

A BIBLICAL VIEW OF ANGER

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of Master of Divinity in  
Grace Theological Seminary  
May 1981



Title: A BIBLICAL VIEW OF ANGER  
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Degree: Master of Divinity  
Date: May, 1981  
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The Bible uses various words to describe the condition of anger, whether it is from the divine standpoint or from a human standpoint. The Old Testament words are more specific and more descriptive of the condition of anger than the words used in the New Testament. The Old Testament also uses a greater variety of words. The Old Testament gives a more concise definition of human responsibility than the words used in the New Testament. The New Testament seems to assume a prior understanding of human responsibility as it is taught in the Old Testament. The same words that are used to describe human anger in the New Testament are used to describe the anger of God also. The anger of God, in contrast to human anger, is always just and right.

There is a human misconception that all human anger is wrong. The New Testament clearly teaches that there are times when it is necessary for the individual to be angry. The Lord is the biblical model for human anger. The model of His life regarding anger can be seen in Mark 3:5. Paul also commands Christians to be angry in Ephesians 4:26. The Bible reveals the responsibility that the Christian has to be angry against sin and injustice. Righteous anger can turn into sinful behavior.

Sinful anger, in contrast to righteous anger, is always wrong. Sinful anger always has a cause and it is necessary to determine the cause in order to find a solution. The grace of God is needed to affect any ultimate solution to the problem of sinful anger. The Christian must recognize and admit the cause of sinful behavior. The solutions to the problem of anger must be carried out within the proscribed limits that the Bible sets down. The Bible clearly gives all the answers that the Christian needs to find solutions to this problem.

Accepted by the Faculty of Grace Theological Seminary  
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree  
Master of Divinity

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## INTRODUCTION

Anger is a problem that affects every man's life to some degree. Many people have trouble finding a solution to the problem of anger. Anger is not confined to the secular world. Its effects can be seen clearly in the lives of believers. Jay Adams states that the sin of anger is probably involved in ninety percent of all counseling problems.<sup>1</sup>

The reason many people go for counseling is because they do not know how to handle this problem. Many do not recognize that it is a problem. They are confused because many times they do not distinguish between righteous anger and unrighteous anger. The Bible has a great deal to say about both.

The Bible clearly teaches that there is a righteous anger and that the believer is commanded to exercise this type of anger. The believer does not have to be confused about the use of righteous anger.

The Bible also teaches very clearly that it is possible to gain control over the problem of unrighteous anger.

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<sup>1</sup>Jay E. Adams, The Christian Counselor's Manual (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1973), p. 359.

It is the hope of this writer that this study will provide some of the answers to the problem of unrighteous anger and the proper use of righteous anger.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>All biblical quotes which appear in this paper will be taken from the King James Version (KJV) unless otherwise noted in the body of the paper.

## CHAPTER I

### WORD STUDIES ON THE SUBJECT OF ANGER

In a study of this nature, a student of the Bible must have a basic understanding of the words that are involved in the Hebrew and Greek languages. A diversity of terms express the human emotion (as well as God's emotion) of anger. The tragedy of any translation of the Bible is that it is not possible to always translate the actual meaning of the biblical words. Thus, the force of the word is sometimes lost and the full impact of the original teaching does not always come across as the original writer had intended. Therefore, this chapter will examine the appropriate words in their biblical context, both in the Old and New Testaments, to lay the proper foundation for accurate understanding of this subject.

#### Old Testament Words

In the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, at least twelve words<sup>1</sup> are translated either anger or wrath. The

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Young, Analytical Concordance of the Bible (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, n.d.), pp. 38, 1076-77.

vast majority of these words are beyond the scope of this study. Three of these twelve words need to be examined in order to have a clear understanding of anger as it is seen in the Old Testament Scriptures and as it relates to human anger. These words, because they are the most common, have been chosen. They are  $\text{אָרַב}$  ,  $\text{אָרַב}$  , and  $\text{אָרַב}$  .

#### The Hebrew Word $\text{אָרַב}$

The word  $\text{אָרַב}$  is derived from the Hebrew verb  $\text{אָרַב}$  which means to be angry and originally meant "to snort."<sup>1</sup> Thus, the word  $\text{אָרַב}$  derived its basic meaning of nose or nostril. But in Hebrew, the word also has the additional meaning of anger.<sup>2</sup> The word is descriptive, especially when the idea is translated into the English language. When the emotion of anger is manifested outwardly, the nose plays a major role in the expressions of the face. The emotions can hardly be manifested without the visual effects that the nose produces.

Out of all the Hebrew words that are used to describe anger,  $\text{אָרַב}$  is the most common. The word is used some 265 times<sup>3</sup> in the Old Testament, of which 201 are used when referring to the anger of God. The word is used

<sup>1</sup>TDNT, s.v. "ὀργή," by Oskar Grether and Johannes Fichtner, 5:392.

<sup>2</sup>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, s.v. "ὀργή," by E. Bergman, 1:351.

<sup>3</sup>The Englishmen's Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance of the Old Testament, p. 437.

40 times when it is properly translated "nose" and it refers to both God and humans. There are 9 times when the word is associated with specific human beings who are angry and 15 times when the word is used in the book of Proverbs as a warning.

The noun form of  $\text{אָנָּח}$  is used with other verb forms to express degrees of anger. It is used also of human beings as an organ of smelling (Deut 33:10) and an organ of breathing (Gen 7:22).

There seems to be no great distinction between this word and other Hebrew words used for anger. In fact, some scholars state that  $\text{אָנָּח}$  is synonymous with the Hebrew word  $\text{אָנָּח}$ .<sup>1</sup> This seems to be supported by the translators of the Septuagint (LXX). This can be seen by examining two different verses of Scripture from the book of Proverbs. In Proverbs 15:1, it states:

A soft answer turneth away wrath ( $\text{אָנָּח}$ ), but grievous words stirreth up anger ( $\text{אָנָּח}$ ).

In this particular verse,  $\text{אָנָּח}$  is translated by the word  $\thetaυμόν$ . The word  $\text{אָנָּח}$  is translated by the word  $\acute{o}ργας$ .

In Proverbs 29:22, it states:

An angry ( $\text{אָנָּח}$ ) man stirreth up strife, and a wrathful ( $\text{אָנָּח}$ ) man aboundeth in transgression.

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<sup>1</sup>The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, s.v. " $\acute{o}ργή$ ," p. 108.

