

Take Authority Over Your Anger in a God-Pleasing Way

In the comments on my blog, I've read that some of you are struggling with anger issues, so I feel led to write about biblical solutions for that.

Anger occurs when you feel as though your rights have been violated or your expectations have not been met, or you are outraged about an injustice that involves others.

Even God the Father and Jesus expressed anger.

However, many people don't feel comfortable dealing with that emotion; instead they keep their mouths closed while seething inside. But keeping anger inside is like a pot on the stove set to boil. Just like that pot will eventually boil over, so does the woman.

And too often, it's the people closest to them who get burned!

While anger itself is not a sin, there are godly and ungodly ways to deal with it. In this article, I'll cover some principles of Christian anger management. First, let's look at what Jesus says about anger:

"You have heard that it was said by the ancients, 'You shall not murder,' and 'Whoever murders shall be in danger of the judgment.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca,' shall be in danger of the Sanhedrin. But whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you" (Matt. 5:21-23).

Jesus tells us that before anger is expressed outwardly, it

started in that person's heart inwardly. As I read this passage, I saw something I've never seen before.

When you add a "d" in front of the word 'anger,' what do you get? Danger! Jesus used the word "danger" three times in his description of the consequences of anger.

He even prioritized pursuing peace with others above bringing a sacrifice to God! Mark 11:25 makes it even clearer:

"And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

With this background, let's look at the story of brothers Cain and Abel, the first instance of a person's anger in the Bible (Gen. 4:3-8). In this case, lack of anger management had deadly consequences:

"In the course of time Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground. Abel also brought the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had respect for Abel and for his offering, but for Cain and for his offering, He did not have respect. And Cain was very angry and his countenance fell. The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your countenance fallen? If you do well, shall you not be accepted? But if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. It desires to dominate you, but you must rule over it. Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him."

From Jesus' words, we know that anger begins in the heart. So the murder of Abel was conceived in Cain's heart.

Here are the facts:

1. Cain brought an offering to the Lord.

2. Abel brought an offering to the Lord.
3. God respected Abel and his offering.
4. God did not respect Cain and his offering.
5. Cain became angry.
6. The Lord asked Cain why he was angry, then gave him instructions as to how he could gain the Lord's respect.
7. Cain talked with Abel. Time passed and Cain killed Abel.

Cain was angry with God. Did his anger have a cause? No, it did not. So when you are angry, you should always ask yourself "Why am I angry?" to determine if you have a legitimate cause for it.

Many of our negative emotions are birthed in lying thoughts. Cain apparently felt that God had wronged him because He did not respect him and his offering. But the Lord's question "Why are you angry?" tells us that there was no cause for Cain's anger.

The Lord told Cain that if he did well, he would have been accepted. Cain did not respond to God's instruction. That tells me that Cain had a prideful heart and was not teachable. It appears he was not bringing an offering to the Lord out of love; rather, it seems he was just going through the motions, perhaps because of his parent's expectations or he was just doing it because Abel did.

If Cain had been humble and was concerned with pleasing God, he would have asked Him: "Lord, what do you mean 'if I do well?' What am I doing wrong? How can I do better?"

I believe that if Cain had a sincere heart to please God, then God would have answered these questions.

Instead, God told Cain that sin was crouching at the door.

Sounds like danger to me! However, the Lord also said that Cain should rule over it. Rule means “to take authority.” The Lord would not have told Cain to do something that Cain did not have the ability to do.

This is an important principle. We have the power to take authority over anger. Too often, we let anger get out of control because it feels good to our flesh to do so. But as Christians, that is no longer an option because we are submitted to Jesus’ lordship.

Our heart should always be set on peace—peace with God, peace with ourselves, and peace with our fellow man as we are in position to make it.

In Cain’s case, he did not rule over sin in his heart—the desire to murder. Because he could not take his anger out on God, he took it out on Abel. Abel did nothing wrong.

Cain expressed his anger outwardly and danger was the result. He ended up a marked man, separated from God and receiving judgment.

Cain is an example of how not to manage anger. Let’s look at advice from Psalm 4:4 for advice on how to manage anger.

“Be angry, and do not sin. Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, And put your trust in the Lord.”

Here are some points to keep in mind:

1. Be angry ... It is OK to feel the emotion of anger. However, always assess it to discover if there is a cause. If you are angry and can’t identify a reason for it, consider it an attack from the enemy. Submit your feelings to God in prayer or even write Him a letter about it. Ask God to open up your spiritual eyes so that you can see the truth of what is happening. Believe that you have God’s peace within and pursue

that peace rather than indulging your flesh through unwarranted anger.

2. **... and do not sin.** If your anger has a cause, then ask yourself, "How have my expectations not been met?" or "How do I feel my rights have been violated?" If the anger comes from unmet expectations, were your expectations reasonable? Did this person have the ability, knowledge or will to meet your expectations?

Sometimes people can have expectations, but the other person has no idea that you had them. You were expecting them to read your mind! Make sure that the other person is at least aware of your expectations if you have them. Otherwise, it is not fair for you to expect something of them that you never bothered to tell them about.

If they lack knowledge about how to meet your expectations, could you supply the knowledge to assist them? If they lack the will, then you have a decision to make. Depending on the relationship, you may decide to limit your association with them or lower your expectations.

Were your rights violated? If you are in a place to do so, be assertive with the other person and state the facts about what happened and then set boundaries regarding the expected behavior.

Once again, your goal is to make peace so that a spirit of offense will not take hold. You don't want to act in a way that will be a stumbling block to someone else coming to the Lord.

Finally, if you are angry about an injustice that doesn't involve you directly, then pray for the situation for God's justice to manifest. Then pray to ask the Lord if there is anything you can do personally about the situation and for Him to give you the courage and/or resources to take action.

3. Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still. Make it a regular practice to take your thoughts captive to the obedience of Jesus Christ. That way, when situations happen that can spark your anger, it will be second nature to shift your thinking to those things that are acceptable to the Lord according to Philippians 4:8:

“Finally, brothers, whatever things are true, whatever things are honest, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue, and if there is any praise, think on these things.”

Take moments in your day to just “Be still and know that He is God.” If you are always running around and don’t stop to catch your breath, then the life’s pressures can make you short-tempered and more prone to use anger as a release valve.

4. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and “put your trust in the Lord.” You are the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 5:21).

Even though it is tempting to let your flesh have its way, act in accordance with your true identity and put your flesh on the altar:

“I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service of worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:1-2).

Trust that if justice must be meted out, God will vindicate you:

“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘Vengeance is Mine. I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Rom. 12:19).

The way to give place to God's wrath is to bring it under the Lord's authority in prayer. Let Him give you wisdom as to how to deal with your anger in a way that pleases Him.

Only then can you experience His peace, which surpasses all understanding. His peace will guard your heart and mind through Christ Jesus. {eoa}

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