

'SLAPGATE'

(Is Violent Anger Ever Justified?)

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Let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God (James 1: 19-20).

I saw it. You saw it. The world saw it ... *that* slap which reverberated around the world. Oscar-winning actor **Will Smith** stormed onto the stage to let fly with a stinging physical slap to the face of an unsuspecting **Chris Rock**, before returning to his seat to continue verbally assaulting the comedian.



Will Smith striking **Chris Rock** at the 2022 Academy Awards will go down as one of the most shocking moments in Oscars history.

That violent slap which stung **Rock** for a moment has since left **Smith** with a smarting legacy of infamy now dubbed "**Slapgate**". A split-second slap delivered in violent anger has changed his life forever! Volumes of social and mainstream media digital ink have been expended since. Few commended him for standing up for his wife. The overwhelming majority criticised **Will Smith's** uncontrolled eruption.

So, was **Smith's** anger at an off-colour joke at his wife's expense justified? The Academy even in 'woke' Hollywood thinks not and, at the time of writing, **Will Smith's** biggest fear is being "totally cancelled" and not being able to find work. He has been banned from attending the Oscars for the next ten years, but apparently is still eligible for future awards. It seems that he will be forever remembered, not for his many fine acting performances, but for his anger and what many think were the crocodile tears that followed an apology that wasn't an apology to **Mr. Rock**.

On the other hand, as a matter of interest, the next time **Chris Rock** walked onto a stage for a performance, the packed house arose spontaneously giving him a standing ovation for 3 whole minutes, and then he brought the house down with his opening question, "**Did y'all have a good weekend?**"!

However, before any of us throws the proverbial first stone of condemnation, let's be honest with ourselves: Who amongst us can truly say that we have not been guilty of angry words and actions that we later deeply regretted — words and/or actions we wish we could reel back in, but can't. Damage done, no matter how remorseful, or however justified we truly may be.

A life's reputation, not to mention a Christian witness, can be blown to smithereens by a momentary angry outburst. As our opening text asserts, **the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God**. One destructive moment, one burst of the tongue, one uncontrolled slap can redefine the legacy of a life's hard work, sacrifice, courage and service for all time.

ANGER EXPRESSED THE RIGHT WAY IS OKAY!

Depending on how and why it's expressed anger can be positive or negative, a force for good or evil. Our text intimates that **slow anger** can be justified, and indeed, may even be *necessary*.

THE EXEMPLARY ANGER OF JESUS

There are four recorded instances in the life of Jesus when he became angry. Perhaps the best known time was when he was 30 years old and "cleansed the Temple". It appears he did this twice, once at the very beginning of his public ministry, and once at the very end.

The cleansing of the Temple is a classic example of the Son of God being **slow to anger**. Has it ever occurred to you that before the first Temple-cleansing, Jesus may have already visited the Temple every Passover celebration since his famous first visit when he was twelve?

If so, I find it hard not to imagine that Jesus' pure and holy heart had not been annually stirred to the very depths of his being every time he entered the Temple precincts all those previous years. Remember how, even at 12 years of age, the lad Jesus had said, **"I must be in my Father's house"?** His Father's affairs were his own — and passionately so.

Any traveller to the Temple wanting to purchase an animal for sacrifice had to first exchange his foreign currency before buying the animal for an offering to God. You see, the only "clean money" was Jewish money, so the opportunity for profiteering was hard to resist. And it's a known fact that the wealthy Sanhedrin class took the cream off the top of the stalls, so were complicit in the wheeling and dealing.

For years, almost two decades after that first memorable visit Jesus must have been grieved every time he saw his Father's house being treated like a commercial market. The merchants and money-changers haggling in his **Father's house** of prayer must have irritated him to the core.

Perhaps another point rankling Jesus was that all of this would have been happening in the **Court of the Gentiles** — the only place where non-Jews were allowed to enter to pray. But the Jews had turned this court into a smelly cacophony which was no atmosphere conducive for worship. It would have been the **Court of the Gentiles** for example, where the **eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians had come to worship** and to pray (**Acts 8: 27**).

