

# Is it righteous anger or sinful rage?

At first glance, it's easy to tell the difference. If I'm mad at you, it's righteous anger. If you're mad at me, it's sinful rage.

Or at the very least, a temper tantrum.

But at second glance ... darn that second glance! Doesn't it just make your blood boil?

At second glance, maybe you were confusing your "righteous" with "highfalutin." And their "sinful rage" with "fraternal correction."

Perhaps the solution is to never take that second glance. But that's probably not the best idea. The highly favored one, but not the best.

Now, if you'll just be patient for a moment, we'll take a look at five suggestions for handling that fiery spark within you. Simple suggestions because you're ... uncomplicated.

1. Quit making Jesus' cursing the fig tree (cf. Mk 11:12-25) and his driving the [money changers](#) from the Temple (cf. Mt 21:12-13) your go-to Bible verses.

WWJD. What would Jesus do? "Well, Jesus was honked off so it's OK if I'm honked off." Better than OK. It is downright "Christ-like."

So "in your face" to the person or persons you're mad at. Make that "righteously angry" at.

To that neighbor who doesn't move his trash, recycle and yard bins to the back of his house after collection day.

To the coffee shop barista who has given you the wrong order three – three! – days in a row.

To the volunteer at the parish who said she'd help with clean-up after the ...

Those people!

Instead of figs and the Temple, spend some time reflecting on and praying with these Scripture passages:

- Matthew 18:21-22: Peter asking Jesus about [forgiving](#) some repeat-offender yahoo. The answer ... darn! ... isn't seven but 77. (Infinity.) The evangelist didn't record Peter's response, but it's not hard to imagine a mumbled, "Are you kidding me?"
- Matthew 7:1-5: The speck of sawdust in their eye, the 2-by-4 in yours. Goodness, that Matthew wrote a lot of inconvenient passages.

2. Slow down that emotional prairie fire that can burst within you by counting to 10. Yes, you've heard that advice a million times. Don't get bent out of joint here. But do try it with a new twist based on your Church heritage: Latin. *Unus, duo, tres, quattuor, quinque, sex* ... What! Now it's getting interesting.

Or, taking another tack on the Roman Catholic life, say a Hail Mary. In your native language. Say it slowly. The [mother](#) of the Prince of (inner and outer) Peace is on your side.

She'll help you. She was without sin. Her Son was without sin. So imagine how trying it must have been at times for them. Dealing with people who were ... just like we are. People who can be so maddening.

While that Mother and Son never did it, no doubt they know how easy it would be, how tempting, to flare up and pounce on

someone. Some organization. Some [political party](#) or its members.

But “pouncing” might not be (read: probably is not) the best way, the most productive way, to deal with a person, organization, political party or its members.

It’s probably best to begin by being really, really subversive. That is, ask the Holy Spirit to give him, her or them wisdom. (No, not with tongues of fire over their heads.) Ask the Third Person of the Holy Trinity to help them be open to what he’s saying to them.

And ask the same for you.

He can multitask.

3. On a more serious note: It’s no joke if you or a loved one is dealing with serious anger issues. It can be tough for all of us to tamp down that spurt (or spray) of temper sometimes. But if losing control leads to doing things you regret or hurting others, it may be time to [seek professional help](#), for the good of others and yourself.

4. Change one word. Instead of “righteous anger,” think of it as “righteous passion.” That can eliminate the anger angle. Not that you aren’t angry, and rightly so, but it isn’t the first arrow you pull out of your quiver.

Here’s the hard stuff: Choose to want to help more than hurt. To educate, not humiliate.

No, that doesn’t mean you’re giving up and giving in. It means you’re doing what you can in a way that’s consistent with Christ’s solid teaching to ...

Sorry, but it has to be said: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (cf. Mt 5:44). Oh, come on, Matt! Give us a break.

Love, like calling on the help of the Holy Spirit, is also pretty subversive.

He, she or they may hold all the cards. Or so it seems. They have public sentiment on their side. They have funds, legal sharks, cold-hearted ...

[Keep praying for them.](#) Become a loving, anonymous insurrectionist. Not telling God what to do. Asking him to help them do what he's asking them to do.

That, coupled with what you can do openly to effect change.

5. It's not all your fault. *O Tempora. O Mores.*

No, that's not from Scripture. It's credited to the Roman statesmen and writer Cicero. "Oh, the times. Oh, the customs." As true in the 21st century as it was in the first century before Christ.

Never mind B.C., we now live in A.I. "After the Internet."

In so many ways, it's been a blessing. But then, too, in a heck of a lot of ways, it's really thrown a monkey wrench into how society functions. How people interact. How apparent knuckleheads and fame-seekers blast the world with their, well, less-than-pleasant and far-from-helpful, opinions, advice and actions to all who will read, listen or watch.

Aha! Two clues:

- Stay informed but don't battle trolls. "Do not answer fools according to their folly, lest you too become like them" (Prov 26:4). Updated, one translation could be: "Don't get sucked into online CAPITAL LETTER shouting matches."
- Swipe, click and power down, and they're gone.

So ...

Gently, patiently strive for inner peace and calm, and remember: In the end, truth wins. In the end, love wins.

Between now and the end? Try muttering a lovely Yiddish expression of dismay, frustration or grief: "Oy vey!"

*Bill Dodds writes from Washington.*

**Saintly advice on anger: 'Cool it!'**

“When you feel the assaults of passion and anger, then is the time to be silent as Jesus was silent in the midst of his ignominies and sufferings.”

– St. Paul of the Cross

“Be gentle to all and stern with yourself.”

– St. Teresa of Ávila

“The humble live in continuous peace, while in the hearts of the proud are envy and frequent anger.”

– Thomas à Kempis

“There is an anger which is engendered of evil, and there is an anger engendered of good. Hastiness of temper is the cause of the evil, divine principle is the cause of the good.”

– Pope St. Gregory the Great

“Many appear full of mildness and sweetness as long as everything goes their own way; but the moment any contradiction or adversity arises, they are in a flame, and begin to rage like a burning mountain.”

– St. Bernard of Clairvaux

“It is better to err by excess of mercy than by excess of severity.”

– St. John Chrysostom

“There is no sin nor wrong that gives a man a foretaste of hell in this life as anger and impatience.”

– St. Catherine of Siena