In this verse, the word  $\epsilon\chi$  is translated by  $\theta\upsilon\mu\omega\sigma\acute{\eta}\varsigma$  which is a form of the word  $\theta\upsilon\mu\acute{o}\varsigma$ .  $\pi\acute{\alpha}\tau\eta\grave{\iota}$  is translated by  $\delta\acute{\rho}\gamma\acute{\iota}\lambda\omicron\varsigma$  which is a form of  $\delta\acute{\rho}\gamma\acute{\eta}$ . Though these words are generally synonymous, there does seem to be some liberty to give these two words different shades of meaning, depending on the context in which they are used. These shades of meaning will be discussed in the examination of the word  $\pi\acute{\alpha}\tau\eta\grave{\iota}$ .

#### The Hebrew Word $\pi\acute{\alpha}\tau\eta\grave{\iota}$

The word  $\pi\acute{\alpha}\tau\eta\grave{\iota}$  is derived from the verbal root  $\pi\alpha\tau\eta$ , which means "to be hot" or "passionate."<sup>1</sup> The word  $\pi\acute{\alpha}\tau\eta\grave{\iota}$  is translated by Brown, Driver and Briggs as "heat" or "rage."<sup>2</sup> The word is used 115 times.<sup>3</sup> Of these, it is used 90 times when referring to the wrath of God and 25 times when referring to human wrath. When referring to the wrath of God, it is translated 65 times (KJV), using the translation "fury." The Authorized Version usually translates  $\pi\acute{\alpha}\tau\eta\grave{\iota}$  (when speaking of human wrath) as a man of wrath or a wrathful man. In most instances, this translation fails to describe the basic meaning of the word  $\pi\acute{\alpha}\tau\eta\grave{\iota}$ . There are two cases in the book of Proverbs

<sup>1</sup>TDNT, s.v. " $\delta\acute{\rho}\gamma\acute{\eta}$ ," by Grether and Fichtner, 5:392.

<sup>2</sup>BDB, p. 404.

<sup>3</sup>TDNT, s.v. " $\delta\acute{\rho}\gamma\acute{\eta}$ ," by Grether and Fichtner, 5:392.

(Prov 22:24 and Prov 29:22) where the word is translated furious. This translation is adequate because it describes a man who is visibly displaying his anger. The literal rendering in Proverbs 29:22 is a man who is an owner of rage. Keil and Delitzsch rightly describe the man who is  $\text{אֵרָאָה}$  as a hot-head of the highest degree.<sup>1</sup>

In conclusion, the word  $\text{אֵרָאָה}$  is not in opposition to the word  $\text{אֵרָאָה}$ , but is a word that helps describe what the man of anger is like in his extreme condition.

#### The Hebrew Word $\text{אֵרָאָה}$

This word is a verb form that has a basic meaning "to burn," or "to be kindled with anger."<sup>2</sup> The word is used 87 times in the Old Testament.<sup>3</sup> It is used almost exclusively as a word that expresses a strong emotion of anger, either in God or in humans. The word  $\text{אֵרָאָה}$  is used some 50 times with this verb to describe the burning of wrath.

In humans, this wrath is sometimes justified and sometimes is not justified. In many cases where it is not

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<sup>1</sup>C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Proverbs, vol. 2, trans. James Martin in Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), p. 101.

<sup>2</sup>BDB, p. 354.

<sup>3</sup>The Englishman's Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance, pp. 462-63.

justified, the individual who is angry manifests a depressed spirit.<sup>1</sup> Consider the following examples of men who exhibited this depressed spirit: Cain in Genesis 4:5; Balaam in Numbers 22:27; Balak in Numbers 25:3; Eliab against David in 1 Samuel 17:28; Saul against David in 1 Samuel 20:7. In Psalm 37:1,7,8 and Proverbs 24:19, it is used of a person who is depressed and who refuses to accept his circumstances in which he finds himself.

First Samuel 15:11 would suggest that the wrath that Samuel expressed is legitimate grief rather than burning anger. This occurred when Saul was removed from his kingship by God. This seems to be the only case where the word "wrath" could be used in a positive sense. All the other uses are used in a negative sense when it talks of individuals being wrathful.

#### New Testament Words

The New Testament words, in contrast to the Old Testament words, are not as descriptive of the emotion of human or divine anger. The words used in the New Testament are broader in their scope and are much more settled in their evaluation of anger. In general, the New Testament writers seem to assume an understanding of anger from the Old Testament Scriptures. Three basic words are used in

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<sup>1</sup>The Authorized Version translates this word as wrath in some contexts. The individuals are wrathful for selfish motives or because supposed claims have been violated.

the New Testament that describe the emotion of human anger. They are ὀργή, θυμός, and παροργισμός.

The Greek Word ὀργή

ὀργή is the most widely used word for anger in the New Testament. Hermann Kleinknecht states very clearly the original meaning of the word:

ὀργή is related in the stem to ὀργάω / ὀργάς, and thus means "lavish swelling of sap and vigour," "thrusting and upsurging" in nature, originally the "impulsive nature" of man or beast, especially the impulsive state of the human disposition,<sup>1</sup> which is in contrast to the more inward and quiet.

The stoic concept of anger is that it should not exist and should be completely eradicated.<sup>2</sup>

Colin Brown states, along these same lines:

In early Greek literature (post Homeric) the aim of anger can be either to take vengeance or to exact punishment. Thus, in Dem. Orationes, 24, 118, ὀργή appears as the attitude which is particularly appropriate for a judge. It is positively evaluated as being in the service of righteousness. For the rest, however, anger is mainly seen as a character defect which man should lay aside.<sup>3</sup>

For the most part, the New Testament also looks at human anger negatively, but there is a righteous anger (to be discussed in the next chapter) that is right and necessary. In fact, outside of those cases when Christ was angry,

<sup>1</sup>TDNT, s.v. "ὀργή," by Herman Kleinknecht, 5:383.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 385.

<sup>3</sup>The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, s.v. "ὀργή," 1:107.

there are only two possible instances (Rom 10:19 and 2 Cor 7:11) when human anger is estimated positively.<sup>1</sup>

The Greek Word θυμός

θυμός comes from the verbal root θύω, which originally denoted a violent movement of air, water, the ground, animals, or men, from the sense of "to well up," "to boil up." Regarding this meaning, Buchsel states:

The basic meaning of θυμός is thus similar to that of πνεῦμα, namely that which moves. The word itself means something different and there is an evolution that in the time of prose writers, Plato and Thucydides, the word means spirit, anger, rage, agitation. Everywhere in the New Testament it means wrath.<sup>2</sup>

The word θυμός, as it is used in the New Testament, has a slight difference of meaning. Both θυμός and ὀργή can refer to human anger. Stahlin shows the distinction:

θυμός is preferred for the passionate rage which boils up suddenly, Luke 4:28; Acts 19:28. ὀργή, however, contains an element of awareness and even deliberation absent from θυμός; in John 1:19, θυμός could hardly be used instead of ὀργή.<sup>3</sup>

It seems that θυμός is more parallel to the Old Testament word נַחַשׁ. It is a part of anger but also a part that expresses the external more vividly.

