

God's Mandate for Righteous Anger

Eschatology

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In 2015, the Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Gibbs published an essay under the banner of his employer Concordia Seminary, St. Louis titled *The Myth of Righteous Anger*. This now-famous essay in Lutheran circles is trotted out at Winkels and by District Presidents, to the point that merely mentioning its name is sufficient to end debate on the subject.

Even while giving him the benefit of the doubt that he was well-intentioned, Gibbs's essay is a fundamental corruption of Scripture in a way that cannot be ignored. In a properly functioning Christian body, its publication would have resulted in public admonition followed by false doctrine charges, had he remained unrepentant. This rebuttal will liberally excerpt it, but the original essay should be read in its entirety. (His follow-up article begs the question, and doesn't address any of the errors detailed below, so it will be ignored.)

Gibbs begins:

“This essay chiefly aims to describe what the Bible, and especially the New Testament, actually says about human anger. This is the main goal of my study.” (p. 3)

When discussing anger in particular, this first sentence is a glowing red warning sign that we are on dangerous ground. Although Gibbs wishes to utterly sever all human anger from God's anger, I will demonstrate that this is a deadly false dichotomy. With that in mind, this is why his frame is so dangerous. Marcionism was a Gnostic heresy that pits the wrathful Demiurge of the Old Testament against the gentle Jesus of the New. While Christians must necessarily dismiss the false dichotomy of two opposing Gods, most of us still cling to the comforting lie that somehow all that wrath in the OT was an aberration. We want to tell ourselves now that Jesus is here in the flesh, God has turned over a new leaf of mercy, as exemplified in His atoning sacrifice on the Cross.

There is a strong strain of this soft-Marcionism even within Confessional Lutheranism, to nearly the same degree as in the rest of what's left of Western Christianity. We don't want to deal with the theological implications of a God who kills by the thousands and by the millions, as though Judgement Day and hellfire were anything but. What is signaled by Gibbs in focusing "especially on the New Testament" is that he too may harbor such feelings. Though he would certainly deny it, we will soon see whether this may be one of his underlying premises.

He then doubles down on this frame:

“What does the Bible, and chiefly the NT, say about anger? These friends and colleagues have not wanted to talk about what the Bible actually says about anger.”

Hopefully at some point he explains why the NT in his view is somehow more worthy of consideration than the OT. It seems as though it is Gibbs, and not his hearers, who wishes to avoid talking about what the Bible actually says, if 39 of its books must be relegated to subordinate status. It is worth noting that every single teaching from Jesus and the Apostles is either expounding directly upon the OT, or Divine revelation through which God builds upon the OT's foundations.

The Holy Spirit recorded through Paul in 2 Timothy 3: *"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."* Today this refers to the complete Scriptures which God has provided us, but it referred with equal inerrancy to those Christians who had only the OT in Paul's day. Not one Christian in the first century of the church had the benefit of the whole NT upon which Gibbs appears eager to hinge his argument. It is concerning to imply that they may not have been fully equipped as we are today.

Gibbs soon provides his thesis:

“If I may speak frankly, without exception my Christian friends and colleagues have wanted to justify their anger; each time they have done this, they have appealed to the category of ‘righteous anger.’”

Here two of Gibbs’s givens clearly emerge:

1. Anyone who is angry about anything must justify himself.
2. All such justifications are in the form of the informal fallacy of special pleading.

Keep these in mind: All anger requires justification, and any such justification is fallacious. There is nothing wrong with such givens *per se*, if one manages to prove them entirely from Scripture. Just be aware of them as we proceed.

“For Christians, however, when the Scriptures speak to an issue extensively and clearly, that’s the place where the discussions should start, and not somewhere else. So, let me say it again. This essay chiefly aims to describe what the Bible, and chiefly the New Testament, says about human anger—and that teaching is pretty clear and pretty direct.”

Scripture (all of it) is the only fitting beginning or end for such discussions, so we are in at least partial agreement. Gibbs thinks Scripture is "pretty clear and pretty direct." It has been suggested elsewhere, "*For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*" We’ll soon see which is more accurate.

“There are four reasons why I decided to do this (fairly basic) study. The first is quite personal: I have a temper, and I regularly am angry. What I have observed about myself when I am angry is that I rarely do or say the wise or loving thing if I simply act out of the anger. To be sure, when I am angry I have lots of energy to do things—do something—but in the times that I have acted in anger or have been chiefly motivated by it, the things I have chosen to do turned out badly and hurtfully for others every time.”

This is the first evidence of what will soon become clear is the fatal omission in all of Gibbs’s thinking. It is a question of cause and effect, of subject and object. Notice what he doesn’t mention here: *why* he gets angry. He sees the question of anger as a purely emotional one, detached from any pattern of facts, let alone moral judgements. If anger is simply emotional rather than being attached to wise judgement, the sin question

becomes much simpler for him. Having detached anger from any surrounding circumstances, he correctly identifies that most human anger results in harm, but he appears ill-equipped to understand why.

