



## Christian Reflection

A Series in Faith and Ethics

### Focus Article:

📖 Getting Rid of  
Inappropriate Anger  
(*Anger*, pp. 30-36)

### Suggested Article:

📖 Zeal for God's House  
(*Anger*, pp. 60-62)

### What do you think?

Was this study guide useful for your personal or group study? Please send your suggestions to [Christian\\_Reflection@baylor.edu](mailto:Christian_Reflection@baylor.edu).

### Christian Reflection

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# Jesus and Anger: Does He Practice What He Preaches?

Although often sourced in his foreknowledge, the way Jesus handles his anger provides a model for Christians today. He knows how to be indignant, irate, and even furious, but without the slightest trace of derision, contempt, or abuse.

**Scripture Reading:** Matthew 5:21-26 and John 2:13-17

### Prayer

Christ, you command us to avoid unrighteous anger and insults toward those who offend us, and to love our enemies.

By the model of your life and death, and through the power of your resurrection, enable us to do what you command. Amen.

### Reflection

If Jesus gets angry (as he seems to do in the Gospels), what is the source of his anger and how does he express it? Can we square Jesus' feelings and actions with his strong denunciation of anger (Matthew 5:21-26)? With these questions in mind, Stephen Voorwinde examines the Gospel stories about Jesus' anger.

- ▶ *The cleansing the Jerusalem temple* often comes to mind when we think of Jesus getting angry. All four Gospels record the event (Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:11, 15-17; Luke 19:45-46; John 2:13-25), but the brief Synoptic accounts do not attribute any emotion to Jesus. According to Mark, a full day passes between Jesus looking around the temple (11:11) and his cleansing the temple (11:15-17). Does this explain why Matthew, Mark, and Luke do not mention Jesus' emotion? "Far from being an expression of uncontrolled rage, Jesus' actions in the temple are well thought through and carefully premeditated," Voorwinde notes. In John's detailed account, the disciples attribute Jesus' actions to zeal for his Father's house (John 2:17). A reference to Psalm 69:9 is adjusted slightly – from "Zeal for your house *consumes* me" or "*has consumed* me" in the psalm, to "Zeal for your house *will consume* me" (future tense). Why this change? Voorwinde suggests Jesus "has a zeal that will consume him utterly and totally. This quotation from the Psalter is a prediction of his death."
- ▶ *The sabbath healing of the man with the withered hand* is recorded in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:1-11), but only Mark reports Jesus' emotions (Mark 3:5). This event is the culmination of a series of controversies (2:1-3:6) that leave some Pharisees and Herodians plotting to kill Jesus. Voorwinde thinks Jesus' two emotions here, anger and distress, are related. "With perceptive insight into human nature, Benjamin Warfield has observed that 'the fundamental psychology of anger is curiously illustrated by this account; for anger always has pain as its root, and is a reaction of the soul against what gives it discomfort.' The hardness of the Pharisees' hearts deeply hurts Jesus and his anger rises in response to the cause of his pain."
- ▶ *Jesus is indignant at the disciples* who prevent children from being brought to him for a blessing (Mark 10:14). Once again, the other Synoptic Gospels do not mention Jesus' emotion (Matthew 19:13-15;



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Luke 18:15-17). Why is Jesus so angry? The disciples disobey Jesus' instruction to welcome children (Mark 9:37), and they prevent from coming to him the very kind of people to whom the kingdom of God belongs (Mark 10:14-15). It is not some "attractive, childlike qualities" that make the children so suitable for the kingdom, Voorwinde believes, but that they come to Jesus with nothing to offer at all. "Entry into the kingdom is by grace, and by grace alone," he notes. "Therefore what really incenses Jesus is not just the fact that the disciples have such a tenuous understanding of God's grace but that they manage to stand in its way." Jesus' anger communicates an important lesson to the disciples.

- ▶ A rare term for harsh rebuke (*embrimaomai*) is used of Jesus four times. He "sternly warns" people he has healed not to tell others about the miracles (Matthew 9:30; Mark 1:43). "He is angry with them not for what they *have done* but for what they *will do*. They are about to show flagrant disregard for his clear command...[and] make his mission dangerous and his ministry more difficult" (cf. Matthew 12:22-37 and Mark 1:45). "In his stern rebukes to the formerly blind and leprous men, Jesus foresees the looming storm. His anger is driven by his foreknowledge." Voorwinde finds a similar pattern in Jesus' anger at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:33, 38, where *embrimaomai* is translated "was deeply moved"). Jesus is not angry at Mary and her companions' weeping, but *because* of their weeping. "It is death that is the object of his wrath, and behind death him who has the power of death, and whom he has come into the world to destroy. Tears of sympathy may fill his eyes, but this is incidental. His soul is held by rage," Benjamin Warfield wrote of this passage. "Not in cold unconcern, but in flaming wrath against the foe, Jesus smites on our behalf." Voorwinde suggests, "In Lazarus's death Jesus foresees his own. This is no ordinary human emotion. Once again it is driven by his foreknowledge of what lies ahead." "Apart from his indignation with the disciples, there is an element of supernatural insight or divine foresight in every case" of Jesus' anger, Voorwinde concludes. "We catch glimpses of the wrath of God. There are also forebodings of his death."

### Study Questions

1. In each of the Gospel stories discussed above, does Jesus practice what he preaches in his strong condemnation of sinful anger in the Sermon on the Mount?
2. Discuss Voorwinde's view that "not only is Jesus' anger *expressed* differently than sinful human anger, it also is *generated* differently." How, then, is Jesus a model for our anger?
3. Consider how Scarcella depicts the intensity of Jesus' emotion in *Christ Driving the Money Lenders from the Temple*. How were images of this event used to teach members during the Catholic Reformation? What can we learn from them today?

