

# Psalm 4: Be Angry and Do Not Sin

Expository Lessons from the Psalms

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## I. Introduction to Psalm 4

- a. Read **Psalm 4**.
- b. A few initial observations and comments.
  - i. This psalm was written by David.
  - ii. The Masoretic Text and LXX are very similar for this psalm, but the verse numbering varies slightly.
  - iii. One line from this psalm appears in the New Testament. Paul quotes from **Psalm 4:4-5** in **Ephesians 4:26**. This is an exact quote from the LXX, as can be seen by comparing the Greek of the LXX with the Greek New Testament.
  - iv. In the LXX it says in the introduction that this psalm was for “*the end*”.
    1. So, we should consider the possibility that parts of it may refer to the time of Christ or to His kingdom.

## II. David was Confident the Lord Heard Him When He Prayed.

- a. Re-read **Psalm 4:1-4** (LXX)
- b. **Questions:** How confident are you that *God hears you*, when you pray to Him? *Why* was David so confident that the Lord heard him when *he* cried out to the Lord?
  - i. David lived his life differently from most other men.
    1. He speaks of many (perhaps most) other people as being slow of heart, seeking after lies, and loving vain things.
  - ii. Note that some people today have no problem believing that God loves them and hears them all the time. On the other hand, there are others (often with more ‘accused’ consciences) who tend to beat themselves up, recalling their past sins and failures, and therefore have a hard time believing that God really heeds to their prayers.
  - iii. David insisted that *he lived according to righteousness*, at least during certain parts of his lifetime.
    1. Read **Psalm 18:17-27** (designated **Psalm 17:18-28** in the LXX).

- a. David asked God to reward him *according to the cleanness of his hands* (in staying away from sin).
  - b. David maintained he was living a righteous life. He is not talking about “imputed righteousness”, where the righteousness of Christ is imputed (or credited) to him.
    - i. In many Protestant circles, where the doctrine of ‘total depravity’ is taught, it is considered the ultimate in arrogance and heresy for someone to claim that he or she was in any way righteous.
    - ii. However, David claims he was living a righteous life (and many others make similar claims regarding themselves or other godly people throughout Scripture).
2. Read **Psalm 24:3-6** (designated **Psalm 23:3-6** in the LXX).
    - a. David said he had *innocent hands and a pure heart*.
    - b. David did not lift up his soul to vanity.
    - c. David said he had been totally honest and truthful with others.
- iv. David saw the Lord as a merciful God who had forgiven him of his past sins.
    1. Read **Psalm 25:4-14** (designated **Psalm 24:4-14** in the LXX).
      - a. David appealed to the Lord to forgive the sins of his youth, on the basis of the Lord’s merciful nature.
      - b. He was open to God’s direction going forward.
      - c. David was humble and feared God.
- v. Peter also pointed to the heart of David for those who want to have the Lord hear their prayers, quoting from **Psalm 34** (designated **Psalm 33** in the LXX).
    1. Read **1 Peter 3:7-12**.
      - a. Peter begins by addressing the need for husbands to treat their wives kindly, if they want God to heed their prayers.

- b. He then explains the principle behind this: “The eyes of the Lord are *on the righteous*, and his ears are open to *their prayers*.”
- c. **Challenge:** Based on what David says, how confident are you that God hears your prayers?
  - i. I realize that some of those whose consciences (or Satan) are accusing them all the time will struggle with this.
    - 1. Don’t be trapped by past sins. David also saw God’s mercy toward those who repent.
  - ii. However, David and Peter refer to people as being righteous; and this is clearly not talking about the imputed righteousness of Christ. This is living according to righteousness.
  - iii. Read **James 5:16-17**.
    - 1. In this passage James states, “The effective fervent prayer of a *righteous man* avails much.”
    - 2. As in the case of Elijah’s prayers for drought and then for rain, the prayers of *the righteous* can have a *powerful* impact, even changing the course of events.
  - iv. If there is sin in your life, repent! Then God will listen to your prayers.

### III. His Holy One?

- a. In the Masoretic Text (Hebrew) it says, “But know that the LORD has set apart for Himself him who is godly...”. (**Psalm 4:3**, NKJV)
- b. However, in the LXX it says, “Know that the Lord has made His Holy One wondrous (**Psalm 4:4**, LXX, OSB).
  - i. **Question:** Does “*His holy one*” (there are no capital vs. small distinctions in the Greek text) refer to *the Christ*, or to *any* of God’s ‘holy ones’?
  - ii. While this *may* be pointing to Christ, I cannot be sure about that.

