Righteous Anger

Indignation is anger caused by a desire to protect another person or correct an unholy situation. Although this emotion can motivate us to take positive action, we must proceed carefully. Let’s look at how believers can wisely handle this powerful emotion.

A. Examples of Righteous Indignation in Scripture

1. Moses

While the patriarch was on Mt. Sinai receiving God’s covenant, the Israelites made a calf out of gold and began to worship it.

What did Moses do when he saw the people dancing and singing in honor of the idol (Exodus 32:19)?

What motivated him to react in righteous indignation?

Adam Clarke’s commentary says that it’s possible Moses reacted emotionally to the people’s idolatry, but more likely he did it symbolically. The people’s choices broke the covenant they had with God. Moses’ action was a response to their unfaithfulness and symbolized how they deserved to be treated by the Lord.

Why do you think Moses ground the idol to dust and made the Israelites drink it (Exodus 32:20)?

2. Jesus

The temple money changers profited significantly from trading ordinary coins for Hebrew shekels, which were acceptable as an offering to God.

Why did Christ overturn the tables in the temple and prevent all buying and selling (Matthew 21:12-13)?

How does the portrayal of Jesus in this passage contrast with the way most people picture Him?
3. Peter

When Judas came to betray Christ, Peter tried to defend the Lord (John 18:10-11). How did he react when the guards tried to grab Jesus (Matthew 26:47-54)?

Why is violence usually not the right response to indignation (v. 52)?

Why didn’t Jesus need Peter to defend Him (Matthew 26:53)?

Christ mentioned several times that He had to die (Matthew 12:39-40; 20:18; 26:2). Yet Peter either failed to understand or could not accept that fact. What do you think is the reason? (See John 6:66-69 if needed.)

B. How to Handle Righteous Indignation

1. React immediately if the situation calls for it.

The Lord sometimes uses righteous indignation to motivate us. When Jesus saw the woman accused of adultery, He rose to her defense (John 8:1-11). You may see an innocent person being harmed, hear the name of Christ slandered, or have a short window of opportunity to speak the truth. Typically, God will give you supernatural boldness as well as the ability to respond with confidence and wisdom.

What did Jesus tell His disciples about how to defend themselves before the authorities (Mark 13:11)?

Describe a time when you reacted in righteous anger to a wrong or an injustice. Did you sense the power of the Holy Spirit working through you? What was the result?

2. Commit the matter to prayer.

We should fight every battle on our knees. In fact, sometimes the Lord will ask us to intercede for a situation, rather than taking tangible action.
According to Ephesians 6:18, how often should we pray for other believers?

Name at least three things Paul prayed for the Colossians (Colossians 1:9-12).

What happens when believers pray for government officials and others in authority (1 Timothy 2:1-4)?

3. Make sure your heart is clean before correcting anyone else.

Read Matthew 7:1-6.

John Gill’s commentary explains that the “speck” in this passage refers to a bit of straw or a tiny splinter. It indicates small sins, comparatively speaking, such as immaturity, human frailties, inconsistencies, and imprudence. We are not to dwell upon or sharply rebuke others for such faults. “Log” indicates a beam of wood, the size of a tree trunk. It represents the weighty sins Jesus saw in the Pharisees - pride, vanity, self-righteousness, hypocrisy, and envy.

Explain this statement: “First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye” (v. 5).

If we don't follow this instruction, what can be the result (1 Corinthians 5:1-3)?

4. Don’t sin when you address another’s fault.

Read Galatians 6:1-5.

In what spirit should we approach a brother or sister who is caught in a transgression (v. 1)?

What are some temptations we face in the process of correcting another person or fighting moral ills in our culture?
What is a common pitfall of those who try to restore someone else (vv. 3-4)?

According to Paul, how can we guard against this?

5. Find practical ways to make a difference.

We can sometimes spend more time criticizing or fighting others than we do reaching out to meet the practical needs of those who are hurting. For example, instead of complaining that your church doesn’t have a ministry to shut-ins, volunteer to get one started.

What does an inability to control the tongue indicate about a person’s spirituality (James 1:26)?

What are the two essential parts of “pure and undefiled religion” (James 1:27)?

What issues or problems in your family, church, community, or the world make you righteously angry?

How can you be a part of the solution, rather than just one more voice of criticism?

Closing: Whether fighting for family values in the community or coming to the aid of a suffering person, believers can find positive and godly ways to express holy anger. Rather than reacting quickly in the flesh, follow the Holy Spirit’s leading. He will faithfully show you how to help solve the problem.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, enable me learn how to harness the power of anger. I want to use its energy to make a difference for Your kingdom. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.