Consider for a moment another emotion: love. Some people love chocolate, some love Star Wars. But is that the same thing as the love they have for their family? Is love of one's parent, spouse, or child mere emotional reaction that wells up from time to time? Or is one's love for family a much deeper thing, rooted in the nature of the relationship itself? The answer to the last question of course is yes. What we call emotions are sometimes far more than the momentary upwelling of brain chemistry.

“Even though this study is focused on human anger, one really has to summarize what the Old Testament says like this: anger rightly belongs to God.” (p. 5)

There is a subtle error lurking here, borne of theological confusion. Gibbs essentially categorizes anger as though it were like Promethean fire, something stolen from the gods and clasped by man in error. To understand the underlying theological error this betrays, it is necessary first to speak of God's nature.

God reveals to us in Scripture that He is perfect, just, loving, merciful, etc. In our human experience, we have a vague sense of these things. We imagine that God elevates those known properties and actions as only the Almighty can, and His version is the best possible version of them. The truth is that we have this backwards in our minds through our insufficiency for the task. What we understand as justice is in fact one facet (from our viewpoint) of God's own Divine nature. **True Justice is that which accords with God's Law, and the Law itself is God's perfect will.**

And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. –Exodus 3:14

When we consider the breaking of the Law, we think causally and sequentially. "I was doing okay, but then I sinned. God saw my sin, and got angry, so He'll punish me for my sin." The more ontologically precise way to think of sin is thus: "I acted contrary to God's nature, setting myself in opposition to Him, and elevating myself as an equal god." (Dr. Lockwood's The Unholy Trinity: Martin Luther Against the Idol of Me, Myself, and I is an excellent book on the nature of all sin as—first and foremost—idolatry.) God of course is "*a consuming fire, a jealous God,*" who tolerates no competition. **In our sin we are now contrary to God's nature, necessitating our destruction.**

Once we properly understand the Law like this, we see that nothing about God's Law, or about the justice, mercy, and love surrounding our Salvation has anything to do with arbitrary rules and retribution. Rather it has everything to do with we creatures being contrary to our Creator's nature according to our sin. Only Christ's atoning blood can cover us in the face of God's perfect wrath. God has declared us reconciled to His nature, and from Judgement Day onward we will live eternally in perfect accord with God.

So when Gibbs says, "anger rightly belongs to God," he is speaking of an emotional reaction to which God is entitled because of our sin. But properly understood, righteous anger has as its object anything contrary to God's nature. Due to Gibbs's category error placing anger within the realm of rootless emotion rather than wise judgement, he has precluded from the outset the validity of righteous anger. Whether this error evinces a form of soft-antinomianism is left to the reader.

"The mistake would be to think that the God of the Old Testament, who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is quickly or easily or routinely angered."

This quote is the entire point of page 5, where he goes on to quote the famous passage from Exodus 34:6-7, that God is "*slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love...*" Unfortunately he neglects at any point to address Psalm 2:

*Now therefore, O kings, be wise;
be warned, O rulers of the earth.
Serve the LORD with fear,
and rejoice with trembling.
Kiss the Son,
lest he be angry, and you perish in the way,
for his wrath is quickly kindled.
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.*

As Lutherans we know better than to make God contort to fit our ideal concept of Him. How often and how quickly God's wrath is kindled against sinners is His business. We can trust that everything about it is perfect according to His nature, and leave it at that. We certainly shouldn't be making excuses or sugarcoating anything to make God sound more acceptable to anyone. Let those with itching ears turn elsewhere, should they require a scratch.

Gibbs goes on in pages 7-8 to cite a number of verses where God exhorts us to be "slow to anger" as evidence that anger is sinful. Later on page 14, he concedes that "slow to anger" does indeed leave open the possibility that finally arriving at anger might not be

sin *per se*. But since it's tricky, we just shouldn't bother. We will deal with his emotional arguments in a few minutes, but there also is a parallel error floating throughout his essay, which boils down to this summary (my words):

“Anger can easily lead to sin in the best of circumstances, so we should eschew it altogether. In the end it is probably impossible for us to have anger without sin.”

Since anger is the root of murder, it probably isn't a coincidence that this essentially the same argument made by pacifists and opponents of the death penalty. It is the same impulse that causes men to corrupt “You shall not murder” into “You shall not kill.” The problem is that God commands killing, just as he commands hatred. Does someone who wants to hate have a spiritual problem? Undoubtedly. Does someone who wants to kill have a spiritual problem? Undoubtedly. **But it does not follow** that hating or killing are *per se* evil. As Christians we do not have the luxury of becoming our own gods who improve on His Law, just to be safe. We *cannot* be more moral than God.

“Another possible quarry from which one might carve out a notion of ‘righteous, human anger’ is some of the psalms. One thinks, for instance, of Psalm 139:21–22:

Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies.

“The psalmists display the complete range of human emotion, and for that reason (and others) the psalms are beloved by God's people. **It would be a little simplistic, however, to conclude that because a certain emotion is displayed (directly or indirectly) in a psalm, that this is a general endorsement of that emotion.** Just as the benediction on those who kill Babylonian babies by smashing them against rocks has to be carefully handled (Ps 137:9), so does the display of emotions in the psalms.”

