

“Why Does God Get Angry?”

Tough Questions, part #2

Romans 1:16-2:1

You are in the right place this morning. You are not here by accident. You are not alone. If you look around, you will see people who are here to worship God and encourage each other. We do not think that we are perfect; however, we do know a perfect God. So we draw together in this place, at this moment, to hear what God would tell us about his character and his love. Let us pray.

God, we worship you this day. We tremble before you in awe of your greatness. We wonder at your loving-kindness. We want to know you more, so that, through our testimony, others will come to know you as well. Thank you for your Son, Jesus, who died to be our Savior. Thank you for the Holy Spirit, who guides us even now as we seek to understand your Word. Meet us in this place, Lord. We are ready. This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

A few weeks before my 18th birthday, I did something that made my father upset. Those of you with teenagers will not be surprised to know, I crashed our family’s car. During Thanksgiving Break, I drove over 150 miles to visit my friends. However, on the way back home, I took a short-cut, hit a patch of black ice, and put the car upside-down in the ditch. I was OK, but as I waited for an ambulance to come to check me out, I had to call my dad. Our conversation went something like this:

Me: Dad, I am so sorry. I just had an accident. I put the car in the ditch.

Dad: Are you OK? Can you drive home?

Me: Dad, the car’s upside down. I’m going to the hospital.

Dad: ...We’ll come right there.

What I remember most about that day was, even though my dad was angry because I had wrecked the car, his primary concern was for my safety and well-being. Believe me, my father was upset. I had to wait a year before I could have my own car again, and for graduation, my parents bought me a bicycle. But that was it; no lecture about safe driving, no grounding. I simply received the logical consequence of my action.

Most people know that their relationship with their father influences their image of God. This was certainly the case for me. However, there is one aspect of God that we struggle with, especially if you had a bad relationship with your earthly father. This is my topic today. How are we to understand God’s anger?

First, we have to decide if God even gets angry. I certainly think so. I have read the stories of the Old Testament – the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3), Noah’s flood (Genesis 7), the ten plagues of Egypt (Exodus 7-11), and so forth. Each of these stories indicates that God displays passionate anger against those who disobey him. And honestly, that makes us uncomfortable.

We are not alone. In the 2nd century, a theologian named Marcion decided that he could not tolerate the image of God he discovered in the Hebrew scriptures, so he flat out rejected that God. Instead, he maintained that God, the Father of Jesus Christ as described in the New Testament, was the only true God. He even went so far as to reject the majority of the scripture we read today, editing out anything he thought portrayed the old God of Judaism.

Fortunately for us, the early church rejected Marcion’s ideas, instead giving us the canon of scripture and the Nicene and Apostle’s Creeds to affirm that the God of the Bible is one person, from beginning to end, Genesis to Revelation. But Marcion had a point. How do we reconcile these two seemingly opposite images,

one of an angry God, and another of a compassionate God who offers his Son up for us?

I think part of the answer is found in Genesis 1:26. We are made in the image of God. Although we are not gods, we share many characteristics with God; specifically, our emotions. When I think about my dad, I know that he is loving, intelligent, and protective. He also gets angry, sad, and frustrated. I do, too. Shouldn't it be natural to think that God, who made us in his image, would also have a similar range of emotions?

God is not one-dimensional. God experiences joy, sorrow, love, anger, and more. God is passionate in both the Old and New Testament. The question we really need to answer is, why does God get angry?

I chose Paul's words in Romans as our reading today because I did not want to shy away from a hard scripture. Paul says it quite clearly. God is angry because people reject him and do not thank him. In Romans 1:18, Paul says people are suppressing the truth of God. In verse 21 he says these people know God, but do not glorify him or give thanks to him. I won't bother to reiterate the list, but you can see the actions that people commit when they ignore God.

Doesn't that make sense? Can you imagine, being in a room, and people just turn their backs to you and refuse to speak to you? You would feel angry and probably a few other emotions, too. How much worse is it when people ignore the Creator of the Universe?