Departing Hymn: "Answer When We Call, Lord Jesus"

# Jesus and Anger: Does He Practice What He Preaches?

## Lesson Plans

<i>Abridged Plan</i>	<i>Standard Plan</i>
Prayer	Prayer
Scripture Reading	Scripture Reading
Reflection (skim all)	Reflection (all sections)
Questions 1 and 2	Questions (selected)
Departing Hymn	Departing Hymn

## Teaching Goals

1. To evaluate the Gospel accounts of Jesus' anger in light of his strong condemnation of anger in the Sermon on the Mount.
2. To consider how Jesus' emotional responses in these accounts can be a model for our anger.
3. To discuss how Jesus' cleansing of the Jerusalem temple is depicted in art and used as a teaching subject during the Counter Reformation.

## Before the Group Meeting

Distribute copies of the study guide on pp. 6-7 and ask members to read the Bible passages in the guide. Distribute copies of *Anger (Christian Reflection)* and ask members to read the focus article and suggested article before the group meeting.

## Begin with a Conundrum

While any idea of an enraged, flushed-faced, tantrum-throwing Jesus is disturbing, so is an image of our Lord as incapable of feeling any anger in response to the foulest, most mean-spirited offense to God or others. This is why we must tread carefully in interpreting the Gospel accounts of Christ's teachings and actions.

On the one hand we have Christ's plain teaching: "I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment" (Matthew 5:22a). (A few translations still follow some manuscripts that say "angry without cause," but interpreters have known for centuries that qualification is an addition to soften the starkness of the warning.) On the other hand, in several stories Christ appears to feel anger and to express his anger. So, we have to ask, does Christ practice in these stories what he teaches in the Sermon on the Mount to his disciples? Can we interpret his teachings and actions together in a way that each illumines the other?

## Scripture Reading

Ask a group member to read Matthew 5:21-26 and John 2:13-17 from a modern translation.

## Prayer

Invite members to share their personal celebrations and concerns with the group. Provide time for each person to pray silently. Conclude by inviting members to read aloud together the prayer in the study guide.

## Reflection

Jesus is a model of true humanity. So, it makes sense to study to his emotional responses and actions, in addition to his teachings, for guidance in dealing with anger. Stephen Voorwinde surveys the occasions in which Jesus seems to be angry. Voorwinde adopts a high view of Jesus' divinity and foreknowledge, and takes into account Jesus' strong condemnation of anger in the Sermon on the Mount. These two interpretive moves make the passages especially problematic, but they also open interesting routes for understanding the sources of Jesus' anger and his reasons for expressing it so strongly.

## Study Questions

1. Form four small groups to review the stories in the four sections of the study guide and Stephen Voorwinde's article. Encourage members to ask: What causes Jesus to become angry? Does he act with derision or contempt toward anyone? Does he say or do too much, toward the wrong people, and so on? Does he harbor ill-feeling?

Voorwinde interprets Jesus' teaching that "everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment" (Matthew 5:22) in context. He writes, "In the same verse Jesus speaks of that brother being called 'Raca' and 'a fool,' both strong terms of abuse that carry overtones of insult, derision, and contempt. Clearly Jesus never expresses his anger in that way. His is never the kind of anger that, according to his teaching, would have been in violation of the sixth commandment not to murder. Although expressed strongly, and on occasion even violently, his wrath always falls within the category of sinless anger or righteous indignation. Jesus' behavior clearly exemplifies the later instruction by the apostle Paul: 'Be angry [an imperative!], but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger' (Ephesians 4:26). Jesus' anger is always well controlled, precisely targeted, and short-lived."

2. Sometimes Jesus' anger is *generated*, in part, by his insight into others' motivation and foreknowledge of their actions, Voorwinde suggests. Thus, he knows some religious leaders in Capernaum are plotting to destroy him, and he knows the man healed from leprosy and the men healed of blindness are going to disobey him, and thereby endanger himself, his disciples, and their mission. In some cases, the object of his anger is his adversary, Satan, who is plotting his death. The case in which Jesus is clearly angry at disciples has a more ordinary source in their obvious disobedience. On these readings, Jesus does not get angry without good reason, or at someone who has done nothing wrong, and so on.

Regarding Jesus' *expression* of anger, Voorwinde believes that his "anger is not an instant response to provocation, but a function of his impeccable holiness. Although often sourced in his foreknowledge, and at times best understood in the light of his coming Passion, the way Jesus handles his anger still provides a model for Christians today. He knows how to be indignant, irate, and even furious, but without the slightest trace of derision, contempt, or abuse. The high standards that he sets for others are the standards he lives up to himself."

3. In Scarcella's dramatic *Christ Driving the Money Lenders from the Temple*, the money lenders along with the sheep, birds, and cattle are shown scattering before Christ who is swinging a "whip of chords" above his head. One man reaches for a huge bag of coins spilled into the center foreground beside an upended table. "During the Catholic Reformation, this scene...became a symbol of the Church's need to cleanse itself both through the condemnation of heresy and through internal reform," Heidi Hornik reports. The focus was put on "Jesus' motive of 'zeal for [God's] house' rather than momentary anger." We might use this famous story in a similar way to motivate discerning reform of Christian churches and institutions.

## Departing Hymn

'Answer When We Call, Lord Jesus' is on pp. 53-55 of *Anger*. If you choose not to sing the hymn, you may read the text in unison or silently and meditatively as a prayer.