Psalms is one of the most quoted books in the NT. The Psalms are inspired, authoritative, and prophetic. It is easily one of the most purely Christological books in the OT. Christ quotes them repeatedly, including from the Cross. There is not one word of the Psalms that can be dismissed as potentially sinful. To make such a suggestion is shocking false doctrine. One wonders whether this same error was in the hearts of the LSB hymnal steering committee when they continued in the unbelievably wicked act of censoring the imprecatory Psalms. God does not require an editor, and woe to the man who appoints the task unto himself.

Does Gibbs want his reader to believe that the same Jesus in Psalm 2 whose wrath is quickly kindled, leading to the perishing of his enemies, would never dash any babies on the rocks? How many babies did God dash on the rocks in the Flood? Answer: **all of them**. Saying these passages must “be carefully handled” without clearly spelling out *how* is a smokescreen. Gibbs is not going to name the Demiurge here, but he is speaking falsely in order to invent a god who does not exist, one contrary to the plain Words of Scripture.

Here is Psalm 139:19-24, the context omitted from the passage above:

*Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God!
O men of blood, depart from me!
They speak against you with malicious intent
your enemies take your name in vain.
Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD?
And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?
I hate them with perfect hatred;
I count them my enemies.
Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any grievous way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting!*

The last two verses which Gibbs conveniently omitted are an unmistakeable claim of a clean conscience, which refutes beyond any shadow of a doubt his clear intimation that these verses describe sin.

Of equal importance to this false doctrine, Gibbs is sweeping aside this key passage for understanding what righteous anger really is. Because he misconstrues anger as an emotional outburst, he is blind when God reveals unmistakably how Psalm 139 is in perfect accord with the many other passages on gentleness, forgiveness, etc.

In Psalm 139, who is doing the hating and why? David sees the wickedness of God’s enemies, and counts them as his own enemies. The *polarity* of this sentiment is everything to understanding righteous anger. The many passages that exhort not seeking vengeance **are precluding vengeance on one’s own behalf**. The Sermon on the Mount speaks specifically of retaliation, that is defense of ego, which is wholly precluded. It goes on to command us to love **our** enemies, a command God must spell out explicitly because it is contrary to our own sinful nature.

This is the heart of the matter. **Righteous anger is never directed towards one's own enemies.** There is no Scriptural warrant for such behavior, and every verse Gibbs cites condemns this. But this is not the end of the matter. For God has enemies who hate Him, and hate us for His sake. While we are commanded to forgive them for their hatred of us, **Psalm 139 commands us to hate God's enemies with perfect hatred.** The man who does not perfectly hate God's enemies and yet has a clean conscience is an unrepentant sinner.

“[T]here are a very few texts in which one might conclude that there is such a thing as human anger that is justified or praiseworthy or (to use the well-known phrase) ‘righteous anger.’ To be sure—and this is important—there is nowhere any direct discussion or endorsement of ‘righteous anger.’” (p. 6)

I will concede Gibbs's point that “righteous anger” (like the word Trinity) does not appear in God's Inspired Word, so for the remainder of this rebuttal, I will use God's phrase: “perfect hatred,” which is unsurprisingly better, more precise, and more sharply piercing and dividing.

This perfect hatred of God's enemies is **not optional** for Christians, for the same reason that God's own hatred of evil is an a priori Truth, rather than a mere emotional response. If we are in accord with God's Spirit, then God's enemies are our own according to our Sanctified nature. Gibbs is not alone in Lutheranism in condemning this. Pastor Bryan Wolfmueller is fond of saying publicly that we are to have no enemy but Satan. While it sounds nice, it is contrary to Scripture, which is a better barometer for sound doctrine than warm fuzzies.

“As in the OT's descriptions of divine anger, so in the NT. God's anger is righteous and justified, simply because he is God. In the case of Jesus of Nazareth who was like us in every way yet without knowing any sin (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15), we acknowledge that his anger was pure and righteous, with no taint of sin.” (p. 10)

Again Gibbs's fundamental ontological error leaves no better argument than, “God can do whatever He wants.” Satan loves when we cast God as arbitrary or capricious. Why can't men marry men? Why can't girls be pastors too? As soon as you collapse these ontological questions into proof-texting arguments, you guarantee that in the near future, people will be doing the opposite with clear consciences and in God's name. If you have an ontological problem for which you seek a non-ontological solution, you have almost certainly sinned, and you will have undoubtedly failed.

“Christ Jesus himself, as well as the other NT authors, explicitly teach about anger and warn of its spiritual dangers. The classic passage is, of course, from the Sermon on the Mount. There Jesus teaches that at least in some important ways, being angry with and speaking angry insults against a fellow disciple is the same as murder, and it brings the same threat of eschatological judgment:

You have heard that it was said to those of old, “You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.” But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, “You fool!” will be liable to the hell of fire.

“Let me say again that I do agree that there is a need to discuss the emotion of anger and how one might deal with it, and I will offer some thoughts to that effect. Jesus’s words, however, must stand. He makes no distinction between being angry and sinning. To be angry with a fellow Christian is, in fact, sin and terrible sin at that.”

