

Control Anger, the Tongue and Criticism

Detailed Outline

Part 1 of 2

I. Controlling the Anger

- A. Some elders today who would never curse, steal, miss a meeting, or think of getting drunk, respond with unrestrained anger toward those who disagree with them.**
 - 1. These Christians overreact.
 - 2. They malign their brothers.
 - 3. They slander the church.
 - 4. They feel perfectly justified in sending hate mail or in spreading venom via the Internet or Facebook.
- B. The Bible calls this anger a “work of the flesh” (Gal. 5:17) and “loveless behavior” (1 Cor. 13:4-7).**
- C. One of the most important biblical principles for handling conflict constructively is to control the passions of anger.**
 - 1. Most disputes wouldn't be nearly as unpleasant and unprofitable if people didn't lose control of their tempers and say harsh and irrational things to one another.
 - 2. Unrestrained anger creates and escalates conflict.
 - 3. It makes problem solving and peacemaking far more difficult than it should be.

II. Controlling Anger: Be slow to anger.

- A. God is slow to anger, and for that we should be eternally grateful.**
 - 1. God is longsuffering with us.
 - 2. Furthermore, God expects his children to be like him—as Paul says, to “be imitators of God, as beloved children” (Eph. 5:1)—so we also must be slow to anger.
- B. Proverbs speaks to this topic a lot.**

“Whoever is slow to anger quiets contention.” (Prov. 15:18 ESV)

“Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding.” (Prov. 14:29)
- C. In the midst of contention, only those who are slow to anger are able to bring peace.**
 - 1. Those who are slow to anger are more rational and objective than quick-tempered people.
 - 2. They possess the calm, cool demeanor that is needed to navigate through the storms of conflict.
 - 3. In contrast to the “calmness” of those who are slow to anger, “a hot-tempered man stirs up strife” (Prov. 15:18).

D. James says it well.

“Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires.” (James 1:19-20)

We are to be careful to listen to what others say, to be slow to speak our mind or express our opinions, and to be slow to express anger.

E. Too often, however, our pattern of behavior is the exact opposite.

When we are opposed or frustrated we are quick to express our anger, spout our own opinions, defend ourselves, and resist listening to others.

III. Controlling Anger: Control the passions of anger.

A. Be angry, but do not sin.

1. Anger is a normal human emotion that everyone experiences.
2. It also is an emotion that God experiences.
3. His holy anger burns against evil (Ps. 7:11) yet always remains perfectly controlled and just. As God’s children, we should feel the righteous indignation that he feels when we encounter gross injustice or blatant wickedness (Ps. 119:53).
4. The problem for those of us who follow in Jesus’ footsteps is that righteous anger can quickly morph into sinful anger.
5. This is why the Scripture says: Be angry and do not sin. (Eph. 4:26)

B. Deal with anger promptly, and do not give the devil a helping hand.

*“Nothing, I maintain, so constantly gives the devil an opportunity as loss of control in anger.”
– Martyn Lloyd-Jones*

The devil exploits masterfully the anger of believers to tempt them to sin. He loves nothing more than to stir up angry, shameful disputes among believing churches, families, and friends.

C. Be calm, and don’t escalate conflict.

“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” (Prov. 15:1)

1. When you speak, answer gently.
2. Intentionally lower the volume of your voice and maintain a pleasant tone.
“A soft tongue will break a bone.” (Prov. 25:15)
3. Love is “not easily angered” (1 Cor. 13:5 NIV). “A fool gives full vent to his spirit” declares Proverbs (Prov. 29:11).

IV. Controlling Anger: Strip off the old life of anger, and put on the new clothes of Christ-like character.

A. Take off the old garments.

“But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander . . . seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.” (Col. 3:8-10 ESV)

1. Angry attitudes are part of the old, unregenerate lifestyle that has no place in the wardrobe of a new person in Christ.
2. As new creatures in Christ then, believers must strip off the dirty garments of the old self.
3. We must, as Paul admonishes, put away “all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander” (Eph. 4:31).
4. The story of one man who, through the power of God’s Word and the Holy Spirit, found victory over anger:
 - a) “As a new Christian, I was challenged to apply my weekly Bible study personally. I was working through Colossians. The Holy Spirit caught my attention with Colossians 3:8: “But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language.” I tried to slide past it, but he kept bringing me back to the words “get rid of anger.”
 - b) I had a violent temper. Whenever it flared, I’d haul up and bash my fist into the nearest door. Even though I often bloodied my knuckles and once completely smashed a beautiful diamond and onyx ring my wife had given me, I couldn’t seem to stop. Yet here was God’s Word: “Get rid of anger.” This wasn’t just advice given to the people of Colossae centuries ago. It was God speaking to me right then.
 - c) So I made a covenant with God to work on controlling anger. My first step was to memorize the verse and review it daily. I prayed and asked the Lord to bring this verse to mind whenever I might be tempted to lose my temper. I also asked my wife to pray for me and remind me of this verse if she saw me failing in my promise to the Lord. So Colossians 3:8 became a part of my life and gradually removed that sin from me.”
5. If you want to improve in this area, try this.
 - a) Stop and pray immediately when you sense sinful anger arising in your mind and body.
 - b) Remember that other people are watching how you respond to a provoking situation.
 - c) Don’t speak or act until you have control over your emotions.
 - d) If you do sin in anger, confess your sin and seek forgiveness immediately.

B. Put on the new clothes.

“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” (Col. 3:12-14)

1. Only when we are properly dressed in Christ-like character can we handle conflict properly or discuss reasonably and profitably our doctrinal differences or policy issues.
2. Story of Bishop Pike and Francis Schaffer:
 - a) Throughout the discussion, this young skeptic (Bishop Pike) did everything in his power to bait the apologist and disrupt the meeting, but the apologist remained calm and responded kindly, patiently, and gently (1 Cor. 13:4; 2 Tim. 2:24-26).

- b) At the end of the debate, impressed by the apologist's gracious demeanor, the young man asked to meet one-on-one to talk more about the faith. If Schaffer had lost control of his anger, he likely would have lost the opportunity to speak with this young man and would have negatively impacted the rest of the audience.