

Why Jesus Was Angry

by Dr. J. Vernon McGee



Published and distributed by
Thru the Bible Radio Network
P.O. Box 7100
Pasadena, California 91109-7100
(800) 65-BIBLE
www.ttb.org

Scripture references are from the *New King James Version Bible*.
(This message is also included in the hardback book, *Jesus: Centerpiece of Scripture*,
Copyright 1995 by Thru the Bible Radio.)

It is assumed today that the gentle Jesus, the lowly carpenter of Nazareth, the humble peasant of Palestine, the man of Galilee, never exhibited any feelings of anger. Many are convinced that He evidenced no emotion of animosity, that He displayed no resistance to evil, and that He demonstrated no antagonism toward anything. The popular conception of Jesus is that He was the personification of pacifism, the ideal of nonresistance, the incarnation of the world's definition of meekness. Men today think of Him as the first-century Gandhi. They say He was neutral on every question and broadminded on every subject. The image of Jesus that liberalism has presented is absolutely foreign to the Word of God; and many Americans, after feeding on this pious pabulum for several decades, think of a Jesus who never did exist.

The popular picture of Him is a monstrosity. Liberalism's Jesus was not actually a man. He had ice water for blood, a water pump for a heart, a gasoline motor for a nervous system, an IBM computer for a brain, and a tape recorder for a mouth. He was insensitive to evil, unmoved by sin. He was incapable of hating anything—anger was foreign to Him. *This* is not the Jesus recorded in Scripture.

Jesus Was Angry

A close and careful examination of the Gospels reveals our Lord as having an intense and passionate hatred of evil. He denounced sin and demonstrated against it courageously on every occasion. The fact of the matter is, if you read the Gospels from this viewpoint you might even go to the opposite extreme and present Him as the first “angry young man”!

At the beginning of His ministry He cleansed the temple. At the conclusion of His earthly ministry He cleansed the temple. Each time evildoers fled before Him. Why do you think they fled from Him?

During my first pastorate, in Nashville, Tennessee, I often played handball and tennis with a man who was a liberal preacher. He was a very fine man personally but a graduate of a liberal seminary in New York City. That was in the days of pacifism, and one day, after we had finished playing, he said, “I understand you preach that Jesus drove the money changers out of the temple and that He had a whip made of ropes that He would have used on those people. You don't really think that the gentle Jesus would ever have used that whip of ropes, do you?”

I said to him, “I have only one question to ask you, and it is this: Was He bluffing?” You think that over for a while. Do you think Jesus was bluffing when He made that whip? May I say to you, when those money changers began to scatter to the four winds, they scattered because there was before them a Man big enough and angry enough to drive them out. He hated evil. This is the picture the Scripture presents of Him—not the willy-nilly, mollycoddled, shilly-shally Mr. Milquetoast type of Jesus that a great many would have us to believe He was.

Those money changers saw a man enraged and angry with sin. That hardened crowd—who knew they were breaking the Mosaic Law, who knew they were being irreverent, who knew they were defying God—do not think they would have fled had they not been afraid of the Man who was driving them out!

Then one day He stood and pronounced a woe upon the cities around the Sea of Galilee. “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!” (Luke 10:13). He was deeply moved.

He stood over Jerusalem to pronounce judgment upon that city and said concerning it, “See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’” (Matthew 23:38, 39). And as He said it,

He *wept* over Jerusalem because He alone knew the judgment that was to fall upon the city in A.D. 70.

He pronounced woes against the scribes and Pharisees in the harshest denunciation that you will find in the Scripture (or out of the Scripture, for that matter), and it still scorches that page of the Word of God. Let us look at just one such statement as He was speaking to scribes and Pharisees: “*Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?*” (Matthew 23:33, italics added). You cannot have language any stronger than that! And I cannot imagine the Jesus who used that language being unmoved when He spoke to the crowd there that day.

I want to lift out one isolated instance in His ministry in which He exhibited anger. Of all things, it was on the Sabbath day—a day on which most people not only put on a change of clothing but also put on a change of attitude as they come to church. They may not be sweet on other days, but they are generally sweet at church. However, our Lord wasn’t sweet at church. He became angry. The record says that He was angry.

Will you listen to Mark as he records this incident?

