like Christ, arouses heartfelt anger in the presence of evil (Titus 2:14, Mark 3:5). But the Christian must put to death wrong-spirited anger and out of control wrath (Colossians 3:8, Ephesians 4:31). How does one, sobered by truth and eternal consequences, successfully navigate this complex maze?

Having a clear definition of the words of anger in our Bibles is a helpful starting place. Words as in plural, you say? Two Greek words, “THUMOS” and “ORGE”, are translated as “wrath” and “anger.” The first, “thumos” denotes a heated spirit erupting into fiery wrath. Our various versions translate the term as “fits of rage” (NIV), or “outbursts of anger (NAS), or “outbursts of wrath (NKJ) (Galatians 5:20). The second Greek word, “orge” denotes a more settled condition of the mind than “thumos.” While not immediately erupting in rage, this anger is frequently looking for revenge if not checked.

Paul helps us with “orge” as we try to successfully maneuver anger’s maze by exhorting us to “Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath” (Ephesians 4:26). Anger is not necessarily sinful. How does one “abhor that which is evil” if not angered by it (cf. Romans 12:9)? It is hard to visualize Jesus physically overturning tables and driving out the money changers without the adrenaline of spirited anger. He was not void of “righteous indignation” when He cleansed the temple. Witnesses were reminded of

Psalm 69:9: “zeal for Thy house shall eat me up” (John 2:17). Jesus’ righteous indignation flows from his own words: “My house shall be called a house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of robbers” (Matthew 21:13). But to avoid sinful anger, Paul exhorts us to not let matters remain unsettled. Not allowing the day to end without trying to solve the issue at hand is godly. For hidden anger has a way of churning into vengeful and hurtful actions.

Paul instructs us that settled anger and raging wrath accompany other sins that must be put away. “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and railing be put away from you with all malice” (Ephesians 4:31). Unresolved bitterness can erupt in sinful outrage and noisy clamor. Or it can reside unchecked until behind the scenes it finds release through malicious gossip and hurtful lies.

Sinful anger and wrath often arise when our pride is hurt. Herod, when he sensed his authority was mocked, was “wroth,” and killed innocent children (Matthew 2:16). Jewish hearts, when hearing Jesus present facts that clearly showed they were not exclusively deserving of God’s favor, were “filled with wrath”. Incensed hearers immediately arose and cast Jesus out of the city seeking to throw him over a cliff (Luke 4:25-30).

In the face of sin, with its glaring disrespect for God’s holiness, we must be angry! But “an angry man stirreth up strife and a wrathful man aboundeth in transgression” (Proverbs 29:22).