<sup>1</sup>TDNT, s.v. "ὀργή," by Gustav Stahlin, 5:419.

<sup>2</sup>TDNT, s.v. "θυμός," by Friedrich Buchsel, 3:167.

<sup>3</sup>TDNT, s.v. "ὀργή," by Gustav Stahlin, 5:419-20.

The Wrath of God in the New Testament

The wrath of God, in contrast to human anger, is always just and right. The reason why God is angry is because of His holiness and His anger is directed against sin. The same two words that express human anger also express God's anger. The most prominent word used for God's anger is ὀργή . Morris points out that ὀργή is a more suitable term to express the divine wrath of God because it expresses the more settled condition. The wrath of God ( ἡ ὀργή ) is specifically mentioned in John 3:36; Romans 1:18; Ephesians 5:6; Colossians 3:16; and Revelation 19:15. The wrath expressed by θυμός is confined mostly to the book of Revelation. The word is more suitable to the book of Revelation because of its vivid imagery.<sup>1</sup> Possibly the reason why θυμός is used in Revelation might be that the passages deal with the idea of divine judgment upon the earth.

The Greek Word παροργισμός

The form of this word is used only once in the New Testament Scriptures and it is found in Ephesians 4:26. In the LXX, it carried the idea of provoking to anger or an angry mood.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Leon Morris, The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955), p. 162.

<sup>2</sup>BAGD, p. 635.

The verb form that this noun is derived from is *παροργίζω* which means "to make angry."<sup>1</sup> This verb is used in Romans 10:19; Ephesians 6:4; and Colossians 3:21. The idea in Ephesians 6:4 is for fathers not to make their children angry. The idea of provocation is clearly behind the verb. Even though this word is used only once in its noun form, it must be understood because it is used in relationship to the command in Ephesians 4:26 to be angry and sin not. It is possible to be provoked and not to allow this provocation to be carried into sinful behavior.

In the New Testament, it assumes that anger must be dealt with in the proper way.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER II

### BIBLICAL STATEMENTS ON RIGHTEOUS ANGER

Confusion reigns in church circles regarding the subject of righteous anger. Varying extremes on this subject are discussed.

Some writers attribute righteous anger to God and imply that human anger is wrong or unrighteous. Bruce Narramore does this in his book, Help! I'm a Parent:

God's anger is always directed toward sin and results from His holy nature. Psalm 7:11 says, 'God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day.' In contrast to this, our anger is usually directed toward anything that gets in our way or frustrates our desires.

God's anger also coexists with love. He really desires the best for the unsaved sinner whose sins He hates. How different we are. When we resent someone, we usually hope he gets what's coming to him.<sup>1</sup>

The basic problem with the above statement is that it implies that only God can experience the right kind of anger which is absent from the human experience. Also, Narramore seems to equate anger with resentment. However, anger is not resentment.<sup>2</sup> Resentment definitely does cause

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<sup>1</sup>Bruce Narramore, Help! I'm a Parent (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), p. 138.

<sup>2</sup>Jay E. Adams, Competent to Counsel (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian Publishing Company, 1970), p. 220.

problems because it stems from the sin that is within. But all anger is not sin. Jay Adams states:

To call anger 'damaging' or to apply James 1:20 ('the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God') without qualification constitutes a reckless and irresponsible use of the Scriptures.<sup>1</sup>

An individual believer must recognize that the emotion of anger is not wrong. Scripture demonstrates this as true.

#### An Exegesis of Ephesians 4:26

An interlinear translation of Ephesians 4:26 prepares the way for discussion of this verse:

ὀργίσεσθε	καὶ	μὴ ἀμαρτάνετε·
Be angry	and	sin not.
ὁ ἥλιος	μὴ ἐπισυέτω	
The sun	do not (let it) go down	
ἐπὶ τῷ	παροργισμῷ	ὑμῶν
upon your	provocation.	

This verse has been a source of controversy among scholars. This verse begins with two present imperative verbs. The controversy stems over how each of these two verbs should be exegeted.

Robertson<sup>2</sup> and Winer<sup>3</sup> understand the first of the two verbs (ὀργίσεσθε) to be a permissive

<sup>1</sup>Jay E. Adams, The Christian Counselor's Manual, p. 349.

<sup>2</sup>A. T. Robertson, Ephesians in vol. 4 of Word Pictures in the New Testament (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), p. 541.

<sup>3</sup>George B. Winer, A Grammar of the Idiom of the New Testament, 7th ed. (London: Tuelener and Company, 1877), pp. 311-12.

imperative and not a command "to be angry." Winer states:

When two imperatives are connected by a *καί*, the first contains sometimes the condition (supposition) under which the action denoted by the second will take place or the second expresses an infallible result. In this passage from Ephesians, Paul's meaning is unquestionably this: we should not let anger lead us into sin.<sup>1</sup>

Meyer,<sup>2</sup> as well as Salmond,<sup>3</sup> would disagree with the conclusion that this can only be taken as a permissive imperative. Salmond states:

Some take the first imperative conditionally as 'if ye are angry, do not sin' (Olsh, Bleek, etc.); others in a way utterly at variance with the quotation; others take *ὀργίζεσθε* as an interrogative (Beya, Grot); others declare it impossible to take the first command as direct (Butt, Gram. of N.T. Greek, p. 290), or deal with the first imper. as permissive, and with the second as jussive (Winer, DeWette, etc.) as if 'be angry if it must be so, but only do not sin.' Such a construction might be allowable if the first imper. were followed by *ἀλλά καί* or some similar disjunctive; but with the simple *καί* it is inadmissible.<sup>4</sup>

If this imperative cannot be permissible based upon grammatical grounds, how then should it be treated?

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Heinrich A. W. Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Handbook of the Epistle to the Ephesians, trans. by Maurice J. Evans, William P. Dickson, and Henry E. Jacobs (Winona Lake: Alpha Publications, 1979), p. 478.