And He entered the synagogue again, and a man was there who had a withered hand. So they watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. (Mark 3:1, 2)

I cannot prove this, but I think these verses would indicate that the man was “planted” there by the Pharisees and the scribes. He was placed there, but not because they wanted him healed; they didn’t care what happened to that man. They were not even concerned about him. They placed him there because they wanted to trap the Lord Jesus. They were after Him.

Our Lord came and saw the situation.

And He said to the man who had the withered hand, “Step forward.” (Mark 3:3)

Although the man with the withered hand had been placed there as a trap, that did not make any difference to our Lord. He was going to do something for him. But before He did:

Then He said to them, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they kept silent. (Mark 3:4)

Candidly, they did not care. They didn’t care whether that man was healed or not. They were concerned about a religious ritual—that was all. They were as hard as anyone could possibly be; they had no concern whatever for that man. “They kept silent.” They didn’t dare open their mouths.

And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other. (Mark 3:5)

Jesus was angry. He was angry with the hard hearts of the religious rulers. That was the thing that made Him angry on the Sabbath day when He went into the synagogue.

May I say this: *If Jesus had not been angry, He would not have been God.*

God Was Angry

You may say, “Oh, you surely don’t believe His anger proved that He was God!” I certainly do—because the God who is presented in the Word of God, whether you like it or not, is a God who exhibits wrath and anger against sin. He has always done so.

Back in the Old Testament again and again He exhibited anger against sin. There are over one hundred statements in the Old Testament that say that God was angry. Oh, I know that it is not popular today to say that God ever becomes angry, but God is angry with sin.

We have looked at one incident of anger in the life of our Lord. Now let us turn back to the Old Testament and pick out one isolated instance there.

From 1 Kings 11:9, I lift out this statement, “So the LORD became angry with Solomon.” Why in the world was God angry with Solomon? Well, let’s read the whole passage.

So the LORD became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the LORD God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice.

Solomon had a unique privilege. This man dedicated the temple, and when he did so, the glory of the Lord filled that temple. Not many men ever had that privilege. But Solomon’s heart was turned away from the Lord because he married many foreign women who worshiped false gods. There are people today who say, “Why did God permit Solomon to have so many wives?” God *didn’t* permit it. God was angry with Solomon. Someone will say, “But God allowed it, didn’t He?” Yes, because God will not interfere with your free will as a believer. If you go into sin, He will let you. He let Solomon because He will not interfere with a man’s free will. But may I say again, *God was angry with Solomon* for allowing his idolatrous wives to turn him away from Him.

“Well, God didn’t do anything about it.”

Yes, He did. Just as the death of Christ rent in two the veil in the temple, so God reached to the top of the kingdom, and right down through that kingdom He made a rent—dividing the kingdom because of Solomon. *God was angry with Solomon.*

I challenge anyone to show me in the Word of God any instance in which God has ever compromised with evil or with sin. He hates it. He says He hates it. The record states that when Solomon, one of His own, went into sin, God was angry with him. God did not approve of what this man did. As far as I am concerned, I would not want to have been in Solomon’s shoes.

God, in the Old Testament, was angry with sin; and when the Lord Jesus Christ, God incarnate, walked this earth in human flesh, *He* was angry with sin. On every occasion He revealed His antagonism toward it.

Christians Are to Be Angry

If you think the things we have been saying are strange, this may really startle you. *The Christian is commanded to be angry!*

Somebody will say, “Wait a minute now, preacher. You’ve gone too far! I happen to know that anger is a sin. The Bible says anger is a sin. Paul, in Ephesians 4:31, says, ‘Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.’ And now you say that God commands us to be angry?”

Yes. God commands us to be angry.

Now, there is an anger that is a sin. When it is this old flesh of ours that flares up because of some little slight to our ego, that is sin. But, my friend, anger is not always a sin for a believer, for he is commanded to be angry. Christ commands the believer to be angry.

Paul, writing to the Ephesians in this same chapter, says, “Be angry, and do not sin” (Ephesians 4:26). The believer is commanded to be angry. Will you notice this very carefully: Christian character is evidenced by that which makes one angry.

This tremendous thing was said of Gaston de Foix: “He loved what ought to be loved, and he hated what ought to be hated, and he was never destitute of conscience on anything.” How wonderful to be that kind of man—to love what should be loved and to hate what should be hated and to have a conscience on everything.

The trouble with believers today is that we have taken so many spiritual tranquilizers that we exhibit no resentment against evil at all. We want to be broad-minded; and believe me, we are!