We must assume for the sake of charity that Gibbs is merely confused when he incorrectly claims, “*He makes no distinction between being angry and sinning.*” Jesus said no such thing, rather He said, “*But I say to you that everyone who is angry **with his brother** will be liable to judgment.*” Gibbs can only see this question in raw emotional terms, so he ignores the object of the anger entirely.

Now that we understand perfect hatred, can it ever be directed toward a brother? No, because by definition, a brother cannot be an enemy of God. Theologically speaking, brothers and neighbors are different things. A brother is a fellow member of Christ’s body, the Church; a neighbor is a fellow creature physically located near us for the moment, for whom Christ also died. But a neighbor may also be an enemy of God. Gibbs’s categorical claim here is simply false. Matthew 5 accords with Psalm 139 perfectly, as it must.

“This essentially negative teaching about anger is taken for granted elsewhere in the NT, so much so that ‘anger’ or ‘wrath’ can simply occur in lists of sins.

For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger (θυμοί), hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. (2 Cor 12:20)

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger (θυμοί), rivalries, dissensions, division, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal 5:20–21)

Let all bitterness and wrath (θυμός) and anger (ὀργή) and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. (Eph 4:31)

But now, you must put them all away: anger (ὀργή), wrath (θυμός), malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. (Col 3:8)

Setting aside that one of these passages does not speak of anger, but of “fits of anger,” note that the rest all pertain to speech. While it is of course true that all sin begins in the heart, it is a poor argument to condemn anger *per se* when all of these passages are clearly dealing with personal enmity and public dissension. Whether a godly man may speak to his perfect hatred of God’s enemies in public is a question on which we might have some good discussion, if only there were faithful pastors to lead it.

“One other passage is significant, and it should be fronted here, namely Romans 12:14–21. Although the specific terms for anger do not occur in these verses, it seems clearly relevant—at least to me.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be conceited. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.” To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

“I might highlight only one thing about this remarkable exhortation, and it is this: There is a place for anger, and for vengeance. But it does not belong to the disciples of Jesus; that prerogative belongs to God alone. As I heard someone say long ago, vengeance is too dangerous a weapon to be placed into the hands of sinners. This contrast is utterly consistent with how anger is portrayed, described, and mentioned in both the OT and the NT. Anger belongs to God, not to us

humans—and especially not to the disciples of Jesus. Anger is dangerous, and quickly leads to sin. So close is this connection that at times, being or becoming angry is simply equated with sin. That is a remarkable truth, and should be restated, because no other emotion receives that sort of attention in the NT. The connection between being / becoming angry on the one hand and actually sinning on the other hand is so close that most of the time, Jesus and the apostles simply equate anger with sin.”

This passage from Romans affirms the truth, “**never avenge yourselves...**” and “**if your enemy is hungry...**” Ego is to have no part in anger of any kind. Since this passage actually refutes Gibbs’s contention, let’s take the opportunity to highlight two verses here that we usually gloss over:

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Someone who understands grammar must acknowledge that God allows for occasions when we do not in fact live peaceably, and that our enemies get a vote on the matter. God does not command that we live peaceably with all *under every circumstance*. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find a Lutheran pastor who will confess God’s Words here faithfully.

*If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; **for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.***

This is not the depiction of a blithely clueless man who imagines everyone can get along. Rather God acknowledges that when we are kind and loving to our enemies, it will make them rage all the more and **this is a reason to do it**. Speaking of persecution in Matthew 10, Jesus says, “*Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.*” Cursed are those who shrink from declaring to us the whole counsel of God.

“Third, I come to the concept that so quickly arose when I spoke about this study to Christian friends and acquaintances. I’ll treat the issue in the form of a question. Is there a New Testament teaching on ‘righteous anger’ on the part of humans and especially on the part of Jesus’s disciples? In a phrase, and to speak somewhat bluntly, not really.”

I don’t intend to be one of those annoying people who hands out logical fallacy citations like a hall monitor, but Gibbs is making it difficult. This nonsense is a textbook Texas sharpshooter fallacy: Don’t look at Scripture; look only at the New Testament. Don’t look

to God's example of perfect behavior; only look at fallen man. Don't even look at all of the NT; only look at passages directly related to the acts of Jesus' disciples. See? No proof anywhere! Hey Jeff, should we stick to only the words in red while we're at it? After all, those are the only parts that Jesus *really* said, right?

Whether or not there are any cases of Jesus' disciples exemplifying perfect hatred is (I'm sorry) an argument from silence fallacy. Imagine for a minute that Gibbs had written this essay to make the case against the death penalty, or police carrying firearms. All of his arguments would play out identically: Sure there's lots of killing in Scripture, but it's nearly always wrong. *"As I heard someone say long ago, vengeance is too dangerous a weapon to be placed into the hands of sinners."* Does this apply equally to killing? To weapons period?

Whether or not killing can be done in a godly way, we know from history and human nature that we're probably going to find a way to make it sinful. And look, there are no examples in the New Testament of any of Jesus' disciples killing. So how could we possibly believe we can kill without sin? These arguments are both logically and theologically bankrupt.

