

# TAKE AIM, DON'T MISS! DEALING WITH THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

## - Anger: Defusing a Dangerous Bomb -



It's a question the Lord asks Jonah (*Jonah 4:4*) and a question we need to ask ourselves more often than we do. What is the question?

**WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO BE ANGRY ABOUT?** Or, in the NIV, **IS IT RIGHT FOR YOU TO BE ANGRY?**

What an insightful, surgical question for all of us! It's a question that walks onto what often happens on the stage of our lives and pulls the mask off of us. It's a revealing emotion, and a potentially destructive emotion.

This emotion is complicated, though, because in some forms, it's a symptom of something in the subconscious desires of the human heart, a whistle-blower for a deeper, darker devotion in our souls. It's symptomatic of something, and when it takes a downward turn, it is certainly a deadly sin. Consider this quote from Marcia Cannon, in her book *The Gift Of Anger*.

***"You become ANGRY when you define reality as UNACCEPTABLE to you, and you feel UNABLE to easily CORRECT it, TOLERATE it, or let it GO."***

How do we gain insight into the potentially deadly sin? In other words, ANGER is only SYMPTOMATIC of something else – CIRCUMSTANCES we consider to be UNACCEPTABLE. Cannon suggests we gain insight into this potentially deadly sin by looking at that UNACCEPTABLE THING to which this emotion responds.

**1<sup>st</sup>, let's consider 3 characteristics of this potential sin that make it unique in comparison to the other seven deadly sins.**

- **This is among the most WIDESPREAD sins.** (*Romans 3:23*) In fact, from a cultural-historical perspective, the first evidence of sin's devastation in the world involved this sin. (*Genesis 4*) The breadth of this sin is *omni-cultural-historical (all people in all times)*, and *omni-generational (all ages)*.

Could it be the first sin we commit? Have you ever heard an infant cry? Infused in their earliest shrills is an all-consuming rage that if they had hands as big and functional as ours, they'd wrap those hands around our necks. Children, infants

can definitely “define reality as unacceptable” and insist that everyone around them knows it! Hungry, or not sharing, we’ve all seen enough red-faces smeared with tears to know anger meets us all when we’re young and we NEVER outgrow it. WE often morph into four-year-olds when we don’t get our way. Anger is no respecter of age. AND . . . EVERYONE gets angry. It’s just expressed in different ways, by rage-containers who clam up / dam up their anger and rage-spewers. There’s COLD ANGER, record-keeping anger that never forgets or forgives, and basically “I don’t get angry, I just get even” usually by freezing out the person they’re angry at. Then there’s HOT ANGER, volatile fits of rage when aggravated. Blowing up. “I blow up, and then it’s over.” So does a bomb! Some SHOUT. Some POUT. Both responses are expressions of anger.

- **It may be the most DANGEROUS of the se7en deadly sins.** (Romans 6:23) The uninhibited expression of anger can quite literally kill. In fact, what does Jesus connect this emotion with in **Matthew 5:21-22**? Murder. The 1<sup>st</sup> upsurge of illegitimate anger can make people liable to judgment. Jesus puts murder and anger on the same continuum. (**1 John 3:15** says ***everyone who hates his brother is a murderer.***)

In fact, anger can cause calculated and uncalculated harm to others. Sometimes anger leads people to do things we would not normally do (smash a hole in the wall, break a window in a car, splinter a cell phone against the sidewalk, shatter a valuable piece of china). The American Justice has a category for this. What IS it? Crimes of PASSION, a crime that happens from someone so inebriated by his/her anger they make a foolish decision to say or do something they would not normally say or do. Anger is an emotion with tremendous disorienting power.

- **Not ALL expressions of this emotion is SIN.** How does this emotion distinguish itself from the other se7en deadly sins? In one significant way: GOD gets angry! In fact, God’s anger is all over the pages of Scripture, both the OT and the NT. *Psalm 7:11; Mark 3:5 (and the money changers); 2 Thessalonians 1:8; Romans 1:18.* And yet God never sins.

