

The Cure for  
Unjust Anger



### **SERIES EDITORS**

Joel R. Beeke & Jay T. Collier

Interest in the Puritans continues to grow, but many people find the reading of these giants of the faith a bit unnerving. This series seeks to overcome that barrier by presenting Puritan books that are convenient in size and unintimidating in length. Each book is carefully edited with modern readers in mind, smoothing out difficult language of a bygone era while retaining the meaning of the original authors. Books for the series are thoughtfully selected to provide some of the best counsel on important subjects that people continue to wrestle with today.

# The Cure for Unjust Anger

John Downname

Edited by  
Brian G. Hedges



**Reformation Heritage Books**  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

*The Cure for Unjust Anger*

© 2020 by Reformation Heritage Books

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. Direct your requests to the publisher at the following addresses:

**Reformation Heritage Books**

2965 Leonard St. NE

Grand Rapids, MI 49525

616-977-0889

orders@heritagebooks.org

www.heritagebooks.org

Originally published in 1600 as *Spiritual Physick to Cure the Diseases of the Soul, Arising from Superfluitie of Choller, Prescribed out of God's Word*

*Printed in the United States of America*

20 21 22 23 24 25/10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

---

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Downname, John, -1652, author. | Hedges, Brian G., editor.

Title: The cure for unjust anger / John Downname ; edited by Brian G. Hedges.

Other titles: Spiritual physick to cure the diseases of the soul, arising from superfluitie of choller, prescribed out of God's Word

Description: Grand Rapids, Michigan : Reformation Heritage Books, 2020. |

Series: Puritan treasures for today | "Originally published in 1600 as *Spiritual Physick to Cure the Diseases of the Soul, Arising from Superfluitie of Choller, Prescribed out of God's Word.*" | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020011007 (print) | LCCN 2020011008 (ebook) | ISBN

9781601787675 (paperback) | ISBN 9781601787682 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Anger—Religious aspects—Christianity—Early works to 1800. | Christian life—Puritan authors—Early works to 1800.

Classification: LCC BV4627.A5 D685 2020 (print) | LCC BV4627.A5 (ebook) | DDC 241/3—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2020011007>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2020011008>

---

*For additional Reformed literature, request a free book list from Reformation Heritage Books at the above regular or e-mail address.*

*He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty;  
and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.*

—Proverbs 16:32



## *Table of Contents*

Preface. . . . .	ix
Introduction. . . . .	1
1. The Nature of Anger . . . . .	3
2. Righteous Anger . . . . .	15
3. Unjust Anger. . . . .	33
4. Internal Causes of Unjust Anger. . . . .	39
5. External Causes of Unjust Anger . . . . .	49
6. The Properties of Unjust Anger . . . . .	55
7. The Different Kinds of Unjust Anger. . . . .	61
8. The Evil Effects of Unjust Anger. . . . .	75
9. Removing the Causes of Unjust Anger. . . . .	89
10. Subduing Anger by Laboring for Patience. . . . .	99
11. Remedies to Cure Unjust Anger . . . . .	107
12. Remedies to Cure Anger in Others . . . . .	119
Conclusion . . . . .	125





## *Preface*

There is a big difference between knowing there is a problem and knowing how to solve it. This is true in every realm of life, not least the medical.

When my oldest son was ten years old, he became very ill. My wife, Holly, and I noticed his lethargy, loss of appetite, and increasingly washed-out, sickly appearance. Holly quickly took him to our pediatrician, who diagnosed him with a mild, passing virus. He would be better in a few days.

But he wasn't. He was getting worse, so Holly took him again. They ran a couple of tests, found nothing wrong, and sent Stephen home. But by Friday of that week, he was just skin and bones. Our usually extroverted, fun-loving ten-year-old was stuck on the couch with no energy and no appetite, his face more pallid by the day. We were very concerned. Holly called the pediatrician again and, refusing to be put off for the weekend, insisted on bringing him in that afternoon. This time I went with her.

Once again, the pediatrician on call could find nothing wrong. Then she decided to do a urinalysis. After a few minutes, she asked if we had a history of diabetes in the family, then left us again for a few minutes. Naturally alarmed, we started reading about symptoms of diabetes on WebMD. Before the doctor returned, we knew that Stephen had DKA—diabetic ketoacidosis.

His life was in danger. His pancreas had stopped producing insulin, the hormone necessary for processing carbohydrates and utilizing sugar in the body. His blood sugar and ketones were dangerously high, his blood was acidic, and his internal organs were not functioning properly. The doctor sent us straight to the hospital—and straight to the pediatric unit. “Don’t go home, don’t collect two hundred dollars,” she said. We weren’t even to go through registration and admitting. Stephen was very, very sick and needed immediate attention.