"Having pondered and read a bit, I've discovered that there is no 'official' definition of human 'righteous anger.' Often the truth that God has anger/gets angry is appealed to, but this doesn't help much, nor does an appeal to the perfect human, Jesus. We're not talking about the divine wrath, but anger on the part of humans who are far from perfect. **As I have asked a few people to describe what they mean, they often say that 'righteous anger' is anger that arises because of something that is genuinely wrong or evil.** When pressed, they admit that this can quickly become an excuse, because 'righteous anger' seems to generally carry along with it the notion that if my anger is 'righteous,' then I am not sinning. There is, as far as I can tell, no agreed-upon definition of 'righteous anger.'"

Isn't it fascinating that Gibbs finds anger directed at something genuinely wrong or evil to be so easily condemned? He keeps after people until they finally admit that they are in fact sinners, as though this proves his point. It never once dawns on him that all those people who answered his challenges were practically quoting Scripture. Many of them probably don't remember Psalm 139, if they've ever read it. Yet their hearts are in accord with God's Will—however imperfectly—because God's Spirit dwells within them.

This next excerpt is long, but I want to be fair when Gibbs addresses some passages head-on, lest anyone accuse me of cherry-picking.

“Finally, there are two well-known passages that speak of anger, but scarcely in a way that commends it. Indeed, both passages reinforce the NT’s mostly negative testimony. Here is Ephesians 4:25–27.

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry, and do not sin; I command that the sun not go down on your anger; and give no opportunity to the devil.

“It does seem valid to remark that Paul here allows that anger is not automatically sinful. This is, however, hardly a rousing endorsement of ‘righteous anger.’ To the contrary, so dangerous is anger that Paul immediately warns against sin. Indeed, the apostle hastens to add that unless a believer guards himself and gets rid of his anger, he has left an opportunity for the devil. It seems clear enough that Ephesians 4:26–27 is part of the NT’s almost exclusively negative judgment of anger in man. Winger comments rightly:

“The connection of anger and not sinning in this verse has led to the proposition that there can be ‘righteous anger’ (as when God is angry with his sinful people), as if Paul were saying, ‘Be angry in such a way that you do not sin.’ Yet the Scriptures rarely portray human anger as righteous It is worth considering the possibility that Paul intends [with the use of ‘be angry,’ ὀργιζεσθε] ‘tremble’ in accord with [Psalm 4:4’s] original meaning; that is, fear the wrath of God in such a way that you deal with the cause of sin and anger in the church community.

“Does Ephesians 4:26–27 ‘teach’ the concept of human righteous anger? To repeat myself, ‘not really.’ The other passage that is sometimes cited in support of claims about righteous anger is James 1:19–20, which reads:

Know this, my beloved brothers; let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

“As with Ephesians 4:26–27, the most one can say is that James here allows for the possibility of anger that is not sinful. After all, to be ‘slow to speak’ does not mean ‘don’t speak at all’; so also, one might say to be ‘slow to anger’ doesn’t mean ‘don’t ever be angry.’ The clause that follows, however, reveals James’s understanding that human anger on the part of Jesus’s disciples is a dangerous proposition, and all too often fails to conform to the ways that God wants to put things right in the world. At most, as in Eph. 4, the apparent concession is followed at once by the verse (20) which rejects anger.”

Whenever anyone begins a Scriptural citation with a verse that starts “Therefore,” they’re proof-texting. This isn’t directed at Gibbs so much as those who would appeal to the snippet Ephesians. There are eight prior verses upon which that “therefore” hinges. It is neither safe nor prudent to divorce any such passage from the full context in which God provided it. (Annotating the Bible with verse markers is one of the worst things to ever happen to Christianity, for this very reason.)

This is some of the more cogent argumentation in the essay, although it refutes his central point. Winger’s observation on the clear parallel between Psalm 4:4 and Ephesians 4:26 strongly suggests that this isn’t really about the sort of anger in question in the first place, though one usually leads to the other. I’ll refer back to my earlier point on killing. If Gibbs were making these same arguments against just killings, would you buy them? If not, why not?

The reason people struggle with these subjects is that we know instinctively what Scripture reveals: hatred and killing do not belong in Creation. Prior to the Fall, the entire Universe existed in perfect accord with God’s nature. When God saw that it was *very good*, that was His divine seal of approval. Adam’s sin changed everything. Man’s nature had been corrupted, and took the Universe with it. In an instant, man was transformed by his own sin from a perfect creature into an object of wrath, worthy of the full measure of God’s hatred. And again, this does not mean that God got mad that Adam disobeyed. Adam set himself up as his own god. God’s response to this wasn’t a decision. It was the only possible response according to His nature.

And this is the other thing that makes people really uncomfortable with Scripture: God hates and God kills, in perfect accord with His nature. How can this be, if hatred and killing have no place in Creation? The question answers itself in light of the Fall: God’s *very good* Creation ceased to be thus. God doesn’t hate out of malice or caprice; God hates that which is not godly, for that which is not godly should not *exist*. Killing and destruction are how God rectifies an untenable corruption of Creation. This is why we die, and why the whole world will be swept away in fire on Judgement Day.