So, year after year, seeing and hearing all this racketeering must have stoked Jesus' ire. Yet, he bided his time, bit his tongue as it were, and **waited years** before taking action. No doubt he would have mulled it all over and over, carefully weighing it all up.

But now finally, the time comes for Jesus to express his indignation. He enters the Temple and grabs some pieces of rope (probably baggage cords or ties used to tether animals). And yet, *even after all this time, Jesus takes a few extra minutes to gather his thoughts. He plaits the cords together into a rope*. He models what **slow anger** looks like. This is no knee-jerk anger. It's

controlled, slow, thoughtful indignation, woven with years in the making and topped off with a few extra minutes for the plaiting.

Using that whip Jesus drives out the animals, both sheep and cattle from the Temple precinct. He overturns the money-changers' tables, scattering the coins, and says **to those who sold doves, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"** (John 2: 16).

Notice the detail here. Did you observe his restraint? Whilst he drove the sheep and cattle away, ***he did not release the doves!*** The animals — the sheep, goats and cattle — could be rounded up by their owners. The scattered money could be collected. But if he had released the doves they would have flown away, and their owners would have suffered financial loss! Jesus' anger was controlled anger, **slow anger**. He was angry without sinning (Eph. 4:26). Here is our model if ever we are to express anger.

King Solomon advises us that **a gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger**. He went on to explain that, **the mouth of fools pours forth foolishness (Prov. 15: 1)**. Shooting a quick blast from the hip via the lip often communicates disrespect toward the one it's directed towards and exacerbates the situation. But a wise person is **quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger ... (James 1: 19-20)**.

So, when we find the inner thermostat rising (someone has cut us off in the traffic, jumped the queue, taken our car park, spoken a rude word, or whatever thing annoys and peeves us) we must train ourselves to swallow the first words simmering up for expression. It's sometimes wise to walk away.

Sometimes it's a helpful idea to sit down and write a letter to the one you are boiling over if the grievance is perceived as serious. Put it all down *in writing*. This is **slow anger**. But even then, don't send it, or make that visit or phone call — at least not straight away. Revisit the letter or the email the next day. Edit it again and again if necessary. But even then you may find it wise not to send it. In other words, metaphorically speaking, **go plait a rope** before tipping any tables over and breaking more than the furniture! Walking away is often the best thing to do.

This is exactly where **Cain** got into big trouble. He became jealous when God accepted his brother **Abel's** sacrifice but rejected his own grain offering. He imagined God was playing favourites and treating him unfairly. But instead of listening to God's advice and dealing with his own seething heart, **Cain** cradled unjustified anger until he slew his own brother. If only he had listened to God's advice on how to deal with his anger. God had said to **Cain**, **"Why are you angry? ... do well (otherwise) Sin is crouching at the door ... (Genesis 4: 6-7)**. Think this through, **Cain**. Don't let your rage run away into something you will regret forever, mate! Unprocessed anger festers and the contagion spreads.

As someone once said, God gave us two ears and one mouth, and so we should do twice as much listening as speaking, especially when we feel the anger rising. Listen. Listen. Try to understand the other's viewpoint first. Many times you will discover they intended no disrespect. They are unaware of how they came across. This way your anger will be slow and if justified, measured. Walk away. Process your anger. **Plait another rope!**

APPROPRIATE ANGER REFLECTS GOD'S CHARACTER

Where does this powerful emotion for anger come from? Many sociologists teach that human anger reflects our primary instincts inherited from our evolutionary past. But the Bible teaches that even our Creator God Himself gets angry. It's called God's wrath.

Since we are created in God's image, it's logical to see that appropriately expressed anger can be right and proper, indeed godly, God-like. So, believe it or not, *appropriate anger is really a good gift from God*. Yes, you read that right!

In his excellent book *The Other Side of Love*, Gary Chapman notes that, while anger is not an essential part of God's nature, it flows "from two aspects of God's divine nature: God's holiness and God's love." ⁽¹⁾

So just what is it that gets God angry? As Chapman explains; It is God's concern for justice and righteousness (both of which grow out of His holiness and love) that stimulates God's anger. Thus when God sees evil, God experiences anger. Anger is His logical response to injustice or unrighteousness. ⁽²⁾

So, whenever we encounter injustice, man's inhumanity to man — the destructive results of sin — it stands to reason that we will, we *should* become angry, and so prove that we are his children! This is one of the indicators that we truly are made in the likeness of our Creator God, reflecting His character. Putting that the other way round, *failure to get angry over sin in our own lives or elsewhere, is an indicator of how far we are from God*.