<sup>3</sup>S. D. Salmond, "The Epistle to the Ephesians," in vol. 3 of Expositor's Greek Testament, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), p. 345.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

This writer would agree with Kent that it would be best to regard both verbs as true commands.<sup>1</sup> Dana and Mantey argue that the imperative mood is the mood of command or entreaty--the mood of volition. It is the genius of the imperative to express the appeal of will to will.<sup>2</sup> Possibly one of the reasons that some commentators attempt to soften these commands is because they do not recognize the authority behind these commands. Dana and Mantey support their view from history:

Normally the imperative carried with it a very forcible tone of command. This was its characteristic force, though it might shade off into mere permission. The ancient Greeks so regarded it, and hence never employed the imperative in communication with superiors. This fact makes it significant that the imperative is so abundant in the New Testament. The apostles and their associates did not regard it as appropriate to address their readers with carefully softened commands.<sup>3</sup>

The apostles knew the Old Testament Scriptures and they knew that they were writing from the authority of God. How then are these commands understood in Ephesians 4:26?

The anger Paul is talking about in Ephesians 4:26 must be righteous anger. What is commanded in verse 26 is forbidden in Ephesians 4:31 because it is viewed as sinful behavior. The Cambridge Greek Testament rightly supports this argument:

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<sup>1</sup>Homer A. Kent, Jr., Ephesians: The Glory of the Church (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), p. 82.

<sup>2</sup>H. E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek Testament (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946), pp. 174-75.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 176.

ὀργή is forbidden absolutely in verse 31 in the sense of personal outburst of anger. There is good reason therefore for taking this verse as referring to righteous indignation. For the anger here is regarded as inevitable and right.<sup>1</sup>

This command in Ephesians 4:26 is parallel to the general teaching about anger in the New Testament. The New Testament assumes an understanding of Old Testament truth on this subject. Salmond believes that these words of this command are taken from the LXX rendering of Psalm 4:5.<sup>2</sup> Meyer, though, argues that it must be left undetermined whether Paul understood the original text as the LXX when he was writing this letter.<sup>3</sup>

Even though it cannot be proved conclusively that this verse (Eph 4:26) is taken from Psalm 4:4, Paul still had a clear understanding about the subject of righteous anger from the Old Testament Scriptures. The New Testament writers assume that their readers have an understanding of the Old Testament teaching on the subject of anger. Numerous individuals manifested righteous anger. Take, for example, the following individuals.

In 2 Samuel 12:5, David is confronted by the prophet Nathan concerning the sin that he had committed with

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<sup>1</sup>J. O. F. Murray, The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians in the Cambridge Greek Testament (Cambridge: The University Press, 1914), p. 78.

<sup>2</sup>Salmond, "Ephesians," p. 345.

<sup>3</sup>Meyer, "Ephesians," p. 478. In the LXX, the rendering is taken from Psalm 4:5, but in the Hebrew text, it is taken from Psalm 4:4.

Bathsheba. The prophet informed David of his sin by telling a parable about a certain man. When David heard the story, he burned (  $\text{׀} \text{׀} \text{׀} \text{׀}$  ) with anger. In 1 Samuel 11:6, Saul became very angry against the Ammonites when he was empowered by the Holy Spirit to accomplish a task for God.

In Exodus 16:20, Moses became angry at the children of Israel because they disobeyed him by leaving manna to rot in the wilderness after he had commanded them not to leave any behind. The implication in each one of these events is that these men were justified in their anger because it was directed against sin.

Paul recognizes in Ephesians 4:26 that it is possible to direct anger toward sin and not sin. But he also recognized the truth that righteous anger could get out of control and bring a person into sin. That is why he gives the third command not to let the sun go down upon your provocation. The word *παροργισμός* is best translated "provocation." *παροργίζω* and *παροργισμός* go beyond *ὀργή* in denoting an angry outburst which threatens to become lasting bitterness (cf. Eph 6:4).<sup>1</sup>

Calvin wisely says concerning this latter phrase: "Paul comes to a remedy that we at least quickly suppress

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<sup>1</sup>TDNT, s.v. "*ὀργή*," by Gustav Stahlin, 5:419.

our anger and not suffer it to harden by continuance."<sup>1</sup>  
 This is possibly the thought that David had in mind when  
 he wrote Psalm 37:8:

Cease from anger and forsake wrath: Fret not thyself;  
 it tendeth only to evildoing (KJV).

This seems to be the very warning that Paul is making in  
 Ephesians 4:26 because when anger is allowed to manifest  
 itself outwardly, it only tends to injure.<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew  
 word David uses in this Psalm (37:8) for fret is  $\text{פָּרַח}$  .  
 The word suggests an eating away at sin. David says this  
 only leads to evildoing. Paul suggests the same thought  
 by commanding that anger be put away before it gets the  
 best of a person.

Salmond summarizes this phrase:

Such anger cannot be indulged long but must be checked  
 and surrendered without delay. To suppose any allusion  
 here to sunset as the time for prayer or to night as  
 increasing wrath by giving opportunity for brooding,  
 is to import something entirely foreign to the simplic-  
 ity of the words as a statement of limitation.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, the emotion of anger is right if it is  
 against sin. But even righteous anger can turn to sin if  
 it is misdirected.

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<sup>1</sup>John Calvin, The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the  
 Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians, trans.  
 by J. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publish-  
 ing Company, 1965), p. 192.

<sup>2</sup>When he says in the last part of his epistle, "Do  
 not let the sin go down upon your provocation."

<sup>3</sup>Salmond, "Ephesians," p. 346.

The Example of Jesus in Mark 3:5

The following is a rendering of Mark 3:5:

And when He had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, He saith unto the man, 'stretch forth your hand.'

This particular event in Mark 3:5 happened after Jesus had entered into a synagogue in Capernaum. There was a man in the synagogue with a withered hand. This particular day was the Sabbath day. There were Pharisees standing around, waiting to see whether Jesus would heal this man on the Sabbath day so that they could trap Him.

Jesus' response in Mark 3:5 gives the Christian believer the supreme example of what righteous anger is like. This example shows the believer a legitimate reason for righteous anger and the attitudes that are reflected in a man of God as a result of that anger. The reason that Christ was angry is expressed by Hendricksen: "The Pharisees were esteeming man-made ritualism above God-ordained concern about a man's welfare."<sup>1</sup>

Jesus had legitimate reason for being angry. These men were more concerned about a man-made rule than they were about a man's life. Christ's anger was necessary and so is the Christian's anger, in certain incidents. Alexander Maclaren makes an appropriate statement regarding this verse:

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<sup>1</sup>William Hendricksen, A New Testament Commentary: An Exposition of Ephesians (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1967), p. 116.

The man that cannot be angry at evil lacks enthusiasm for good. The nature that is incapable of being touched with generous or righteous indignation is so, generally, either because it lacks fire and emotion altogether, or because its vigour has been dissolved into a lazy indifference and easy good nature which it mistakes for love.<sup>1</sup>

Christ not only was angry for a right reason, but the attitude that He manifested is an attitude Christians ought to have in displaying righteous anger.