Since God never sins (Deuteronomy 32:4), there is hope. Why? God shows us you CAN be angry and not sin.

**\*\* It is the CAUSE of ANGER, not the EXPERIENCE of it, that qualifies it as SINFUL or RIGHTEOUS. Ephesians 4:26. \*\***

**2<sup>ND</sup>, Let’s consider the *main issue* underlying this potentially deadly emotion.**

- **Anger boils down to one issue: LOVE. In its uncorrupted form, ANGER is actually a form of LOVE.** When we value or love something or someone, we move in ANGER to PROTECT the object of our affection. [Someone beating your dog, you love your dog, what will you do? In that case, the opposite of love would be INDIFFERENCE, not caring.]
- **In other words, if we want to know when this emotion is sinful, we look for how our loves have become DISORDERED. It's not a question of WHETHER we love, but WHAT we love, what we long for, what we desire, what is valuable that we must protect.**
- **How do we interpret reality, fundamentally?** We interpret reality fundamentally as BROKEN, FALLEN LOVERS, and because threats to whatever and whoever we love exist at every turn, reasons to be ANGRY emerge everywhere, all the time.

**As Augustine says, "We are created to love GOD most and best, but too often we prefer OURSELVES and the things that serve US. We make GOOD things ULTIMATE things.** And why we should get angry @ the things that take GOD angry, instead, we find ourselves getting annoyed / angry at things like a withering plant on a sunny day (Jonah 4:9).

- **In its sinful form, this emotion, then, inherently STUPID.** It happens when we are so blinded by our self-consumed LOVES that we lash out at ANYTHING or ANYONE that doesn't SERVE us (the PERSON we LOVE the most)! ***It is the explosive power of a flawed affection!*** It comes from loving esteem, comfort, approval, security, or whatever because of how something serves US.

SINFUL anger is SELF-SERVING. *There's nothing wrong with getting angry to a degree if somebody slights your reputation, but why are you ten times—a hundred times—more angry about it than some horrible injustice being done to people in another part of the world?*

*Because . . . if what you're really looking to for your significance and security is people's approval or a good reputation or status or something like that, then when anything gets between you and the thing you have to have, you become implacably angry. You have to have it. You're over the top. You can't shrug it off.* Truth is, if we press in behind the normal instances of our anger, it's ugly.

If we find ourselves unusually perturbed about getting snubbed in social media, or being cut off in traffic, or going unrecognized for work, or having an idea shot down, or feeling under-appreciated by our spouse, it is likely because we love

ourselves too much. Sinful anger is the result of our disordered loves, often our shameless self-love.

**\*\* A GOOD FILL IN THE BLANK IS THIS: MY LOVE FOR \_\_\_\_\_ IS MAKING ME EXPRESS THIS EMOTION. BUT SHOULD THAT BE MY GREATEST LOVE AND DEVOTION? \*\***

**3<sup>rd</sup>, let's consider a Gospel and Grace oriented method against the madness of this (potentially sinful & deadly) emotion.**

Defusing the bomb requires our untangling the source of this emotion, which is our *ego-centric* perception of reality. Three steps provide a method against the madness.

- **ANALIZE this emotion EARLY.** When stress starts to rise, when you get your hackles up, when your temper begins to flare, we must hear God's Words: ***WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO BE ANGRY ABOUT?***

Stop and ask this: "What is so IMPORTANT to me that I get this DEFENSIVE and EMOTIONAL? What or Who am I LOVING so much that my heart is moved to feel this ANGRY? What does this emotion reveal about What or Who am I truly CARING about? Am I LOVING my comfort, convenience, alone time, \$\$, reputation, whatever I WANT? Is my love curved in on myself? Is my anger really about ME? Is my anger SELFISH anger?"