Dr. Thomas Arnold, the man who made Rugby one of the greatest schools the world has ever seen, said this: “I was never sure of a boy who only loved the good. I was not sure of him until he began to hate the evil.”

There are a lot of folk today who are syrupy. They exhibit and exude saccharine sweetness. They just *love* the good, but it is another thing to hate the evil. What is *your* attitude, really?

“To be incapable of moral indignation against wrong is to lack real love for the right,” according to Dr. Augustus H. Strong. And Xenophon was intending to compliment his enemy, Cyrus the Younger, when he said concerning him that he did more good for his friends and more harm to his enemies than any man who had ever lived up to that time. Cyrus had feelings of right and wrong. He loved the good, but when he loved the good, he hated the evil.

Dr. William G. T. Shedd says, “Human character is worthless in proportion as abhorrence of sin is lacking in it.”

Charles II was called the “merry monarch,” and the record of his reign is a most sordid story. There came a day when the merriment ended and a terrified Charles faced death unprepared. But of his life it was said, “He felt no gratitude for benefits and no resentment for wrong. He did not love anyone and he did not hate anyone. He was indifferent to right and wrong, and the only feeling that he had for anyone and everyone was contempt.”

I would hate to be that kind of person, wouldn't you? I would not care to be one who could move through life today and have no feeling about anything around me—not loving the good and not hating the evil. And yet there are many believers today who think it is Christian conduct to exhibit no feeling at all about anything.

Our Lord, when He moved through this earth, exhibited feeling that was intense—a passion against evil.

Paul wrote a letter to the Corinthians in which he rebuked them severely. “You are over there arguing about whether Paul or Apollos or Simon Peter is the greatest preacher, and many of you like to say, ‘I follow this one,’ or, ‘I follow that one.’ Baby talk! You are babies, carnal Christians, arguing about that sort of thing. You have no feeling about evil. It is in your midst, and you won't do a thing about it!” And Paul called it by name. He marked it out, and then he said, “If you don't do something about it, I will when I come!”

The church in Corinth was stung to the very quick. It went to its knees in prayer, and its conscience became sharpened again. The Corinthians said to the man who had done wrong, “You are wrong.” They were angry.

And then Paul wrote a second letter to them in which he said this:

For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter. (2 Corinthians 7:11)

Paul says, "What indignation!" He loved it!

William Lecky, in his book *Democracy and Liberty*, said this: "There is one thing worse than corruption, and that is acquiescence in corruption."

Herbert Spencer said that "good nature, with Americans, has become a crime and that because of our good nature, we feel as much goodwill for evil as for good." How accurate he was!

What Angers You?

What makes you angry today? If it is some little personal resentment or some little personal slight, then it is sin. But can you shut your eyes to evil? Can you see that which is wrong, even in your church, and say nothing? Can you? Can you open your ears to gossip and listen to it and then walk away unmoved and do nothing about it? God have mercy on you if you can! That is not Christian.

"What indignation!" Paul said, "I want to congratulate you, that you didn't shut your eyes to evil in the church." Does the indifference, the coldness, and the apostasy of this hour leave you unmoved? Are you, in the midst of an apostate church, like a limp dishrag, flopping back and forth, agreeing with every crowd and going with every group? May I say to you, we need spiritual backbone that will stand up and say to a man, "You are wrong, and I am opposed to what is wrong."

A certain monk took pleasure in antagonizing Martin Luther. The great reformer whipped him down intellectually, for Luther was a brilliant man. But the monk in a very stubborn way kept baiting him. Luther once said to him, "I will break in pieces your heart of brass and pulverize your iron brains." Martin Luther said that! Do you know why? Because the man would not see the gospel of the grace of God, that men are justified by faith. It made Martin Luther angry.

The Wrath of the Lamb

Let us come back now to the Lord Jesus. We looked at incidents in His earthly ministry. We went back to the Old Testament and saw that God was angry in the past. I want us to move into the future now and take one final look at Him. Will you listen to this language?

And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

(Revelation 6:15-17)

"Do you mean to tell me a little *lamb* is angry?"

Yes.

"Do you mean to tell me men are going to run and hide from a lamb?"

Yes.

“Well, they surely must be cowards to run from a little lamb! Whoever heard of a little lamb hurting anybody? Such a gentle little thing!”

