

Question: Since Jesus showed anger when he drove the money-changers out of the temple, does this mean that it is not a sin to be angry?

The Bible actually teaches Christians, “In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry” (Ephesians 4:26). Anger is a natural emotion for a righteous person in the presence of evil and injustice. The problem occurs when that anger is not dealt with in a constructive way. Instead, there is a failure to control our responses to the emotion of anger. Thus, the Bible often calls for us to rid ourselves of things like “anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language” (Colossians 3:8; Ephesians 4:31). James warns, “Man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires” (James 1:20); and Jesus said, “But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment” (Matthew 5:2). The Old Testament Proverbs often warn us about the “hot-tempered man” and those who “lack self-control” (Proverbs 15:18 and 25:29). Proverbs 30:33 says, “For as churning the milk produces butter, and as twisting the nose produces blood, so stirring up anger produces strife.”

When Jesus went into the temple, he found men who were apparently taking advantage of people. Many of the people had traveled a long distance to offer sacrifices in Jerusalem. They needed to exchange their foreign money in order to contribute in the temple. These men set up shop in the very temple precincts and charged excessively to people in need. Jesus demonstrated a kind of “righteous indignation” by driving them out of the temple, using a whip to direct the animals, not the people (John 2:13-19). God’s temple was supposed to be a house of prayer, not a marketplace to cheat people (Mark 11:15-17). Numbers 14:18 says, “The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished.”

My suggestion is to keep anger from becoming sinful. That means aiming at the sin rather than the fellow-sinner. Aim your anger at Satan rather than the one used by Satan. To control anger, try these additional suggestions based on James 1:19-20: (1) “Be quick to listen.” Before lashing out, be careful to hear and see what is really happening. There may or may not be just cause for anger. Listen carefully to find out the truth.

(2) “Be slow to speak.” Refuse to speak your anger until you are sure you understand what has been said or done to cause your feelings of anger to arise. (3) “Be slow to anger.” Focus on solving the problems rather than reacting destructively. To these I would add the following instructions from Ephesians 4:26: “Do not let the sun go down on your anger.” Don’t let the emotion of anger simmer. Do something constructive about it before the day ends. Be creative and pray for God’s help to keep from sinning in your anger.

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