But remember that righteous anger is proof that we are walking with our heavenly Father. He is angry with those who abuse others taking advantage of their poor economic circumstances. He is angry with the murder of innocents in abortion. He is angry with child molesters. He is angry with cheats, swindlers, those who defraud. He is angry with bosses who don't give their workers their due wages and entitlements. He is angry with police officers who beat protestors without provocation. He is angry with gossipers who assassinate the character of others by **bearing false witness**. He is angry with self-serving politicians and bureaucrats who do not serve the interests of the public. And if you and I are like our Father, these things, and similar, will make us angry to pray for and to work towards proper justice, redress and fairness.

I mentioned earlier that there are four recorded instances when Jesus is said to have become angry. The two Temple-cleansings (**John 2: 13-25; Matt. 21: 12-17**), the time when his own disciples tried to "protect" Jesus from the little children coming to him (**Mk. 10: 13-14**), and the Sabbath when the religious leaders stood between Jesus and a man with a paralysed hand (**Mk. 3: 5**).

It's informative to see the different Greek words used for Jesus' anger. They are *orgē / ὀργή*, the strongest of the words reserved for the self-righteous religionists who opposed Christ for his intention to heal a man on the Sabbath — and Jesus **looked around at them with anger**. This word

¹ As quoted in *6 Rules Every Man Must Break [And Every Woman Must Know]* by Bill Perkins, Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, 2007, Ill. pp 86

² *Ibid* p87

is usually used for God's wrath upon the wicked. Yet even so, in the same breath the Scripture records that Jesus felt **grieved** for them; **When he had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts ... (Mk. 3: 5)**. It was anger mixed with sadness! Anger and compassion make a perfect mix!

To be perfectly honest, at this point I feel ashamed. I ask myself, when I have been wronged and been mad at somebody have I, *at the same time*, felt compassion and sadness for them?

Then there is *aganakteō / ἀγανακτέω*, translated as **greatly displeased** or **indignant (Mark 10: 14)**. This describes Jesus' disgust and irritation at the pathetic attitude of his followers who tried to stop little children sitting on Jesus' lap for a blessing.

Finally, the word used of the Temple-cleansings is the word equivalent to our word for **zeal, ζήλος /zēlos**, expressing a fervent and passionate emotion. Because of Jesus' total devotion to his Father's honour Jesus cleansed the Temple from the purest motivation of love for God.

LEAVE ROOM FOR GOD'S VENGEANCE

This is where faith comes in. Our heavenly Father has promised His own that He will vindicate them in good time. This is the way Jesus himself lived and operated all his life. We read that **when he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the One Who judges justly (I Peter. 2: 23)**.

Jesus believed his Father God would vindicate him. Sure, as the old Gospel song so aptly reminds us, **He could have called ten thousand angels, to destroy the world, and set him free ... but he died to set us free!** Jesus died entrusting himself to His Father's faithful promises. By raising Jesus up from the dead God was declaring, for the world to see, that Jesus really is the Son of God.

Of course, when wronged, we want God to step in straight away. We want immediate redress. We want our own resurrection in three days too. Waiting is hard. Our anger burns and calls for prompt expression of justice, and ...

Sometimes the LORD God does intervene and we get redress almost immediately.

Sometimes **Haman** does swing in this life from the gallows he has himself made for others!

Sometimes a wicked king **Adoni-bezek** who punished 70 kings by cutting off their thumbs and big toes gets his own thumbs and big toes cut off in this life. That cruel king was made to crawl under the table to collect scraps of food all the while admitting, **"As I have done, so God has repaid me"** (**Judges 1: 7**).

Sometimes a **David** waits for years for the hand of God to vindicate him from an unjust and violent **King Saul**.