Mark 3:5 states that Christ looked around at the Pharisees. The Greek word used ( *βλεψάμενος* ) is a present participle. The word suggests that this was more than a passing glance, but was one of indignation.<sup>2</sup> Christ was able to show this emotion without sinning. The phrase "being grieved" suggests something of the character of Jesus that ought to be emulated and should serve as a model for the Christian in righteous indignation. Christ had a concern for even the vilest of men. This is reflected in the statement "being grieved." This, then, ought to be the attitude that accompanies righteous anger in the Christian. A person cannot be grieved and be vindictive at the same time. Righteous anger is necessary. Righteous anger must be guarded and righteous anger must be concerned. The Christian need not be filled with guilt when he is angry

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<sup>1</sup>Alexander Maclaren, The Gospel According to Mark, Chapters I to VIII (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1906), p. 96.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

for the right reasons. He also need not have to apologize for his anger. Only if it is misdirected toward a person and that person is injured does it become wrong.

### CHAPTER III

#### BIBLICAL CAUSES AND SOLUTIONS TO HUMAN ANGER

In a study of this nature, the book of Proverbs demonstrates the reasons and solutions for sinful anger. Nowhere in the Bible is it possible to find such a wealth of information as this book. Also, there is no place that can evaluate and define anger the way the book of Proverbs does. Fichtner supports this supposition thusly:

Only the wisdom literature attempts a true evaluation of human anger. The sages of Proverbs measure it by utilitarian standards in accordance with the general view of CHOKMA (wisdom).<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, this section of the thesis will be confined to the book of Proverbs.

The book of Proverbs is essentially a book of warnings and admonitions. The book seeks to define a wise man and warns or admonishes him of his moral responsibility to behave in the light of that truth.

The book of Proverbs has a vast amount of material on the subject of anger. Therefore, a study of this nature

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<sup>1</sup>TDNT, s.v. "ὀργή," by Johannes Fichtner, 5: 395.

cannot deal with all the material exegetically. But it is possible to examine some of the causes of anger and suggest some answers that would be helpful in dealing with the problem of anger.

### Identifying the Causes

Proverbs suggests several probable causes for anger. These verses have been grouped into six major categories. Some degree of overlap does occur between the categories. However, this writer wishes to handle the material not in accordance with the perceived overlaps, but in accordance with the specific statements of Scripture.

#### Hasty Spirit

The hasty spirit reflects a general attitude of impulsiveness. It does not take into consideration the harmful effects that result from this problem. The following verses are pertinent to this subject: Proverbs 12:16; 14:17; 14:29; 15:28; 18:13; 25:8; 29:20. The clearest and most significant verses will now be discussed.

#### Proverbs 14:29

He that is slow to anger is of great understanding;  
But he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly.

In this proverb, the individual who is slow to anger is praised. He is praised because he is a man who reflects

great care in his character. His understanding makes him realize the destructive nature of sinful anger. He is the one who puts off anger long.<sup>1</sup> The implication of this verse is that this individual does not allow his external circumstances to control his spirit.

In contrast to this man, the man who is hasty of spirit exalts folly. Keil and Delitzsch translate this last phrase, "But he that is easily excited carries off folly."<sup>2</sup> This second individual is set in contrast to the first.<sup>3</sup> He is characterized this way because he lacks self-control. Ironside describes this man as follows: "Bad temper is always a sign of weakness. The man who knows that he has the mind of God can afford to wait quietly on Him."<sup>4</sup> The thing that characterizes the man with a hasty spirit is that he lacks reason. Bridges supports this: "Too often passion serves instead of law and reason."<sup>5</sup> The hasty

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<sup>1</sup>C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Proverbs, vol. 6, trans. James Martin in Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), p. 309.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Many commentaries were consulted on the book of Proverbs. However, most lacked sufficient information on the subject. There were only a few sources, which are quoted in this chapter, which were of value to this writer.

<sup>4</sup>H. A. Ironside, Notes on the Book of Proverbs (New York: Loireaux Brothers Bible Truth Depot, 1907), p. 71.

<sup>5</sup>Charles Bridges, An Exposition of Proverbs (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959), p. 190.

spirit then reflects a refusal to act upon knowledge. This ultimately carries an underlying disobedience on the part of the man who has a hasty spirit.

Proverbs 29:20

Seest thou a man that is hasty in his word? There is more hope for a fool than of him.

In Proverbs 14:29, it was seen that a man who is hasty in spirit exalts folly. Here, the reason behind the folly is seen. A man who is hasty in his words is filled with conceit. Ironside states:

In chapter 26:12, this statement is made concerning a man who is wise in his own eyes. He who is filled with self-conceit is very liable to be hasty in his words. The self-confident man is continually uttering words which<sup>1</sup> he has to recall because of his reckless impatience.

This is precisely why there is more hope for a fool. It is because that individual is in such a state that he will not be governed by reason. Bridges says: "Until the stronghold of his own conceit be shaken, argument and instruction are lost."<sup>2</sup> The thing, then, that characterizes this man who has a hasty spirit is that he is a man who strikes out without consideration of those around him. He has a haste that is destructive of reflection.<sup>3</sup> This proverb teaches that every word, as well as every thought, can only be

<sup>1</sup>Ironside, Proverbs, p. 427.

<sup>2</sup>Bridges, Proverbs, p. 579.

<sup>3</sup>Crawford H. Toy, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), p. 514.

matured by being thought out, and thought over.<sup>1</sup> It is necessary for the believer to be thoughtful before he acts.

### Self Assertiveness

The self assertive man is one who does not seek the interests of other people. Instead, he refuses to accept circumstances as they come to him and, thus, he has a tendency to force his opinion. His behavior can end up with the problem of anger.

The following verses are pertinent to this subject: Proverbs 15:28; 17:19; 18:1; 20:3; 22:3; 30:33. The verses that follow are the most pertinent.

#### Proverbs 20:3

It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife, but every fool will be quarreling.

The thrust of Proverbs 20:3 lies in the contrast that it makes between a man who remains far from strife and the fool. The man who seeks honor knows what strife will do and he keeps from it. The fool, on the other hand, seeks his own ends and does not care that strife exists. He is self-assertive and this is what causes strife, because he fails to recognize what strife will do. The word for "keep aloof" is the Hebrew word  $\text{סָבַח}$  which means "cessation." This comes from the verb form  $\text{סָבַח}$

<sup>1</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, Proverbs, p. 254.

which means "to cease, to desist."<sup>1</sup> The man who ceases from strife is honorable. Keil and Delitzsch comment on this verse:

He who is prudent, and cares for his honour, not only breaks off strife when it threatens to become passionate but does not at all enter into it, keeps himself far removed from it.<sup>2</sup>

This honorable man refuses to participate in strife.