### IV. Be Angry and Do Not Sin

- a. Read **Psalm 4:4** (designated **Psalm 4:5** in the LXX).
  - i. Two commands here, or one?
  - ii. Is the Lord telling us to “*Be angry*”?

- b. Paul quotes this verse in discussing how Christians should live.
  - i. Read **Ephesians 4:17-5:2**.
  - ii. Paul tells us to speak truthfully to one another and to put away all bitterness, wrath, anger, and malice toward one another.
  - iii. In **Ephesians 4:26**, Paul quotes directly from **Psalm 4** in the LXX, saying:
    - 1. “Be angry *AND* do not sin.”
    - 2. Then he tells us not to let the sun go down on our anger.
    - 3. Also, he says we must not give place to the devil.
      - a. I assume this refers to not giving the devil a place *in our hearts*, from which he can expand his evil operations.
  - iv. **Questions:**
    - 1. Why does it say “be angry”?
    - 2. Is anger always a sin?
    - 3. Does God get angry? Did Jesus (who never sinned)?
    - 4. What is the Bible teaching Christians about anger?
- c. A few words on the word “and”.
  - i. The Greek word in the LXX and in **Ephesians 4:26**, most often translated “and” is ‘καί / kai’. It is a very common conjunction used to connect two things or phrases.
  - ii. This may be the most common word in the Bible.
    - 1. This Greek word is Strong’s #2532. In that reference, it notes that this word is generally translated ‘and’ but can also be rendered: *also, even, too, both, but, or yet; or even therefore*, depending on context.
    - 2. In English, generally we use ‘and’ to connect two things that are in harmony with each other, while we use the word ‘but’ to connect two ideas that are in contrast or tension.
      - a. For example, one would say, “He was engaged to his fiancée for six months *AND* then married her.”

- b. However, one would say, “He was engaged to his fiancée for six years *BUT* did not marry her.”
    - c. Similarly, one would say, “The shark, with his mouth wide open, approached the distressed swimmer in the open sea *BUT* did not bite the swimmer.”
  3. In Greek, sometimes the word ‘kai’ is used to connect two ideas that are in tension with one another. Below is one example.
    - a. “...John had said to Herod, ‘It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.’ Therefore Herodias held it against him and wanted to kill him, *but* she could not;” (**Mark 6:18–19**, NKJV)
      - i. The English word ‘*but*’ in the NKJV is used to translate the Greek word ‘kai’ here instead of ‘*and*’, since the idea that Herodias wanted to kill John was in contrast to the fact that she was unable to do so. She was constrained.
      - ii. Note that while the NKJV, ESV, NIV and some other translations render it “*but*”, some other translations use the word “*and*” there.
  4. So this passage, which connects two ideas in opposition to each other (being angry and not sinning), could be rendered “Be angry *BUT* don’t sin.”
    - a. That makes more sense to me. It puts a constraint on our anger.
    - b. Perhaps this is similar to a sign I might see at a park or playground: “Dogs are permitted; *but* must be on a leash”.
      - i. I think of this constraint on our anger as acting like a leash that would restrain a dog.
      - ii. Our anger must also be curbed before it becomes sinful.
      - iii. Paul puts limits on our anger. He says we must resolve things the same day, before the sun goes down.
    - c. Also, this is similar to how this is translated in the NIV: “In your anger do not sin...” (**Ephesians 4:26**, NIV).