Next was the short, sobering trip to the hospital; then, several hours of waiting for some assurance that our son would be okay; and finally, a clear diagnosis: Stephen had type 1 diabetes. And then we had a crash course in how to manage this disease.

As I write, Stephen is now seventeen, is managing diabetes well, and is back to his extroverted, fun-loving personality in every way. The Lord was merciful and has even used diabetes to help draw Stephen into a deeper dependence on Christ. But our experience reinforced for us a truth that every person must learn: clear

diagnosis is essential for proper treatment. The reason Stephen languished with DKA for almost a week was because the doctors and nurses who first saw him misdiagnosed his symptoms. I'm so thankful that Holly's "mom-sense" outweighed their reluctance to see him for that third visit, pushing them to look deeper for the cause of his symptoms.

*Clear diagnosis is essential for proper treatment.* This is as true in the spiritual life as it is in the physical. For when the maladies of the soul are misdiagnosed, moral mischief and mayhem are sure to follow. Unmortified sin always breeds more sin. Mismanaged soul-care is spiritual malpractice. And that is one reason the Puritans are so valuable today.

### **The Puritans and Soul-Care**

No era in the history of Christ's church has left us with a greater wealth of literature on Christian soul-care than that of the seventeenth-century English Puritans. The Puritans were pastor-theologians extraordinaire. As theologians, they mined the depths of the sacred Scriptures with profound reverence for their divine authority and an earnest desire to elucidate the whole of God's truth for all of God's people. And as pastors, they consistently kept in view the fourfold purpose (or use) for which Scripture was given—namely, "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16).

In J. I. Packer's words, the Puritans "were men of outstanding intellectual power, as well as spiritual insight. In them mental habits fostered by sober scholarship were linked with a flaming zeal for God and a minute acquaintance with the human heart. All their work displays this unique fusion of gifts and graces."<sup>1</sup> This is especially evident in *The Cure for Unjust Anger*, this newly titled modernization of John Downame's practical treatise, first published in 1600 as *Spiritual Physick to Cure the Diseases of the Soul, Arising from Superfluitie of Choller, Prescribed out of God's Word*.

Downame belonged to the earlier generation of Puritans and is lesser known today than those of the mid-seventeenth century, such as Richard Baxter, Thomas Watson, and John Owen. He was born in 1571 during the reign of Elizabeth I, educated at Christ's College, Cambridge, and served as both a vicar and rector from 1601 to 1618. He did not marry until 1623, when he was wed to the widow of Thomas Sutton, Catherine, with whom he had seven children. A popular preacher as well as an editor and a licenser of books, Downame was also involved in examining candidates for ordination.

Downame died in London in 1652, having authored ten books, including a Bible concordance; several practical treatises on the sins of lying, swearing, drunkenness,

---

1. J. I. Packer, *The Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2012), 29.

whoredom, and bribery; lectures on the first four chapters of Hosea; and his most famous book, *The Christian Warfare*, published in four parts from 1609 to 1618. But his short, diagnostic manual on “choller” (that is, anger) was his first. According to Packer, “Downname stands with Perkins, Greenham, and Richard Rogers as one of the architects of the Puritan theology of godliness.”<sup>2</sup>

### **The Value of This Book**

Downname’s treatise on anger is a brief, but valuable book marked by three features: clarity, practicality, and piety.

#### *Clarity*

Readers will quickly note that Downname approaches his topic with a methodical, analytical mind. The great physician-turned-preacher D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones often spoke of the importance of moving from the general to the specific when analyzing a problem. Downname takes a similar approach. As a skilled physician of souls, he begins by carefully defining anger and distinguishing righteous anger from that which is unjust (chapters 1–3). He then proceeds to consider the properties, causes, kinds, and effects of unjust anger (chapters 4–8). Then he prescribes remedies for the cure of sinful anger

---

2. As quoted in Joel Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2007), 188. For a brief biographical sketch of Downname, see pages 187–89 in *Meet the Puritans*.

by marshaling out practical strategies for both preventing and overcoming unjust anger in its different forms (chapters 9–12). As I worked through these chapters, I could not help but think of people who would greatly benefit from reading them. And as these chapters worked through me, I could not help but be convicted of my own sins in the realm of anger.

### *Practicality*

I've already hinted at the practical value of Downame's treatise, but allow me to say two more things. First, Downame writes as a skilled practitioner who has assembled a comprehensive moral and spiritual pharmacy for treating sin-sick souls. His counsel bears the marks of proverbial wisdom as he ransacks the Scriptures for both principles and examples that illustrate truth. Downame knows his Bible well, freely quoting from the Gospels, the Epistles, Wisdom literature, and both Old and New Testament narratives. But not only that, he also freely employs the best stories and maxims from classical moral and ethical philosophers such as Seneca, Plato, and Plutarch. The result is that Downame writes with what I can only call sanctified moral sanity.

This leads to the second thing: Downame's incisive ability to cut through the complexities of anger and provide simple but effective strategies for prevention and cure. Some writers are so simple as to be naïve while others are so complex that they lose the forest for the trees.

Rare is the author who understands the complexity of an issue yet can still prescribe clear, actionable solutions. Downname is such an author. He knows, for example, that the body affects the mind, and vice versa. Further, his book reveals a clear understanding of the role habits play in forming character (an area that is currently receiving much attention in both Christian and secular literature). On top of this, he has a clear grasp of how relational dynamics (especially in the home) can aggravate and reveal our unique proclivities toward sin. But while he “gets” the complexity of our emotions, he is also able to clearly and simply apply the truth to the heart.

### *Piety*

And yet Downname is not a moralist! Moral sanity? Yes. Moralism? No. Unlike so much popular psychology today (even of the religious variety), Downname is not content to simply prescribe things to do. He is not a superficial physician, and he does not heal the wounds of God’s people slightly (see Jer. 6:14). On the contrary, he deeply probes our wounds, showing that the heart of anger is a matter of the heart itself—the heart that is not only *diseased*, but *dead* in sin—and in need of regeneration, repentance, and sincere faith in Christ’s atoning work on the cross. Genuine change, therefore, is wholly dependent on God’s saving grace. “Where there was once a corrupt spring gushing forth in polluted streams of sin into the deep gulf of eternal perdition,”

Downname writes, “now there is a fountain of life leading them to depart from the snares of death (Prov. 14:27).”<sup>3</sup> In other words, *The Cure for Unjust Anger* is a book not only marked by clarity and practicality; it is also marked by piety, “that reverence joined with love of God which the knowledge of his benefits induces,” of which Calvin wrote.<sup>4</sup> It is this combination of clarity, practicality, and piety that makes *The Cure for Unjust Anger* such an exceptionally helpful book.

### A Note on the Editing

*The Cure for Unjust Anger* is a modernized version of the original seventeenth-century book. In the course of editing, I have replaced archaic terms with contemporary words, broken down long (often paragraph-length) sentences into shorter sentences, and clarified obsolete idioms and illustrations. I have also added headings and subheadings, organized the material into twelve chapters instead of the original ten, and added explanatory footnotes as needed. Downname quoted often from classical authors, such as Seneca and Plutarch, usually in Latin, followed by his own translation. For these quotations, I have removed the Latin and have instead used English translations available to modern readers, which

---

3. See p. 70 of this book.

4. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1.2.1.



are documented in the footnotes. While I have removed a few passages that seemed tangential, confusing, or inappropriate to modern readers, I believe the work as it now stands remains faithful in both scope and substance to Downname's original book.

My prayer is that *The Cure for Unjust Anger* will be useful not only to pastors and counselors but also to ordinary believers who desire to overcome unjust anger and live in the relational harmony that is possible only through God's grace in Christ and the Spirit.

—Brian G. Hedges



## *Introduction*

In considering the universal infection of the contagious disease of unjust anger in the soul, along with the manifold and pernicious evils it produces in both private and public, I thought it would be helpful to prescribe some remedies from God's Word for those patients committed to my care. May these remedies help either to (1) preserve them from these fever-like fits which cause people to outwardly tremble as they are inwardly inflamed or (2) calm their heated emotions if they have already fallen into sinful anger.

At first, I thought to communicate these remedies only to those under my own care. But I was persuaded by more skillful physicians than myself that publishing them might be helpful for others. Therefore, since I desire nothing more than to use my poor gifts for God's glory and the benefit of my fellow servants for whose good they are given, I have agreed to their request.

In view of this, though I had sketched only a rough, unpolished draft, I was happy to review this work,

changing and adding things to make it more suitable for the press than for the pulpit. If anyone thinks I have been too hasty in this, I hope they will excuse me when they consider that I've applied my small skill not to the vital parts of the soul but to the affections, and yet the curing of the affections (or this one in particular) may greatly benefit the whole soul. Just as a disease in the feet affects the whole body, so it is when distempered affections are infected with the contagion of original sin. And just as healing the feet brings comfort to the person as a whole, so also will purging corruption from the affections bring peace to the higher parts of the soul, the understanding and will. Seeing then that great good with little danger can result from this, I have ventured to offer this cure. I am content to undergo the censure of too much haste from some who are, I fear, much too slow in these situations. My purpose is to use all my skills to benefit many.

May the Lord, who is the only true Physician for sin-sick souls, bless this and my other endeavors to make them profitable for the setting forth of His glory, the benefit of my brethren, and furthering the assurance of my own salvation. Amen.

## CHAPTER 1

# *The Nature of Anger*

*Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.*

—Ephesians 4:26

The miserable ruins of our excellent state at creation and the foul spots of original corruption appear nowhere in the body or soul as clearly as in the affections. These ruins are the lamentable effects following our first parents' sin, and these spots are like a contagious leprosy that has spread from them to infect all their descendants, resulting in affections so corrupted and disordered that only the smallest relics of humanity's created purity remain. And this is why the heathen philosophers plainly discerned the great corruption of our disordered affections—even though they didn't perceive how the foggy mists of original sin had dimmed and darkened the bright shining beams of reason and understanding, the excellence of which they highly extolled. In fact, some of them, swayed with too much

vehemence in speaking against the affections, have condemned them as evil in their own nature and therefore to be wholly abandoned, seeing there was no hope to amend them. Others, with greater discernment concerning the difference between the affections themselves and their corruption, have written whole treatises on reforming the affections. They esteemed the ordering and governing of these disordered and tumultuous passions to be the very perfection of wisdom.

Even the heathen philosophers, walking in the darkness of ignorance and error and enlightened with only the glimmering spark of natural reason, could both discern the corruption of the affections and study to reform them, bringing them under the rule of reason. How much more earnestly should we endeavor not merely to subject them to natural reason (which is but a blind leader) but to reform and purify them by God's word? For God's word, like the glorious sun having dispelled the foggy mists of ignorance and error, has exposed the deformities of our affections far more clearly than blind reason.

We should earnestly labor to reform all our affections, but especially anger, which is the most turbulent and violent affection if not bridled and restrained. I have chosen this text to help us in this good endeavor in order to show the ways in which anger is to be approved and embraced and the respects in which it should be avoided and shunned.

In handling this text, I will first show the meaning of the words and then break them down into their various parts. And in showing the meaning of the words, I will first define what anger is, then distinguish between the different kinds of anger.

### The Definition of Anger

Anger is an affection in which someone is moved to retaliation in response to a perceived injury<sup>1</sup> or injustice. The injury in question may be either a true injustice or only an injury in one's perception, and it may be an injury against oneself or one's friends, relatives, or some other group.

There are two Greek words for anger, *thumós* and *orgē*. *Thumós* denotes the displeasure itself, while *orgē* often suggests the desire for retaliation, the indignation directed toward the perceived injury. Together, these words contain the material and formal causes of anger: the material cause is the disturbance itself (*thumós*), while the formal cause is the appetite for retaliation or revenge for the injury (*orgē*). The most common word for anger in Hebrew is *aph*, a term that signifies the nose or nostrils and, by a synecdoche,<sup>2</sup> the whole face. The word

---

1. By "injury" Downname does not mean primarily a physical injury, but any kind of wrong or offense committed against another person.

2. A *synecdoche* is a figure of speech in which a part represents the whole.

suggests anger because anger is often expressed and quickly discerned through vehement facial expressions. Our English word *anger* is derived from the Latin word *angor*, which signifies strangulation or choking as well as mental distress, grief, and anguish. This is because immoderate anger often produces both of these effects, tormenting both the mind and body.

And anger is an affection, for the whole essence of a human being consists in these three things: body, soul, and affections. Anger is an affection that participates in the body and soul as well. It is not a property of the soul only, for the emotion itself arises and is felt in the body. But it is not a property of the body alone, for the affection is provoked by a perceived injury, and this more properly belongs to the soul. I therefore call anger a mixed affection, proceeding from both body and soul.

### **The Different Kinds of Anger**

Having provided this general definition, we can now consider the different kinds of anger. First, there is the natural affection of anger, an expression of human nature as created by God. Second, we will consider this affection as it has been corrupted by original sin since the fall. And third, we will consider this affection as it is renewed and sanctified by God's Spirit.



Unlike the Stoics, we do not confuse these three expressions of anger.<sup>3</sup> We do not condemn all expressions of anger without making distinctions between them. For no matter how turbulent and pernicious this affection is when it is corrupted, we must hold that the natural affection itself, as created by God and to whatever degree it is renewed and sanctified by God's Spirit, is just, holy, and lawful.

We can easily prove this with a variety of reasons. First, this affection is created by God and was a part of human nature prior to the fall, before evil entered into the world. Uncorrupted human nature, being the Lord's own workmanship, was approved by God as "very good" (Gen. 1:31). It therefore follows that this affection in its own nature should be esteemed as good and lawful.

Second, anger, or wrath, is often attributed to God Himself in Scripture: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (Rom. 1:18). "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). Since it is ascribed to God, and since His

---

3. Stoicism was a system of moral philosophy founded by Zeno in the fourth century BC. While Downname critiques the Stoic rejection of all forms of anger, he also favorably quotes Seneca, one of the most famous Stoic philosophers, multiple times throughout this book. It is clear that Downname rejects Stoicism as a system yet is still able to affirm the value of certain aspects of its moral teaching.