

Where does anger fit in?

When anger and love are not so far apart

So God himself at one point “burned” with anger, did he? Yes he did, **Numbers 25:3**. And God wants to share his divine nature with us? Yes again, **2 Peter 1:4**. So does that mean God is now sharing his anger with us, as well? But why? What useful purpose could anger possibly serve in the life of a Christian?

But what good purpose did anger *ever* serve in our lives? Before we were Christians anger maybe helped in letting off steam to feel better or for stopping a foolish child in his tracks, but beyond that it was mostly just reacting to uncomfortable things happening. As to why God was angry, or why he included anger in our make-up, well it never crossed my mind.

But then we became Christians, and suddenly all kinds of scriptures came leaping out at us about God’s anger - like **Genesis 6:7** when God wanted to wipe out humanity, or **Exodus 32:10** when he threatened to kill every Israelite, or **Numbers 25:9** when he actually did kill 24,000 Israelites in a plague.

It wasn’t just the Old Testament, either. Many times Jesus got angry too, threatening people with outer darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth and even being cut in pieces. Paul got so angry with people twisting the gospel he wished them a quick trip to hell, **Galatians 1:7-9**. So did Peter in **2 Peter 2:17**. So did Jude in **Jude 13**. All these men burst past the boiling point in their anger, and none were told off by God for it, either.

So anger is part of God’s nature, and part of a Christian’s too. But why?

Because anger is a powerful proof of love. It’s a real eye-opener. It has great shock value, especially for someone who doesn’t realize how loved he is. Look at why God gets angry, for instance. We discover, amazingly, that God gets angry because he’s jealous. And why is he jealous? Because only he can meet our needs perfectly, and if he can’t do that for us because we’re looking to some other useless source to meet our needs, it hurts God so much it bursts out in anger. It really brings him to a boil.

Because he hates us? No, it’s powerful proof he loves us. When God says of Israel that “**For 40 years I was angry with that generation,**” **Psalm 95:10**, he wasn’t angry because he hated them, he was angry because they didn’t trust him.

But as a parent I understand that about God. When my children didn’t trust me after 10 or 15 years of proving I cared for them, it tore me to pieces. And how did it spill out

in me? In anger. I couldn't help it. But nor, it seems, could God. When *his* children, Israel, didn't trust him, it tore him to pieces too. Why on earth wouldn't his silly children trust him? But no, they wanted other gods to trust in, empty-headed, useless, powerless gods that couldn't offer them anything close to what he, God, had to offer. And how did God react to that? "I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'"

That's like us saying to our children, "I never want to see you in this house ever again," because if they're so enamoured with the gods of the culture and trusting in the advice and company of their empty-headed friends, then why don't they jolly well go and live with their silly friends instead, then? If there's no trust, there's no relationship, and if there's no relationship then what's the point of living under the same roof together?

And God felt like that too? Yes, he did, because love and anger flow through the same veins. Ask any husband who adores his wife how he feels when his wife confides in other men. Or how a wife feels when her husband looks to other women for consolation and companionship. They feel a jealous rage.

But their anger isn't hate, it's the anguished cry of a heavy heart, made that way by love. And isn't that exactly what God's anger tells us about him? What we hear is his rage, but what we're really seeing is his love.

It's also through his anger, then, that we come to realize how much God loves us, just like a child who sees his parents utterly distraught at his behaviour and it suddenly dawns on him why. They're distraught because they love him. What he hears is their rage but what he's really seeing is their love. And when a husband or wife is stirred to jealous rage, what they hear from each other is anger but what they're really seeing is love.

I got a glimpse of that myself just now, because it was at this point in writing I noticed one of our clocks was fast, which between my wife and I has become a battle of epic proportions. I like the clocks to show what the time really is whereas she likes the clocks running two to eight minutes fast, so I jokingly accused her of changing the clock to suit her. To my surprise her nostrils flared and she got angry. But then I realized why. It's because it sounded like I didn't trust her, and it cut her to the bone. It was a real eye-opener for me, because I suddenly realized how much she loved me.

But *how* I understood her love was through her anger. I heard rage, but what I was really seeing was her love. And as God fills us with his nature, the reason for *his* anger becomes just as clear as well. It's not hatred, it's the anguished cry of a heavy heart, made that way by love.

So when Jesus cries out in **John 3:36** that "[whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him,](#)" it's not God's hatred that remains on us, it's the

anguished cry of a broken heart in reaction to our lack of trust. We hear the rage, but underlying that rage is God's great love for us.

And God's given us all kinds of human relationships to help us understand that. As an angry parent I understand it. As a jealous husband I understand it. I can also understand it in my children when they yelled at me in frustrated fury, "You just don't understand me, do you Dad?" because that's exactly how God reacted to Israel. "They have not known my ways," he cried in **Hebrews 3:10**. In his rage God cried the cry of a child who shouts at his parents, "You never understand me or give me a chance to explain myself." And oh how it hurts when that happens. It spills out in anger, and sometimes the rage is horrible, but what we're really seeing is the anguished cry of a broken heart.

Anger, therefore, whether it's from God, a parent, a spouse, a child or a friend, can serve a powerful purpose, of shocking us into realizing how loved we are. Because God gets very angry, but in Scripture - and in our own relationships - we discover why. It's because he loves us. But sometimes it takes anger to see it.