

Steve Whitacre
SESSION 5 | God's Anger

I. INTRODUCTION

“Many people, whether religious or irreligious, envision the God of the Old Testament as ill-tempered, exacting, and capricious—rather like us at our worst. Particularly in the Old Testament incarnation, he’s supposedly a looming storm cloud of petty, harsh, vengeful wrath. But I’m not sure what ‘Scripture’ such folk have been reading. The god they describe sounds uncannily like *us* when anger goes sour: demanding, arbitrary, irritable, and judgmental. It sounds nothing like the person actually portrayed in the Bible.” David Powlison, *Good and Angry*, 106.

II. THE ANGER OF GOD

1. God’s anger is necessary because he is righteous and holy

“It may surprise us to find how frequently the Bible talks about the wrath of God. Yet if God loves all that is right and good, and all that conforms to his moral character, then it should not be surprising that he would hate everything that is opposed to his moral character. God’s wrath directed against sin is therefore closely related to God’s holiness and justice. God’s wrath may be defined as follows: “God’s wrath means that he intensely hates all sin.” Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 205–6.

“In reference to God, *wrath* and *fury* don’t describe a mere irritable mood or a momentary tantrum. They express God’s whole-hearted decision to destroy things he finds utterly despicable. There’s no contradiction between slowness to anger and fierce indignation. In fact, it’s because God loves so intensely that he must get angry. ‘That matters... and it’s wrong!’” David Powlison, *Good and Angry*, 107.

“In the final analysis, then, it is biblical and edifying to say that God by nature is throughout eternity passionately opposed to evil. This hatred pervades all his thoughts and actions. God is the supreme hater of wickedness.” John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 273.

GOOD & ANGRY: OVERCOMING IRRITATION, OUTBURSTS, & EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN

2. God's anger is the proper companion to his love

"You can't understand God's love if you don't understand his anger. *Because* he loves, he's angry at anything that harms those he loves." David Powlison, *Good and Angry*, 115.

3. God's anger is not like sinful human anger

"But rarely are the beauty, internal logic, and necessity of God's wrath communicated... Don't let any preoccupations you have about 'the wrath of God' keep you from stopping to examine the inner logic of how God's anger works. His anger always arises for a good reason. It's never a fit or a spasm or bad hair day. It's never brooding hostility just waiting to explode on some innocent, well-meaning bystander who happened to get caught in the cross fire. The causes are clearly identified and they make perfect sense when you stop, listen, and think about it." David Powlison, *Good and Angry*, 108–9.

"God's wrath is terrible, but in the course of history the Lord is eager to defer that anger, to forgive those who turn from sin." John Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 275.

III. GOD'S ANGER AND OUR ANGER

1. God's anger is a model for righteous human anger

"When your anger is justly aroused, it operates along the lines of the Ten Commandments. Like God, you are displeased at betrayals of love. Selfishness, backstabbing, hypocrisy—all those things that anger you anger God as well. More to the point, the *reason* these things anger you is because they anger God. He describes us as 'made in his image.' We are hard-wired morally to know that some things are plain wrong and need to be dealt with." David Powlison, *Good and Angry*, 111.

2. The realities of God's anger can nourish our hearts

3. Our anger is redeemable!

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“Even though God’s wrath is the hope of his children and the despair of his enemies, it is also true that those enemies who turn and believe the staggering message of how wrath is converted into grace through Jesus Christ are changed into friends. The truth is that you can’t understand God’s love if you don’t understand his anger.” David Powlison, *Good and Angry*, 121.

“It is this God that we were created to be like. We are made in his image. That’s why we have the capacity for moral judgment. We are made to be aroused to anger and to constructive action in the presence of moral evil. That’s what God is like.” David Powlison, *Good and Angry*, 121.

The Gospel is how love and anger are resolved:

1. God’s anger falls on Jesus
2. God’s anger disarms the power of sin
3. God’s anger delivers you from the pain of other’s sins
4. God’s anger protects us from ourselves

David Powlison, *Good and Angry*, 116–118.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION

- Prior to this class, how did you think and feel about God’s anger?
- Are you more likely to think about God as a benevolent grandfather who is never angry or as an irritable God who is often angry at you and others?
- How is God’s anger different from sinful human anger?
- If you learned to be angry the way God is angry (which is to say, righteous anger), what would be different about your anger?
- Think about a conflict you’ve had in the last month. How would the truth about God’s anger and His forgiveness of you affect the way you handled the situation?