Sometimes it even appears that gross crime and injustice will stay forever hidden and win the day. But, as I say, this is where faith comes in; either there is a good and righteous God on the Throne of the cosmos who will make everything right in the end, or there is not. But God has given us the guarantee of final and universal justice because He has raised Jesus from the dead and appointed a Day for him to judge the world in righteousness (**Acts 17:30**).

Before the 18th Century, people generally understood that morality was important because the world is heading towards an end game where God's eternal judgment and rewards await. The whole point of ethics was to prepare men to pass from this present world to our true end. The

Bible word for this truth is *telos* ... meaning that ultimately there is an end goal, a final fulfilment, a just purpose.

In the once Christian West, there was a general consciousness that the world and our lives are going somewhere ... men were going to meet God and all things would be put to rights. But this prevailing Bible worldview changed from the 18th Century. So-called Enlightenment thinkers became committed to the belief that human reason and science, apart from ancient revelation, are sufficient to give us the knowledge we need to live in this world.

So, the basis was laid to stop thinking about what human beings were made for. That became the wrong question. We were told there is no design, no purpose, no end, no *telos*. Rather than being told we humans were made by God and for God and to be His accountable stewards in this world, we were told we were no different than the fish or tadpoles.

Thus, our society — supposedly based on reason and natural science alone — has rejected any notion of a Divine purpose and answerability for human beings. Now think about that: If there is no final Judgment Day then it makes absolutely no difference whether you live a kind and righteous life or whether you live a life of selfishness and cruelty and oppression of others — just go around slapping anybody who offends! — because at the end of the day there is no such thing as objective, universal justice where actions and deeds are accountable.

So, we are told, just come to grips with the fact you live in an amoral Universe and stop looking for justice. Resign yourself to the fact that evil & injustice & tyranny are never going to be redressed. If there is no Judgment Day then we can be the judges. We may take up our weapons and we may seek revenge and take matters into our own hands — slap anybody we disagree with in the face!

From a Christian perspective, the doctrine of the Judgment Day is not a gloomy prospect. If I know that God has promised to finally mete justice out according to His fair and holy character, according to all the motives and facts of the case that only He could possibly know, then I can live with both hope and grace in the meantime. If I know justice will finally and fully be administered, then I don't have to live with vengeance on my mind and unforgiveness in my heart. God has said, **Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, saith the LORD**. Oh sure, I may still legitimately cry out to God **day and night** for Him to hurry up about it, but I know He has promised to ultimately fix it (**Rev. 6:10**).

So, our understanding of God and His promise to finally administer justice through His righteous anger (wrath) is a great comfort and hope for every Bible-believer. My case, my vindication is always ultimately in God's hands. Good enough for Jesus. Good enough for me!

Do you believe in the Judgment Day when every evil and rotten injustice is going to be redressed?

Do you believe He will exercise vengeance mixed with compassion on all sin not repented of?

Do you believe in the new heavens and the new earth **in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 3: 13)**?

Do you believe you are headed for that renewed society of endless joy and uninterrupted fellowship?

Do you believe life is going to swallow up death and decay and the bad?

OFFER UP TO GOD YOUR SACRIFICE OF HOLY ANGER!

The Psalmist said, **Be angry , and do not sin** and then went on to tell us how ... **Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the LORD (Ps. 4: 4-5)**. Now that's rather revolutionary —

offer up to God your holy anger as a sacrifice acceptable to God! Which is to say, let your anger be for the right reasons. Let your anger be a positive force for justice, and God will accept it.

The apostle quoted the Psalmist's verse in **Ephesians 4: 26-27; Be angry, and do not sin**, adding his commentary to, **not let the sun do down on your anger and do not make room for the devil**.

Be angry! Yes, that's a command. But **do not sin**. That's also a command. Let your anger against sin direct you into positive action for change. Let your anger be mixed with compassion. Let your anger make a positive difference for the better in the world and the blessing of others. Quite the challenge, hey?

Uncontrolled rage, quick anger only gives the Devil room to ruin your life — just ask **Will Smith!**

Yes. Jesus was angry and did not sin — his **slow anger** glorified his heavenly Father for it was in response to injustice and abuse. His anger was contemplated and deliberate, wise and measured, designed to lead others nearer to God!

Jesus would never be guilty of a **Slapgate!** Nor must we be, if we would be his followers.