The Gospel is the good news that death is not how we end. The same God who hates us for our unrighteousness equally loves us, for we were made in His image. “*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*” We want to hear about God’s perfect love, but we—understandably—flee in terror from God’s perfect hatred. But this flight is unbelief in the face of Scriptural revelation.

This is where the soft-Marcionism emerges. We want to imagine God as some sort of video game character with sliders to adjust His various attributes. Sure God’s got a 9 in

Wrath, but He's got a 10 in Love! And maybe if we read the tone of the OT differently than the NT, it's because God used to have Wrath at a 10 too?

For I the LORD do not change. –Malachi 3:6

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. –Hebrews 13:8

God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it? – Numbers 23:19

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. –James 1:17

So why did Gibbs insist on focusing on the New Testament? Why are his pointed questions directed at those whom he challenges for advocating righteous anger always couched in terms of the NT? He finally attempts briefly to justify his choice on page 16:

“The Bible, and especially the New Testament, teaches straightforwardly that human anger is a common and dangerous reality in our lives.”

Given that Psalm 139 clearly and unmistakably exemplifies human perfect hatred, it would be charitable to call this claim eisegesis when it serves the absolute prohibition he has manufactured. The fact that he demotes the Psalms, dismisses the Divine example, ignore's God's nature, and erroneously defines and characterizes anger itself raises other questions about the nature of this essay. Let's double back to page 5, where he did something very curious:

“A simple syllogism cannot be used as a comprehensive OT theology, nor can it be used to put God in a box. Nevertheless, there is validity to the following reasoning:

Yahweh is slow to anger, as he himself declares.

Yahweh is often angry in the OT, especially with his own people, Israel.

Therefore, human creatures (and especially Israel) have given **Yahweh** plenty of reason to be angry; one must never underestimate how grievously **Yahweh** has been provoked.

“In an indirect yet eloquent way, then, the sheer frequency of the OT’s mentioning of God’s anger, coupled with God’s own self-revelation, underscores how deeply and enduringly and constantly humans, and especially God’s own covenant people, have sinned against their God!”

No explanation is ever given for the curious choice of referring to God as Yahweh only this one time and only in the Old Testament section. On the same page, Gibbs also writes:

“The mistake would be to think that the God of the Old Testament, who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is quickly or easily or routinely angered.”

Reread what he just said for the second time. The first Person of the Trinity is “the God of the Old Testament,” in apparent contradistinction to “our Lord Jesus Christ!” It seems for all the world that Gibbs is implying that Yahweh is limited to the confines of the OT, and that a new and improved Godhead emerges in the NT.

And if Yahweh is the Father, and God of the Old Testament, what is Jesus in the OT? Is Jesus God yet? Is He present at all in the OT? Do the Father and the Son have different degrees of anger? At different times? Of course the Creeds, Confessions, and Scripture itself dictate the orthodox answers to each of these questions. So why is Gibbs talking this way? What godly purpose did he feel his word choices served? When private thinking spills over into public discourse in such a way, it must be called into question under these circumstances.

“It would be going too far, I believe, to say that the emotional reaction of anger is always and intrinsically sinful; it is not. It would not be going too far, however, to say that anger is always spiritually dangerous and that we need to deal with it seriously and piously. Anger is never extolled; it is not a fruit of the Spirit.” (p. 16)

Galatians 5 says, “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; **against such things there is no law.***” First, what is the “Spirit” here? This is the word that is always used to refer to the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity. So God teaches here that the indwelling of the Holy Spirit will Sanctify us, bearing fruit which accords with God’s nature. The things enumerated here are not an à la carte menu; the verse itself tells us what is going on: “*against such things there is no law.*”

1. The Law is God's nature.
2. God dwells within believers through the gift of the Holy Spirit.
3. The fruit of that indwelling accords with God's nature.

Properly understood, this passage is not simply a list of nice or salutary things. Rather it is an example of how—through Sanctification—our own spirits grow into greater accord with God's nature. And God's nature is not divisible. Having described these things in human terms as properties or facets of God, it is necessary to confess that such language is our imperfect attempt to faithfully describe Divine simplicity.

Therefore, the fruit of the Holy Spirit within Christians will accord with **all** of God's nature. **God's nature is hatred for that which is contrary to God's nature.** In claiming that “anger... is not a fruit of the Spirit,” Gibbs has committed a Trinitarian heresy; he has confused the Persons and divided the Substance.

Given the sheer number of serious errors in this essay, one is left wondering why Gibbs wrote it in the first place. It has been demonstrated not to be exegetically sound. Its conclusions and effects are contrary to his pastoral office. He did sprinkle context for the in-person interactions he had which motivated him to write it:

“If I may speak frankly, without exception my Christian friends and colleagues have wanted to justify their anger.”

“Third, in my own involvement in the life arena, I have become more aware than ever before of how often ‘pro-lifers’ speak and write and act in ways that flow directly from their own anger.