Proverbs 30:33

For the churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood, so the forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife.

This verse can reflect either an attitude of pride or an attitude of self-assertion. In this particular case, the self-assertion is the result of pride (Prov 30:32). What is central in the proverb is the inevitability of strife. This strife is caused by an attitude that refuses to bend, or by an attitude that refuses to accept the proper way out of circumstances found in Proverbs 30:32. The Hebrew word אִפְּאֵן is used to designate that there are two involved in the forcing of the wrath. Zockler states:

The dual אִפְּאֵן stands doubtless intentionally (comp. Dan. XI.20) to indicate that it is the wrath of two whose sharp pressing on leads to the development of strife.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>BDB, pp. 991-92.

<sup>2</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, Proverbs, p. 40.

<sup>3</sup>Otto Zockler, "Proverbs," trans. by Philip Schaff in vol. 10 of Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, ed. John P. Lange, 25 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), p. 252.

The parallel that is being brought forth in this proverb is the parallel between the forcing of blood and churning of butter. These latter two will produce results. In the same way, the forcing of wrath will produce strife. The spirit that is self-assertive is the one that refuses to look at the consequences. The individual involved desires only his own opinion. The result is the causing of anger in a greater degree.

#### Pride

Pride is similar to self-assertiveness and it manifests itself in much the same way. The following verses are pertinent to this study: Proverbs 13:10; 13:16 (implied); 16:18; 28:25; and 30:32. The most representative of these verses follow:

#### Proverbs 28:25

He that is greedy of spirit stirreth up strife; But he that putteth his trust in Jehovah shall be made fat.

The translation "greedy of spirit" is a good one because it describes a man that lifted himself up in his desires. Keil and Delitzsch describe this man as follows:

He is of a wide heart who haughtily puffs himself up, of a wide soul who is insatiably covetous; for  $\aleph$   $\eta$  is the spiritual and  $\omega$   $\epsilon$   $\zeta$  the natural heart of man, according to which the widening of the heart is the overstraining of self-consciousness and the widening of the soul the overstraining of passion.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, Proverbs, p. 238.

The covetous spirit is a sin that reflects an unquenchable greed and selfishness. This ugly sin affects others and genders strife. The contrast is made between the one who genders strife and the one who trusts in Jehovah. The individual's desires become more important than his love for God. This inevitably leads to strife with other people.

Proverbs 30:32

If thou hast done foolishly in lifting yourself up, or if thou hast thought evil, lay your hand on your mouth.

The lifting up here refers to an exaltation in arrogance.<sup>1</sup> Keil and Delitzsch explain the meaning of the first half of the verse: "If thou arrogantly and with offensive words, wilt strive with others, then keep thyself back, and say not what thou hast in mind."<sup>2</sup> This verse cannot be explained by itself because of the Hebrew conjunction which is found at the beginning of verse 33. This Hebrew conjunction  $\text{ו}$  is rightfully translated "for," because it shows the continuation in thought that began in verse 32.

Verse 33 reads:

For the churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood, so the forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife.

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<sup>1</sup>BDB, p. 672.

<sup>2</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, Proverbs, p. 313.

It is the nature of pride to refuse to take the steps necessary to solve the problem. Verse 32 expresses the steps necessary not to allow the sin of pride to continue to its logical conclusion. Verse 33 demonstrates the results if that pride is not kept in check. There is an implication in this verse (v. 32) that the sin of pride has been committed and the individual needs to keep it in check so that it does not end up causing strife (v. 33). Barnes expresses this thought well regarding verse 32.

The act expresses the silence of humiliation and repentance after the sin has been committed, and that of self-restraint which checks the haughty or malignant thought before it has ever passed into words.<sup>1</sup>

Verse 32, then, is a warning not to allow the sin of pride to be carried to the further sin of wrath which ultimately causes strife.

### Jealousy

The sin of jealousy is similar to, if not synonymous, with covetness. The jealous spirit is characterized by a bitterness of spirit.

The following are pertinent to the subject of jealousy: Proverbs 6:34; 14:30; 27:4. All three of these passages will be dealt with in the following discussion.

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<sup>1</sup>Albert Barnes, "Proverbs-Ezekiel," in vol. 3 of The Bible Commentary, gen. ed. F. C. Cook (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953), p. 83.

Proverbs 6:34

For jealousy is the rage of a man and he will not spare in the day of vengeance.

In this particular verse, there is a general principle applied about jealousy and how it manifests itself. The man who is jealous, in this context, is the man who is the husband of an adulterous woman. This man is incensed because he has been cheated. His feeling is reasonable under the circumstances.

This principle can also be applied to the individual who experiences jealousy, but who is not justified in his jealousy. He also expresses the same passion toward the individual to whom he is jealous. The Hebrew word used to describe rage is the word <sup>1</sup>. This word refers to the heated passion of the man who is angry. The contrast that the proverb makes is that this man of jealousy will not spare the individual (the adulterer or adulteress no matter what attempt is made to bribe that individual. Bridges describes this man: "The tremendous passions of jealousy and rage shut out all forgiveness."<sup>2</sup>

Proverbs 14:30

A tranquil heart is the life of the flesh; but envy is the rottenness of the bones.

A literal rendering of this verb reads as follows:

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<sup>1</sup>BDB, p. 404.

<sup>2</sup>Bridges, Proverbs, p. 66.

The life in the body is a heart of healing; but jealousy is the rottenness of the bones.

The contrast that Solomon is making here is between a heart that is quiet and a jealous heart. Keil and Delitzsch comment on the silent aspect of the heart.

The heart is the innermost region of the life, where all the rays of the body and the soul-life concentrate. Thus is styled the quiet heart, which in its symmetrical harmony is like a calm and clear water mirror, neither interrupted by the affections, nor broken through or secretly stirred passion.<sup>1</sup>

The quiet heart is one that is under control. The jealous heart creates a condition that disturbs the quiet heart. The jealous heart seeks something that does not belong to it. It creates a rottenness. The Hebrew word for rottenness is רָקַב. The word is used in Hosea 5:12 as a figure and is translated "the ravages of a worm."<sup>2</sup> Jealousy has the affect of eating at the bones. It is a consuming passion that destroys the tranquility of the heart. If it is left unchecked, it will reveal itself in anger.

Proverbs 27:4

Wrath is cruel and anger is overwhelming, but who is able to stand before jealousy?

The words used in the above proverb for anger and wrath are intense for a reason. This is done to show the

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<sup>1</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, Proverbs, p. 310.