- d. Some early Christians commented on this.
- i. From Tertullian, early Christian writer from Carthage, in North Africa, writing c. 207 AD:
    1. "... 'be angry, and sin not'; that is, not persevere in anger, or be enraged...".
      - a. (Source: Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, book 2, chapter 19; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 312)
  - ii. From a work entitled *The Apostolic Constitutions*, a collection likely compiled in the late 300's AD but including much material from the time prior to the Council of Nicaea (i.e., prior to 325 AD):
    1. "Be therefore 'righteous judges, peacemakers, and without anger. For 'he that is angry with his brother without a cause is subject to the judgment.' (**Matthew 5:22**) But if it happens that by any one's contrivance you are angry at anybody, 'let not the sun go down upon your wrath;' (**Ephesians 4:26**) for David says, 'Be angry and sin not;' (**Psalm 4:4**) that is, be soon reconciled, lest your wrath continue so long that it turn to a settled hatred, and work sin.
    2. "'For the souls of those that bear a settled hatred are to death,' (**Proverbs 12:28**, LXX) says Solomon. But our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ says in the gospels: 'If you bring your gift to the altar, and there rememberest that your brother has anything against you, leave there your gift before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift to God.' (**Matthew 5:23-24**)
    3. "Now the gift to God is every one's prayer and thanksgiving. If, therefore, you have anything against your brother, or he has anything against you, neither will your prayers be heard, nor will your thanksgivings be accepted, by reason of that hidden anger.
    4. "But it is your duty, brethren, to pray continually. Yet, because God hears not those which are at enmity with their brethren by unjust quarrels, even though they should pray three times an hour, it is our duty to compose all our enmity and littleness of soul, that we may be able to pray with a pure and unpolluted heart. For the Lord commanded us to love even our enemies, and by no means to hate our friends. And the lawgiver says: 'You shalt not hate any man; you shall not hate your brother in

your mind. You shall certainly reprove your brother, and not incur sin on his account.' (**Leviticus 19:17**)”

- a. (Source: *Apostolic Constitutions*, book 2, section 6; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 7, p. 419)
- iii. Lactantius, a prominent Christian teacher from Rome, writing c. 304-313 AD, writes concerning the anger of God and the anger of men:
1. “CHAP. XXI - OF THE ANGER OF GOD AND MAN.
  2. “There remains one question, and that the last. For someone will perhaps say that God is so far from being angry, that in His precepts He even forbids man to be angry. I might say that the anger of man ought to be curbed, because he is often angry unjustly; and he has immediate emotion, because he is only for a time. Therefore, lest those things should be done which the low, and those of moderate station, and great kings do in their anger, his rage ought to have been moderated and suppressed, lest, being out of his mind, he should commit some inexpiable crime.
  3. “But God is not angry for a short time, because He is eternal and of perfect virtue, and He is never angry unless deservedly. But, however, the matter is not so; for if He should altogether prohibit anger, He Himself would have been in some measure the censurer of His own workmanship...
  4. “... Therefore, He does not altogether prohibit anger, because that affection is necessarily given, but He forbids us to persevere in anger. For the anger of mortals ought to be mortal; for if it is lasting, enmity is strengthened to lasting destruction. Then, again, when He enjoined us to ‘be angry, and yet not to sin’ (**Psalm 4:4, Ephesians 4:26**), it is plain that He did not tear up anger by the roots, but restrained it, that in every correction we might preserve moderation and justice. Therefore, He who commands us to be angry is manifestly Himself angry; He who enjoins us to be quickly appeased is manifestly Himself easy to be appeased: for He has enjoined those things which are just and useful for the interests of society.
  5. “But because I had said that the anger of God is not for a time only, as is the case with man, who becomes inflamed with an immediate excitement, and on account of his frailty is unable easily to govern himself, we ought to understand that because God is eternal, His anger also remains to eternity; but, on the

other hand, that because He is endued with the greatest excellence, He controls His anger, and is not ruled by it, but that He regulates it according to His will. And it is plain that this is not opposed to that which has just been said. For if His anger had been altogether immortal, there would be no place after a fault for satisfaction or kind feeling, though He Himself commands men to be reconciled before the setting of the sun. But the divine anger remains forever against those who ever sin.

6. "Therefore, God is appeased not by incense or a victim, not by costly offerings, which things are all corruptible, but by a reformation of the morals: and he who ceases to sin renders the anger of God mortal. For this reason, He does not immediately punish everyone who is guilty, that man may have the opportunity of coming to a right mind and correcting himself."
  - a. (Source: Lactantius, *A Treatise on the Anger of God*, chapter 21; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 7, p. 277)
7. Points made by Lactantius here include:
  - a. God has anger. However, that is *not* a vice nor a shortcoming in God's character.
    - i. This reinforces the importance of us fearing God.
    - ii. Recall that Jesus said, "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (**Matthew 10:28**, NKJV)
    - iii. Jesus made a similar statement, in Luke's gospel: "And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!" (**Luke 12:4-5**, NKJV)
  - b. God put anger in man.
  - c. Consequently, human anger is *not always* sinful.
    - i. Man's tendency may be to unleash his anger uncontrolled, and for that anger to linger and turn to bitterness.