“I have placed the phrase ‘pro-life/pro-lifers’ in quotations because I, with others, have become convinced that it is no longer a useful way to speak. For better or worse, in our current context the phrase ‘pro-life’ simply means ‘Republican’ or ‘angry.’ Whether those perceptions are accurate is not relevant; these perceptions are dominant. For my part, I am not a Republican, and as a Christian who wants to be **comprehensively life-affirming**, I am seeking to become less angry.

“Ironically, the few times I have tried to teach such ‘pro-lifers’ about the New Testament's teaching about anger, these persons became angry at me and (I am not proud to say) I in return was angry at them. This motivated me to think and study more about the topic.”

“Finally, I am quite convinced that the United States of America in the twenty-first century is a profoundly angry culture, and in contemporary discourse anger (often labeled ‘outrage’) is almost regarded as a virtue. When someone with whom we agree ‘goes off on’ someone with whose position we disagree, we applaud the anger, the belittling, the demeaning words. One factor that seems clearly (at least to me) to be at work behind the distressing number of shootings and mass murders in our country is the generally angry and violent tone of significant aspects of our culture.”

“Lest any of my readers become suspicious at this point, I assure everyone that my words here do not indicate a particular view or position regarding ‘gun control.’ On the one hand, I am not a gun person and I confess that I do not really understand those perspectives; I need to learn more about them. On the other hand, I am a very large fan of the US Constitution and the Bill of Rights, including the Second Amendment. I realize, of course, that there are many debates swirling around these matters. In no way am I taking part in those debates here.”

“As I have asked a few people to describe what they mean, they often say that ‘righteous anger’ is anger that arises because of something that is genuinely wrong or evil.”

Gibbs began with the premise that anyone who is angry must be sinning. He's angry, and he knows his sins. He has routinely confronted people around him about their anger, and declared them self-justifying sinners. The derogatory references to “pro-lifers” and culture make clear that for Gibbs this is at least in large part a political issue. He has seen and participated in political arguments where people were angry, and everyone involved was a sinner, ergo all the anger was sinful.

It is very notable that he describes himself as “comprehensively life-affirming” over against the presumably incomplete dedication to “life” by his Republican opponents. In light of the earlier point that his argumentation would work equally well to nullify the death penalty, we must ask whether he views the use of deadly force by the State to contradict his “comprehensively life-affirming” standard.

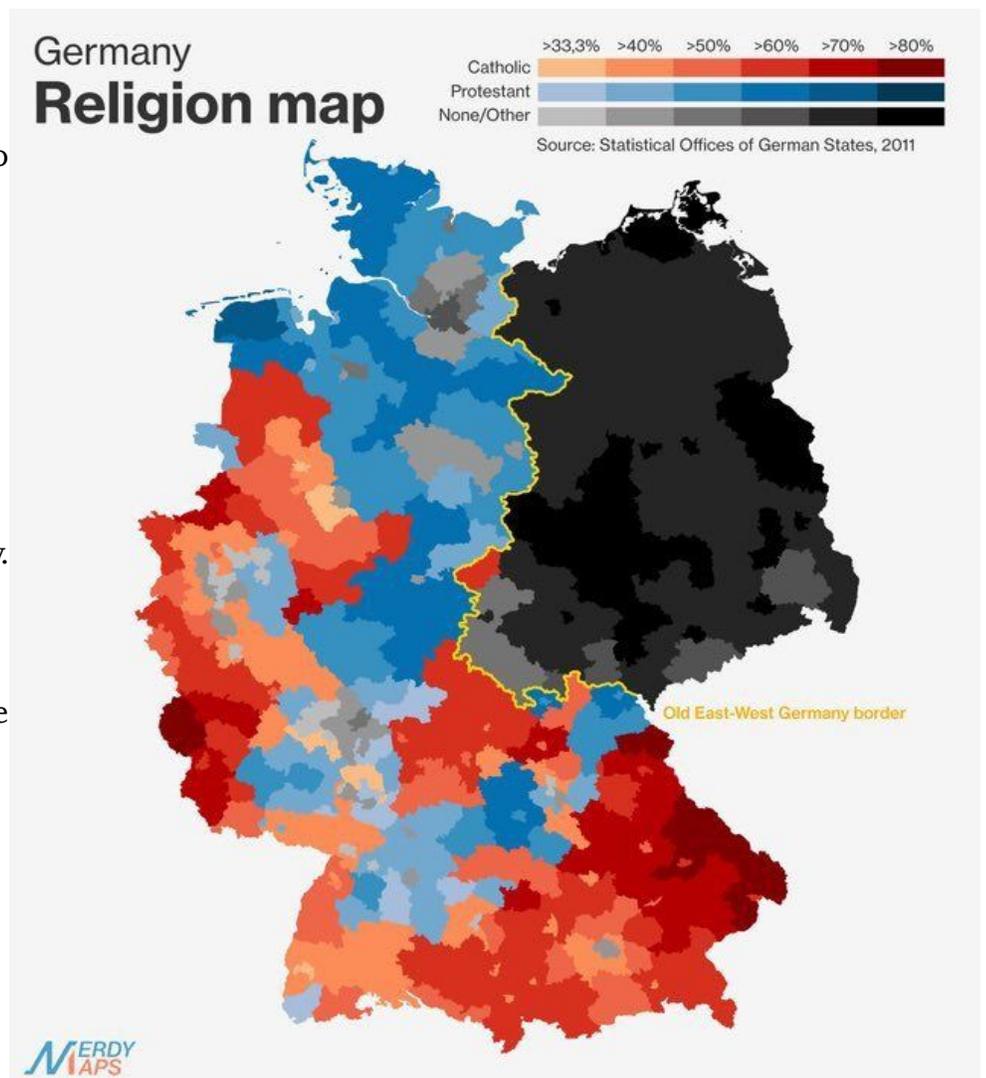
How can one theologically limit perfect hatred to God without also limiting justifiable killing, whether by the executioner, the soldier, the policeman, or the father, or neighbor—each according to his office? Christians are forbidden to reject either perfect hatred or justifiable killing, and for the same reason. In our earthly lives, there are some evils so great that they must be addressed in the here and now. God alone will fully avenge every wrong in eternity, but He also ordained that men enforce order in time. We are