<sup>2</sup>BDB, p. 955.

extreme power that is in the emotion of jealousy. Jealousy is not something that breaks out and then stops like anger or wrath, but it broods. Deane, in his commentary on Proverbs, explains:

Jealousy does not blaze forth in some sudden outbreak and then die away; it lives and broods and feeds itself hourly with fresh ailment, and is ready to act at any moment, hesitating at no means to gratify itself, and sacrificing without mercy its victim. Septuagint, 'Pitiless is wrath, and sharp is anger; but jealousy ( *Σηλος* ) submits to nothing.'<sup>1</sup>

The thing that characterizes a man of jealousy is that he refuses to be obedient to God's Word.

#### Hatred

The sin of hatred refuses to recognize circumstances of life and leave them in the hand of God. Only one verse in all of the Proverbs speaks of hatred as being a cause of anger. This is found in Proverbs 10:12.

#### Proverbs 10:12

Hatred stirreth up strife, but love covereth all transgressions.

Hatred is the exact opposite of love and it refuses to manifest a forgiving spirit. The implication brought about by the contrast is this: hatred refuses to overlook a wrong done; hatred has more of an effect than just the evil that is wrought. Keil and Delitzsch state: "Hatred has further than this bad effect, that it calls forth

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<sup>1</sup>W. J. Deane, Proverbs in vol. 20 of The Pulpit Commentary, ed. by H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, n.d.), p. 515.

hatred, and thus stirreth strife, feuds, factions, for it incites man against man."<sup>1</sup> Hatred never allows a man to have a calmness of spirit toward the man he hates. Hatred may contain anger externally, but it usually manifests itself internally in the sense that it begins with the unforgiving spirit. It engenders strife because it internalizes a kind of anger that separates men.

In contrast to hatred, love is forgiving because it realizes that vengeance belongs to God. The New Testament writers knew this concept well when they wrote to the first century Church (cf. Rom 12:17-19; Eph 4:31-32). In Romans 12:19, Paul quotes from Deuteronomy. Hatred seeks to get even or to be unforgiving.

#### A Backbiting Tongue

Only one verse in Proverbs speaks of a backbiting tongue as a cause of anger. This verse is found in Proverbs 25:23.

##### Proverbs 25:23

The north wind bringeth forth rain, so doth a backbiting tongue an angry countenance.

Solomon uses the geography of Palestine to explain this proverb. The north wind is the direction that the rains come from when they come. As Palestine is viewed on a map, the north winds come from Syria, because Syria is

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<sup>1</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, Proverbs, p. 217.



14:29; 15:18; 16:32; 17:9; 17:27; 19:11; 20:3; 21:23; 22:3; 24:19; 25:28; 29:11; 30:33. No single verse is all inclusive in exercising self-control in the life of the believer. There are certain things that a man must realize about self-control in order to be able to have victory over sinful anger. These suggestions are reflected in the verses that follow.

Proverbs 16:32

He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.

Proverbs 25:28

He whose spirit is without restraint is like a city that is broken down and without walls.

The first thing that a man must realize about self-control is that he can rule his spirit and the way to accomplish this is through restraint. The appraisal that God gives to the person who rules his spirit is interesting. Solomon says, in Proverbs 16:32, that the one who is slow to anger is better than the mighty. And he that rules his spirit is better than the one who takes a city. This is significant because, in the day that Solomon was writing, the military man was the most honored and the most prestigious in the eyes of the people. But, according to this proverb, God's estimation of the man who rules his spirit is higher than the one who accomplishes great military feats. The supreme motivation is that which seeks to please God. The individual does not have to be a slave to his

feelings and he can rule his spirit. An act of the will is involved. A wise man knows how to check his feelings.<sup>1</sup> God would not suggest a rule to a man if it were not possible to accomplish it.

Restraint is necessary because a man without restraint leaves himself defenseless to attacks. The picture that Solomon paints in Proverbs 25:28 is a city that has its walls broken down. There is no way of defending it. That is the way it is in the believer's life when he fails to exercise restraint. Many people that go for counseling claim that it is impossible to exercise restraint.<sup>2</sup> A person restrains anger when he wants to restrain it. Take, for example, the woman who is arguing and is angry with her children. She gets a telephone call. She goes to the phone and immediately her countenance changes from anger to a gentle spirit.<sup>3</sup> Why is it possible for her to restrain her spirit now when she could not do it before? She now restrains her anger because she does not want to be embarrassed. Her actions reflect that a person can restrain anger. The Christian needs to realize that when he is angry, he is taking matters into his own

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<sup>1</sup>Jay E. Adams, Competent to Counsel, p. 221.

<sup>2</sup>Jay E. Adams, The Christian Counselor's Manual, p. 352.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

hands rather than being under God's control. He must also realize that it is possible to restrain his anger and it is also possible for him to rule his spirit.

Proverbs 24:19

Fret not thyself because of evil doers; neither be thou envious at the wicked.

Psalm 37:8

Cease from anger and forsake wrath; Fret not thyself, it tendeth only to evil doing.

The next thing that a believer must realize is that certain circumstances are beyond his control. These things are not worth losing the fellowship that that person has with another and with God. The challenge that Solomon makes in Proverbs is essentially the same one David makes.

The two verbs translated "fret" are identical. They both come from the Hebrew word  $\text{פָּרַח}$  which means "to burn."<sup>1</sup> In the Hithpael stem, this verb means "to heat oneself with vexation."<sup>2</sup> That is what both writers are saying. Do not allow yourselves to be consumed with evil doers because the responsibility of their evil actions (as far as judging) lies with God. David, in Psalm 37:8, does add one thing that Solomon does not--that is the warning that this passion will only lead to evil. It is God's business to take vengeance (Rom 12:17-19). Do not burn inside against the evil doers. Leave the judgment of evil doers to the Lord.

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<sup>1</sup>BDB, p. 354.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

Proverbs 19:11

The discretion of a man deferreth his anger and it is to his glory to pass over a transgression.

Proverbs 10:12

Hatred stirreth up strife but love covereth all transgressions.

Both of the above verses speak of the responsibility of the individual believer to exercise self-control in his life. Proverbs 10:12 implies that it is very easy to respond to hurt by acting in a hateful and vengeful way. The end result of hatred is strife. But the individual's responsibility is not to allow the actions of others to injure the individual. The individual has the responsibility to overlook hurts which he encounters. Proverbs 19:11 explains the individual's responsibility to exercise self-control in his life. There are incidents in each person's life where he is confronted with the problem of anger, whether it is justified or not. It is the nature of anger to be more fierce than the occasion demands.<sup>1</sup> If anger is allowed to manifest itself, it ends up injuring another person and also injuring the person who is angry. Therefore, it is glory for the individual to pass over the anger and to cover the transgression by acting in love. There are some things which are not worth the price of anger.