The greatest deception the world will have, until the Antichrist gets here, is the fabrication concerning Jesus Christ—that He would not swat a fly, that He would not crush a grape, that He is sort of a first-century Mr. Milquetoast.

“Wasn’t He a lamb?”

Yes. John marked Him out as a lamb.

“He was a lamb in His character?”

Yes. Meekness, humility, and gentleness characterized Him, but not the kind of meekness you have in mind. It was not weakness—it was strength.

If you will read the Gospels very carefully, you will find that only twice in His adult lifetime did He ever obey any man or follow any human suggestion. Did you ever notice that? He positively did not go along with the crowd. His disciples said, “Send the multitude away, that they may go into the village and buy bread.” Our Lord said, “You feed them.” (See Luke 9:12, 13.) He is following nobody’s suggestion.

A man came and said, “My little girl—she’s dying! Oh, if You’ll just come and heal her.” Our Lord said, “Not now. There is a sick woman here. I want to heal her first, and it will be a little while before I get to your house.” The servants came and said to the anxious father, “Your little girl is dead. You can leave Jesus alone now.” Our Lord said, “I am coming, but not to heal the sick, as you thought I would. I am coming to raise the dead.” He just simply did not follow men’s directions.

Simon Peter said, “Don’t go to Jerusalem and die on the cross!” Our Lord said, “I am going to Jerusalem to die on the cross, regardless of what you say.”

They said to Him, when He was hanging on the cross, “Come down from the cross.” Of course He would not, because He was paying the penalty for the sins of the world.

When He was a boy of twelve, it is said:

Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. (Luke 2:51)

As an adult He was obedient to His Heavenly Father but did not take orders from man, until they came and arrested Him. From that moment on, He was the Lamb led to the slaughter, and He became “obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). The reason He hung there obediently, yielding Himself to the hatred of men, was because He was dying for your sin and mine. That was the only reason He was being obedient.

He is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). And because He died for the sin of the world, a great many people say, “Well—a little lamb—I’m not afraid of Him!” My friend, you do well to be afraid of Him. And every believer does well to fear the Lord Jesus.

“Oh, don’t say that! He is so gentle and so loving—I can go to Him.” Yes, you can! But, my beloved, *He hates your sin*. He hates it! He is angry with your sin.

For we know Him who said, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. And again, “The LORD will judge His people.” It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10:30, 31)

The writer to the Hebrews says, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” Whom do you think he is talking about—the unsaved? No. “The Lord shall judge *His own people*.” The greatest deception held by Christians today is that they can go on being indifferent, living in sin, and saying, “I am going to get by with it.” This is the reason we have so many psychosomatic disorders among believers. They are trying to “get by with it.”

The further I go in my ministry and the more I watch God’s people, the more convinced I am that He is moving today. He is reaching in here and reaching in there, judging His own when they will not deal with the sin in their lives. My friend, we *must* recognize that “it is a *fearful* thing to fall into the hands of the living God!” He disciplines His own. Oh, He redeemed you. He died for you, and He loves you. But He hates your sin.

If God were to compromise with sin in my life, I should lose my respect for Him. But I have not lost and never will lose my respect for Him because I have learned that when McGee tries to explain it away, to excuse his sin somehow, *God does not*. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

If for the believer it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, what about the unsaved? God hates sin; the Lord Jesus is angry with sin. And there is only one place to hide from the wrath of God, the wrath of the Lamb—only one place to hide.

After World War II a book came out bearing the title *No Place to Hide*, with the alarming message that there is no place to hide from an atomic bomb. It is a frightful and awful thing to find that we live in a world where there actually is no place to hide, no refuge to which one can flee.

But for the sinner there *is* a place to hide, and that is in the cleft of the Rock—that Rock, Christ Jesus, who was rent for us. There the storm of the wrath of God will pass over. But that is the only place. Do not deceive yourself with the idea that, because He is characterized as a lamb, He is not going to punish sin. He *is* going to punish sin. He *does* punish sin. The wrath of the Lamb is a reality.

However, that same Lamb was offered as a sacrifice on the Cross for you and for me. He took in His body, there on the Cross, all the wrath and judgment of a holy God against sin in order that you and I might be saved. He is the only place of safety today, and He invites you to accept the merit of His sacrifice and be safe. To accept His invitation is to find the one hiding place for a sin-troubled heart. To reject Him is to choose the wrath of the Lamb.