commanded by God to hate and to kill under certain circumstances. Anyone who claims otherwise violates the 1st and 2nd Commandments by lying about God.

Finally, why did I write this? What's the big deal? False doctrine aside, much of what Gibbs wrote is true: anger is incredibly dangerous, and far too often leads to sin and the great suffering that accompanies it. People should lead evermore Sanctified lives where sinful anger recedes in favor of the fruit of the Spirit. So what harm is there in declaring, "you know what, from now on, all anger is off limits!" Simply put, to do so is disobedience to God and invaluable service to Satan.

There has never been a time in the era of the Church when Christians globally were beset by immediate threats AND Christians were apostatizing at an inconceivable rate. Rome persecuted the nascent Church, but God's propitious timing in history and geographic placement of the Gospel ensured that the empire's own roads carried away the accounts written in the lingua franca faster than the centurions could chase them. Charlemagne unified the tribes of Europe under an ever-growing Christian empire that withstood the concerted attacks by Satan's standing army of Muslims for 14 centuries. Christendom's greatest days took place within this period.

In our own lifetimes, Satan's attacks and servants have continued to evolve. The 20th century was defined in large part by the industrial-scale slaughter and persecution of hundreds of millions of Christians under the Soviets. The spiritual scar this Satanic butchery left on the Church is clearly visible on maps to this day. The men responsible exported their Satanic communism to China, where today Christians are again persecuted, tortured, and exterminated by the millions.



In our own country, Satan has sent homosexual pedophiles into libraries where they read to four year olds while disguised in full makeup and garb as transexual demons. Butchers called doctors are now mutilating and chemically castrating our children in a paroxysm of demonic inversion the world hasn't witnessed since Weimar Germany. Chastity is aberrant and transgressive, while sexual promiscuity is insufficient to fit into our society, unless coupled with unnatural acts for which God commanded death. Cities and communities are razed by bloodthirsty mobs while police guard them from the few Americans who have thus far dared to intervene.

The point is this: **none** of that is political. **All** of it is spiritual warfare, period. The people responsible could hardly be more blatant in their service to Satan. Many people are angry for non-spiritual reasons, though much of that is also ultimately rooted in hunger for Divine Justice. But many more see these things and experience perfect hatred, not because they are bad Christians, but because they are good Christians. Sanctified Christians see with increasing clarity the fundamentally Satanic nature of every one of these assaults.

Every evil enumerated above has the specific goal—and is thus far showing inexorable progress toward—the complete inversion and destruction of God's created Order. Of course ultimately God will not permit this; Satan lost at the Cross. But God did promise that Satan would be loosed for a little while at the end. Whether those days are upon us now is immaterial to the fact that Satan is served by Christians who are castrated of their ability to experience perfect hatred toward God's enemies.

It is the most evil people in our society who cry *peace! love!* as they topple civilization and salt the earth. Christians who stand shoulder to shoulder with them crying *peace! love!* do not serve God, but Satan—**regardless of their intentions**. "*If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*" When it is no longer possible, when it no longer depends on us, God commands us to hold perfect hatred toward His enemies.

How do Christians handle this righteous anger, this perfect hatred, in the face of our sinful nature to corrupt every thing? *I don't know*. That is a question that we would have faithful pastors hammering out in our seminaries, Winkels, and pulpits, if only they would get on the right side of Scripture here. Particularly in these days of profound and overtly spiritual evil, every true Christian is in fact filled with hatred against what we see happening in the world, in accord with our Sanctified hearts. It is a great tragedy that Satan has robbed us of sound preaching to address this matter when we need it most. And to have pastors damning such hatred is nothing less than the teaching of demons from our own pulpits.

May God grant pastors and laymen the Faith to believe the whole counsel of God, the wisdom to discern the lies of the Adversary, and the steadfast courage to speak Truth boldly no matter the opposition or the consequences. The final victory has already been won at the Cross. We eagerly await that day when all anger ceases for all time, and the Elect live in perfect accord with God in a new world without end. Amen.

“I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.

He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, ‘A shower is coming.’ And so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat,’ and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?” – Luke 12