Proverbs 30:32-33

32. If thou hast done foolishly in lifting up thyself, or if thou has thought evil, lay thy hand upon your mouth.

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<sup>1</sup>W. J. Deane, Proverbs, p. 373.

33. For the churning of milk bringeth forth butter and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood, so the forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife.

A believer must realize three things when examining the above verses. Number one, pride is a cause of sin and it must be dealt with immediately. The second thing is that a person must not force his opinion when he knows that it will only lead to trouble. Thirdly, the believer must realize that there will be wrong results in his life if anger persists.

It is impossible to force someone to change. Only God can do a work in that person's life. The forcing of wrath only indicates a weakness of character. The person who refuses to learn this lesson refuses to leave his expectations with God.

#### The Proper Use of the Mouth

James declared that the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity (Jas 3:6). Therefore, in order to exercise self-control, a man must learn to control his tongue. The following verses are pertinent to the subject: Proverbs 6:12; 10:19; 15:1,2,4,23; 16:21,22,24; 17:20. The verses that follow are most significant.

#### Proverbs 10:19

In the multitude of words, there wanteth not transgression; But he that refraineth his lips doeth wisely.

The mouth can easily be out of control rather than under control. This proverb teaches that it is possible for a person not to know when to quit talking or arguing. Too much talking leads a person to have a reputation for garrulity or glibness that is damaging.<sup>1</sup> McKane comments on this verse:

The man who talks and talks is an inveterate blunderer who lacks sensibility and who because he never has a feel for the situation, repeatedly injures susceptibilities, raises hackles and gives offense.<sup>2</sup>

Proverbs 15:4

A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness therein is a breaking of spirit.

This statement (in Prov 15:4) is not a direct solution to anger. But, when the principles of the proverb are applied, it will lead to a solution to the problem of anger. The tree of life is a figurative expression equivalent to a source of peace. The same expression is used in Proverbs 3:18 when Solomon is defining wisdom.<sup>3</sup> The same correlation can be supplied here in Proverbs 15:4. Solomon is using poetical imagery to allude to the benefits that will be received as a result of using the tongue in the proper way. The proper use of the tongue leads to a condition that brings peace. The improper use of the tongue leads to a breach in the spirit of the one who is

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<sup>1</sup>William McKane, Proverbs: A New Approach (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970), p. 416.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Toy, Proverbs, pp. 69-70.

affected by the tongue.<sup>1</sup> The tongue is a delicate instrument that must be used in the right way. It is easy to hurt an individual by your speech. The proper use of the tongue brings encouragement.

Proverbs 15:1

A soft answer turneth away wrath but grievous words stirreth up anger.

This verse teaches that it is possible to disarm anger by the proper use of the tongue. When a man enters into conversation with another man, there can always be control. The very first response of a person who is under attack is to retaliate. This verse teaches that the injured person should not wrap himself in a sullen silence, but this answer should be simple and conciliatory.<sup>2</sup> McKane gives a similar explanation:

It is not appeasement at any cost which is recommended, but a studied, conciliatory approach. It is this which causes heat to subside, i.e., which restores good temper and reasonable attitudes.<sup>3</sup>

The point of this proverb is that a word which causes vexation makes anger rise higher.<sup>4</sup> Adams says that the answer must be different in kind.<sup>5</sup> The person, then, must disarm anger by responding in the proper way.

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<sup>1</sup>Barnes, Proverbs-Ezekiel, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup>Deane, Proverbs, p. 290.

<sup>3</sup>McKane, Proverbs, p. 477.

<sup>4</sup>Deane, Proverbs, p. 290.

<sup>5</sup>Adams, Christian Counselor's Manual, p. 357.

### Synthesis of Causes and Solutions

This section has not been exhaustive, but some observations can be made.

All sinful anger has a cause. Many times it is possible to identify a cause directly. Sometimes, understanding the cause of anger helps the individual to deal with anger in a concrete way. Anger is many times symptomatic and is related to a direct cause. When this is the case, that sinful cause must be dealt with and this will relieve the symptom. The ultimate responsibility is to restrain one's emotions even when a cause cannot be determined.

There are two basic solutions to the sin of anger: the exercise of self-control (which is broad in its out-working), and the proper exercise of the tongue. There is no single answer to the problem of anger. The suppression of anger should be completed within the limitations of Scripture. The Scriptures are the final authority.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Trevor Craigen, "Anger Controlled," sound recording of sermon at Immanuel Baptist Church, Marion, Indiana, July 7, 1980, side II.

## CONCLUSION

Anger is a sin that has far reaching consequences in the life of the believer. The believer has a great responsibility in the light of the teaching of the word of God.

The teaching on human anger is clear. Anger can be a settled condition where the individual holds that anger inside, or it can be an explosive type of anger that is externalized. Both kinds of anger can have far reaching effects. The one type (internal) can lead to separation of affection. It can lead to guilt on the part of the believer and it can lead the believer to lose his equilibrium. The other type of anger (external) can also have the same effects as internal anger. But, it can also end up hurting and alienating people. It can have very devastating results on the person who is involved. Unlike righteous anger, it seeks its own benefit. That is where it is necessary for the believer to make a distinction between unrighteous anger and righteous anger.

The believer must realize that all anger is not wrong. Many times Satan gets a foothold in the life of the believer because the believer has not learned how to control this strong emotion. The Christian should always

hate that which is evil. In fact, the Christian should not think that something strange is happening when this emotion is experienced. This type of anger must never be confused with sinful anger. But it must be recognized that this type of anger, as well as sinful anger, must be controlled and channeled into the proper biblical action. Even righteous anger can turn into sinful anger, if it is allowed.

Sinful anger, though, destroys the equilibrium of the believer. A believer can be guilt-ridden because of this devastating sin. It can lead to resentment, depression, and loss of hope. But a believer must realize that it is possible to overcome this ugly sin. There are definite steps that must be taken for the believer to have victory. The first step is for the believer to identify the source or cause of the anger. If the source is a sinful one, then it is necessary to deal with the sin which caused the anger. The believer must channel his behavior into the limits which the Bible prescribes. The most frequent channel is the exercise of self-control or restraint. The believer must learn that there are circumstances in life which are out of the realm of his control. It is necessary in these situations to learn to give these problems over to the Lord in prayer, and to recognize that God is sovereign in his future judgment. When the problem is

given over to God, it must be realized that it is in the best hands. God is interested in every one of His children.

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