A couple of obvious examples come from MARRIAGE and FAMILY. Between spouses, how many fights are about something someone wanted from the other that was NOT provided? [She was busy w/the kids and cleaning the house all day; she wanted him to pick up 2 items from Kroger on his way home (a reasonable request); he just wanted to go home and chill out. "Did you . . . ?" "Well, then, go get it!" "All you've been doing is lying around the house all day; why didn't YOU?!?" She feels not listened to and unappreciated for what she does. He feels like he's done enough and NEEDS his "down time", BOTH are having goals blocked. When getting angry in a conversation, listen to the assumptions behind the accusations! EMOTIONS – even ANGER – come for how you INTERPRET what has happened to you. NEITHER party is really considering or trying to understand the other. Ladies, men do NOT read between the lines very well; nor can they read your mind! Better to spell it out before hand and tell them than clam up or blow up. In every case, ask, "What do I LOVE so much I'm getting angry for not

having it?” Warning men: There’s a MOTIVE for your wife asking, “Honey, does this dress make me look fat?”

With children, often you must do SOMETHING to make sure your children do not make foolish decisions that end up harming them. “If it works, it continues.” But consider WHY you’re angry @ your children. Is it because disciplining them INCONVENIENCED you? Or if they do what you tell them not to do, is that going to make YOU look bad, and you will get angry b/c YOU look bad? “Is my anger over their foolish decisions, or over what their decisions do to me?” Behind being impatient and angry w/children is loving our COMFORT and the way we LOOK as parents more than loving our children.

- **Feel RIDICULOUS for being RIDICULOUS.** If you ask the question about the love beneath / behind your anger, more often than not you’ll immediately be embarrassed because many times, the thing you’re defending is your ego, your pride, your self-esteem, your deep desire – your DEMAND for significance, affirmation, approval, or whatever...

But you should remember, this sin cannot CONDEMN us or DEFEAT us b/c IF we are in Christ, HE has paid the price even for our sin of disordered love for ourselves! (*Psalm 103:3; Colossians 2:13*) And the same power that raised JESUS from the dead can work in your life to overcome the self-love that drives too much of our anger (Hebrews 13:20).

- **Remember what makes GOD angry, and let it make you angry, too!** We need to pray that we would get angry over what angers GOD, not over what angers US. Let’s remember what God LOVES so much that He went to great lengths and great cost to end all threats against what He loves.
  - **God loves His NAME, His REPUTATION, His GLORY.** And He sent Jesus to begin the process of the promise of Habakkuk 2:14 being fulfilled. ***“For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”*** When we see God’s glory being diminished in any way, or God’s reputation being smeared, or God’s name being used as a swear word, we SHOULD get angry.
  - **God loves His PEOPLE. His CHURCH.** God sent His Son to live and die to create a new community of PEOPLE who would represent Him on this earth. When

anything or anyone threatens the church and her people, we SHOULD get angry! Especially CHILDREN! (Luke 17:2).

- **God loves this WORLD.** This is my FATHER'S world. When the world is exploited by takers who do not give, we SHOULD get angry.
- **God loves those who OBEY Him.** Disobedience to God by ourselves 1<sup>st</sup>, and by others 2<sup>nd</sup>, should anger us. This can easily turn into self-righteous selfishness – pointing out and getting “righteous indignation” over something WE are likewise guilty of! Like getting angry and talking about someone behind their back who's talking about you behind your back!
- \*\*\* Something else, sort of underlying all of this: God loves the TRUTH. He gets angry when folks LIE. Think of Ananias and Saphari struck down for lying. We should LOVE the Truth & LOVE the One Who IS the Truth, our LIX! We are Truth-SEEKERS / Truth TELLERS. \*\*\*

Whatever God LOVE and desires to PROTECT, so we should also love and desire to protect. And our love for what GOD loves will sometimes express itself in ANGER.

- **Practice FORGIVENESS.** (*Matthew 6:9-15*). Yes, people who offend you OWE you an apology. Sometimes you just may need to cancel the debt. Jesus absorbed the GREAT debt of your sin; you can absorb the LESSER debt of someone offending or upsetting you! Sometimes, you need to just “let it go” and move in love towards the person who has treated you wrongly. [Jay Adams story . . . overcoming evil w/good . . . opened up a dialogue . . . “]