- ii. However, we must restrain those impulses, restrain our human anger, and settle matters quickly.
- e. Reflections on anger.
  - i. Many of us have come from families where a parent or other family member had serious problems with uncontrolled, destructive anger.
    - 1. Generally, this causes a lot of damage to other members of the family, notably to the children.
    - 2. Those of us who were subject to this kind of abusive anger can struggle with the idea of seeing Jesus getting angry (for example, in His clearing the temple, making a whip of cords, etc. in **John 2**).
    - 3. Those who have suffered under the hand of angry, out-of-control tyrants do not want to see anger in the character of God the Father, nor in the character of Jesus.
  - ii. However, we must see God *as He is*, and not over-react against abusive type anger we may have seen from people in the past.
    - 1. God is slow to anger and has perfect self-control, but He *does* get angry. We see this throughout the Scriptures.
    - 2. We need to fear God because we do not want to incur His anger.
  - iii. Also, those of us who are parents and spouses, especially, must be in control of our tendencies toward unrighteous anger.
    - 1. We cannot 'let it rip' in unleashing the destructive force of uncontrolled anger, in explosive fits of rage.
    - 2. Also, we cannot let our anger go unresolved and cannot let it turn into bitterness. We must settle matters quickly. (**Matthew 5:25**)
    - 3. Sometimes, rather than dealing with our anger and resolving issues, people will stuff or suppress their anger. This can be one of the causes of depression (which I have heard referred to as "anger without enthusiasm"). That is not a righteous way to handle our anger, either!
  - iv. Self-control can make all the difference.

1. Throughout the Scriptures, men and women who want to follow Jesus are called to exhibit and grow in the character of *self-control*. (**Acts 24:25, Galatians 5:22-23, 1 Timothy 2:15, 1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:8, 2 Peter 1:6**, etc.)
2. I realize that some Christians think it best to abstain from drinking wine or other alcohol-containing drinks altogether. Drunkenness is a sin. However, other Christians drink but in strict moderation (for example, having just one glass of wine with dinner).
  - a. There is a world of difference between drinking in moderation with self-control, versus drinking without self-control!
  - b. The latter will destroy the life of the person involved and often cause a wake of destruction in the lives of others, as well.
3. Similarly, water is a wonderful thing, necessary for life, when it is under control (when it remains within the designated plumbing pipes and water mains, or behind dams and flood-control levees). However, when water escapes those boundaries and is uncontrolled, it quickly becomes a terrifying, destructive force!
  - a. Control makes all the difference between something being useful versus being destructive.
  - b. You can't ever allow it to get out of control.
4. Similarly, sexual desire and attraction is not inherently a bad thing. It was created by God and needs to be controlled and directed toward our spouse (and restrained to be within marriage).
5. So, as God has righteous anger and Jesus has righteous anger, our anger can be righteous as well, useful and purposeful in the right places. However, it must be curbed, never be allowed to get out of control.

## V. Old Sacrifices to be Replaced By Better Ones

- a. Read **Psalm 4:6** (LXX), which corresponds to **Psalm 4:5** in versions that are based on the Masoretic Text (in most modern Bibles).
  - i. "Offer the sacrifice of righteousness, and hope in the Lord." (**Psalm 4:6**, LXX, OSB)

- ii. **Question:** Does the “sacrifice” discussed here refer to an Old Covenant animal that would be sacrificed at the tabernacle/temple; or to something else?
  - 1. Note that Peter spoke of a new type of sacrifice that the followers of Jesus are now called to offer.
    - a. “Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (**1 Peter 2:4-5**, NKJV)
    - b. Peter speaks of us as priests who are called to offer “spiritual sacrifices”.
      - i. **Question:** Could this be alluding to the same idea as the “sacrifice of righteousness” referred to in **Psalm 4:5-6**?
- b. Cyprian, a bishop in the church in Carthage, North Africa, wrote c. 250 AD:
  - i. “16. That the ancient sacrifice should be made void, and a new one should be celebrated.
  - ii. “In Isaiah: ‘For what purpose to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord: I am full; I will not have the burnt sacrifices of rams, and fat of lambs, and blood of bulls and goats. For who has required these things from your hands?’ (**Isaiah 1:11-12**)
  - iii. “Also in the forty-ninth Psalm: ‘I will not eat the flesh of bulls, nor drink the blood of goats. Offer to God the sacrifice of praise, and pay your vows to the Most High. Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver you: and you shall glorify me.’ (**Psalm 50:13-15**, designated **Psalm 49:13-15** in the LXX) In the same Psalm, moreover: ‘The sacrifice of praise shall glorify me: therein is the way in which I will show him the salvation of God.’ (**Psalm 50:23**, designated **Psalm 49:23** in the LXX)
  - iv. “In the fourth Psalm, too: ‘Sacrifice the sacrifice of righteousness, and hope in the Lord.’ (**Psalm 4:5-6**) Likewise in Malachi: ‘I have no pleasure concerning you, says the Lord, and I will not have an accepted offering from your hands. Because from the rising of the sun, even unto the going down of the same, My name is glorified among the Gentiles; and in every place odors of incense are offered to My name, and a pure sacrifice, because great is My name among the nations, says the Lord.’” (**Malachi 1:10-11**)