So Paul lays out some good reasons why God is angry. And just when we are nodding our heads at this, Paul does an amazing thing. After laying out his argument of why God is angry at the people who have rejected him and sinned, Paul says, “You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone

else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.” (Romans 2:1) Paul includes us in the people who have messed up and rejected God. Actually, he includes himself in that list, too. Romans 3:23 says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Paul does not excuse himself or any of us. So before we start judging others, we need to realize, we are all in the same boat. In Ephesians 2:3, Paul tells us that by our sinful nature, all of us were objects of wrath.

That is a hard truth to swallow. We want to think the best of ourselves, to say that we have never done anything to upset God, but the Bible is clear that we have, even if we do not believe it at first. God is perfect. God is holy. God is jealous. He made us and wants us to worship him. God loves us. When someone you love ignores you, it upsets you, too. Sin and rejection anger God.

And this anger is not restricted to just God the Father. Jesus displayed righteous anger in the temple in Jerusalem. (Matt 21:12-16) Jesus cleared the temple courts of those buying and selling. He uttered these scathing words, “It is written, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers.’” (Matt 21:13) Jesus was passionate about worshiping God the Father, and when others did not do the same, he lashed out.

Now, before we go hiding in caves to escape God, we need to understand how God displays his anger. It is not like our own anger. When we get angry, we want to lash out and hurt someone. We want payback. Our goal is to make someone feel worse than we do. But that is not how God operates. God’s anger is always holy, always righteous. God’s anger is his love in action. Proverbs 3:12 says, “the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.”

God expresses his anger by letting us have our own way. Paul says in Romans 1:24 that God gave people over to their sinful desires. The purpose was for all of us to feel the effects of our sin. God in anger takes his protection away, hoping the pain and regret of our sin will draw us back.

A while ago, my friends' son committed a crime. As a result, he had to serve jail time. His parents did not want him to go to jail, but they all accepted the sentence because it was the natural consequence of his actions. While he was in jail, they prayed for him, visited him, wrote to him, and did everything possible to maintain their relationship, so that this week, when he got out, he knew he had a home to return to.

Those difficult times can draw us back to God, or they can harden us. But the choice is ours. Sometimes, punishment does influence us to make better decisions. As a teenager, I did not want to make my father mad. But more importantly, I wanted my dad to be proud of me.

So what motivates us to please God? Is it that we do not want him to be angry at us? Maybe. But there are better reasons to serve God. Things like gratitude, making God proud, and enjoying the presence of God.

We need to get the right idea about God's anger. God does not throw temper tantrums. When God is angry, it is because we have denied his love and chosen our own selfish ways. God knows that our sin leads to death. Like any good parent, God wants what is best for us.

The good news is, God does not let his anger win. His anger motivates him to find a solution. His wrath against sin is great. Sin harms his children. And God loves his children. So instead of abandoning us, God sends his own Son to die for us. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, “God made him (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for

us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Usually, when we are angry with someone, we do not sacrifice something precious to us so that we can win the other back. Yet this is exactly what God did for us.

Does God get angry? Yes. Read the book of Revelation. God’s anger will be on full display at the end of history. But God is also patient, slow to anger, and full of compassion. (Psalm 103:8) In 2nd Peter 3:9 it says, “The Lord is...patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

Being slow to anger is not the same as never getting angry. If God could not get angry, we could not know how good his grace is. If God was completely passive, never letting us feel the effects of our sin, we would not know how good his forgiveness was. If God did not get angry, we could not know how deep his love for us is.

Yes, God gets angry, because people reject God. But God always gives us the freedom to choose to continue to reject him, or to confess our sin, repent, turn away from the things that harm us, and turn back to God, who offers forgiveness through Jesus Christ. In the end, I believe God’s anger is a good thing, because to me, that proves that his love for you and me is fierce.

Memory verse

“For the LORD disciplines those he loves, just as a father disciplines the son in whom he delights.” Proverbs 3:12 (NET)

Reflection questions

1. Describe your relationship with your own father.
2. What images do you have of God? Do you see God as angry? Loving? Something else? All of the above?

3. How do you make sense of the stories in the Bible where God displays his anger? Do you think God is justified in punishing those who reject him? Why or why not?
4. Does it surprise you that Jesus expressed anger? Do you see Jesus as a passionate person?
5. How does God’s love provide a response to God’s anger? How does God see us after the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross?