

Proverbs 15:1, 18.
Ephesians 4:25-32

Sept. 26, 2021

Have you ever been angry ... angry at someone, angry at some group, angry at something, angry at some event ... or angry at yourself? Have you ever been angry at God? I do not personally know anyone today, nor anyone from my past, who has not been angry at one time or many times in their life. How about you? Anger is a universal human emotion. Quite often it comes with a cost. When we don't count the cost before we let loose our anger, we often regret it.

Anger is an emotion, like other human emotions, and we can learn to control it or channel it so that it does not destroy us and those around us. For there is a cost that comes with unbiblical anger. ... *because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires*, James 1:20.

Righteous Anger

Though the Bible is clear that anger often causes trouble, it also shows us that not all anger is wrong. There is such a thing as righteous anger. Righteous anger is an anger that arises when we witness "an offense against God or His Word."

When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain, Exodus 32:19. Moses' anger here is reflection of God's anger. Anger is one of the attributes of God and is spoken of over one hundred times in the Bible. God's anger is kindled when His people spurn His love and guidance and do terrible things as a result. *Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and aroused my anger by all the idols their hands have made, my anger will burn against this place and will not be quenched*, 2 Kings 22:17. Why is God angry at people who follow other gods? Because they are no gods, but expressions of their own selfish desires and by spurning the one, true God they are choosing a path of their own destruction. It might be similar to a parent who is angry at a child who has foolishly ignored advice and so put him/herself in grave danger.

We know that God never sins, yet the Bible speaks often of his anger toward sin and disobedience. We know also that there are times when anger is justified. When we see people hurting other people, be it near or abroad, that ought to make us angry. If we sit idly by while the world goes to hell, if we don't get angry, if we don't weep, if we don't care, then something is wrong deep inside us.

Righteous anger cares about others. It decries what sin does to a person's life. Nevertheless, the Bible warns us: *In your anger do not sin*, Ephesians 4:26. Knowing that our own hearts can deceive us, we must be careful and humble about claiming righteous anger, for even righteous anger can lead us astray. We must ask: what can result from my anger? Will my anger produce actions that make the world a better place? Will it help bring people to hear the Gospel in a loving way? Or will my anger demean, isolate, or punish someone? Will it cause someone to potentially stray away from the faith because of my words and actions? It is better to surrender to the Holy Spirit, who can calm the fires of our anger and filter our emotions through God's way for responding to others.

Causes of Anger

Anyone who has been hurt, slighted, disparaged, demeaned, snubbed or in any way diminished by another or by a “system” likely knows what it is to feel anger. Who or what has caused you to be angry lately? There is an old saying that goes something like this: “The measure of a man is what it takes to make him angry.”

Anger can arise when one of our loved ones is deliberately or negligently hurt – either physically, emotionally, or spiritually. Lawsuits are often borne out of such anger ... and sometimes they’re justified.

Did you know that anger can also arise from ingratitude? Those who have been parents understand this. Give the child everything he/she desires, respond to every whim and demand and what results? A child that expects always to be catered to. Soon resentment grows within that little heart and when his/her demands are not met they become angry. You’ve seen children like this and we usually call them “spoiled.” It can happen in adults as well. Ingratitude is an ingredient in the anger some have toward God. They didn’t get what they wanted, and neglect all the good God gave, even when they didn’t deserve it. When the honor, recognition, privileges, payment, or income that someone feels entitled to, is not forthcoming, anger often sets in. Ever feel angry because you thought you deserved and you didn’t get?

Handling Your Anger

Years ago, I had a friend who used to say, “You can get an arrow in the back anytime. What counts is what you do about it.” *Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil, Psalm 37:8.* Sure that’s a fine word from the psalmist, but ... easier said than done.

Yes, anger is a universal human emotion. It arises within us unbidden and uncontrolled, unless we recognize it for what it is. It is an emotion that can lead us to say and do things we later regret. Anger is what caused Cain to kill Abel. Anger is what stopped Moses from going into the Promised Land. And anger will stop your purpose and your assignment. So, we just have to figure out what to do with it. It's not a question of if you get angry, it's what to do when you do get angry. Here’s some thoughts:

1. Face your anger. If you are unaware that you get angry, or are angry, or have been angry ... or you just don’t want to think about it, or are ashamed of your anger so you bury it ... then your anger will continue to be your boss. Your responses to difficulties, insults, slights, and disagreements will not be reasonable and responsible if they are driven by this emotion. Get hold of your anger, or it will get hold of you.

Proverbs 16:32: *Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.* In the ancient world, warriors were the heroes. They were superstars in Israel. When men came back from battle, the women wrote songs in their honor. In the O.T. book of 1 Samuel there is the saga of Saul, first king of Israel, and his friendship, turned to deadly competition, with David. They both battled Israel’s enemy, the Philistines. They were heroes, but when people began singing a little ditty about their exploits, things went sour in their relationship. *Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands,* 1 Samuel 18:7. Saul’s jealous anger was stirred when he

realized that David had become more popular than he. In fact, his anger drove him to attempt to murder David. His anger got the better of him and it finally destroyed him and his whole family.

2. Take an inventory. Who or what made you or makes you angry? After you've identified the catalyst, measure yourself and your response according to Scripture. Galatians 5:22-23 lists the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Do you respond with those traits? Ephesians 4:31-32 advises on which emotions and responses to avoid and which ones to practice. Do a de-brief with yourself or a trusted friend. In time you'll be able to pause even in the midst of conflict or disagreement and assess yourself and respond calmly.

3. Seek reconciliation. Pray for the one who has made you angry. If nothing else your heart changes toward them. Remember Jesus' advice? *You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'* But I tell you, *love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*, Matthew 5:43-44 (See also Proverbs 25:21.) Look for opportunities to help that person. Make yourself approachable to that person. Look for gestures of reconciliation from the person. Be ready to accept reconciliation when it is offered. Be willing to admit that you could have misunderstood some things and even exacerbated some situations. Nevertheless, grasp the sober realization that you cannot control that person's behavior. You have to give it over to The Lord.

4. Yield your life to the Holy Spirit. It says in Ephesians, *In your anger do not sin*, Eph. 4:26. Don't let anger push you into more problems and bad behavior. *For as churning cream produces butter, and as twisting the nose produces blood, so stirring up anger produces strife*, Proverbs 30:33.

Now Ephesians 4:26 goes on to say: *Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry*. In other words, don't go to bed angry. Even if your anger is justified, don't go to sleep that way. Deal with it, talk it out, pray it out, walk it out, but don't try to sleep it out. That never works. You'll likely wake up the next morning already simmering. If you don't deal with your anger, it will settle deep in your heart and harden like concrete.

Some people like to hold on to their anger. It gives them a perverse pleasure, I guess, a sense of control over the other person or situation, maybe. But anger held onto distorts the personality, squeezes out the joy, painting every part of your life with unhappiness. That's why the very next verse in Ephesians is a warning: *Do not give the devil a foothold*, Ephesians 4:27. Satan is always looking for a foothold in your heart and anger is his opportunity. He wants to use your anger, even your legitimate anger to get a foothold from which to influence all areas of your life. Don't let him. Turn to the Holy Spirit. Ask the Holy Spirit to enter your life. Allow the Holy Spirit a foothold. Say, "Holy Spirit I surrender to you now. Teach me self-control." Then pause, wait, don't speak.

Holiness Your Aim

In handling your anger, your goal is to prevent your anger from handling you. This goal is the same goal as in every area of our lives: holiness of heart and life. Last week I said that the destined end of humanity, of you and me, is not happiness, nor health, nor success, nor wealth ... but holiness (1st Peter 1:16).

Holiness begins by accepting Christ as your Savior – realizing that you can't get all the sin in your life under control, let alone purged, without His help. The next step is to invite the Holy Spirit to begin renewing your spirit to become more like our Savior's. Real self-control is rooted in Holy Spirit control. *Mockers stir up a city, but the wise turn away anger, Proverbs 29:8.* With Holy Spirit power, in time you'll be able to turn away from anger without even thinking about it.

Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools, Eccl. 7:9.