1. (Source: Cyprian, *Three Books of Testimonies Against the Jews*, book 1, chapter 16; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, p. 512)
2. Note that Cyprian saw in **Psalm 4:5-6** one of the places in the Old Testament where the Scriptures foreshadowed the greater sacrifices that would be offered in the future.
3. This also is consistent with what Peter said in **1 Peter 2:4-5**, regarding the better sacrifices we offer to the Lord today, the spiritual sacrifices of righteousness.

## VI. The Light of the Face of God, to Come

- a. Read **Psalm 4:6** (designated **Psalm 4:7** in the LXX).
  - i. "... O Lord, the light of your face was stamped upon us." (**Psalm 4:7**, LXX, OSB)
  - ii. "... The light of your face, O Lord, was manifested upon us." (**Psalm 4:7**, LES)
- b. This passage reminds me of so many passages in the New Testament where Jesus is described as the light who came from God (the Father). We see the glory of the unseen Father in the face of His Son.
  - i. "The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light." (**Revelation 21:23**, NKJV)
  - ii. "The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned." (**Matthew 4:16**, NKJV)
  - iii. "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world." (**John 1:4-9**, NKJV)
  - iv. "Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, 'I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.'" (**John 8:12**, NKJV)
  - v. "For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (**2 Corinthians 4:6**, NKJV)

- vi. “God... has in these last days spoken to us by His Son... who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person...,”  
(**Hebrews 1:1-3**, NKJV)
- vii. “Therefore He says: ‘Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light.’” (**Ephesians 5:14**, NKJV)
- c. Tertullian, an early Christian writer from Carthage, in North Africa, connected this statement about “the light of your face” from **Psalm 4:6-7** to several other passages that speak about Christ, as *the light who came from the Father*. Writing c. 207 AD, Tertullian said:
  - i. “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to (give) the light of the knowledge (of His glory) in the face of (Jesus) Christ.’ (**2 Corinthians 4:6**) Now who was it that said, ‘Let there be light?’ (**Genesis 1:3**) And who was it that said to Christ concerning giving light to the world: ‘I have set You as a light to the Gentiles’ (**Isaiah 49:6, Acts 13:47**) —to them, that is, ‘who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death?’ (**Isaiah 9:2, Matthew 4:16**)
  - ii. “(None else, surely, than He), to whom the Spirit in the Psalm answers, in His foresight of the future, saying, ‘The light of Your countenance, O Lord, has been displayed upon us.’ (**Psalm 4:6-7**, LXX) Now the countenance of the Lord here is Christ.”
    - 1. (Source: Tertullian, Against Marcion, book 5, chapter 11; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 454)
- d. Jesus is “the light of the face of God”, who came into the world to make God known.

## VII. I Will Sleep and Rest in Peace

- a. This psalm closes with the statement by David, “For I will both sleep and rest in peace, for You alone, O Lord, cause me to dwell in hope.” (**Psalm 4:9**, LXX, OSB)
- b. As we discussed in the prior lesson on **Psalm 3**, in many places in Scripture, “sleeping” is used as a figure for death. That appears to be the case here, as well.
- c. The hope that David had in the face of death, and the hope that we have, is in the resurrection.
  - i. As Paul boldly proclaimed to Felix, the governor:
    - 1. “But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all

things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.” (**Acts 24:14–16**, NKJV)

- ii. Note that Paul also makes it clear that his hope is not to be found in this world during our lifetime.
  1. “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.” (**1 Corinthians 15:19**)