

Concerning Anger

Ephesians 4:26-27 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

²⁶ *BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger,* ²⁷ *and do not give the devil an opportunity.*

Introduction

Anger plays a big part in human lives. Sometimes, more than we wish it to. When we express our anger in rage and vengeance, it negatively affects us and our families. We often regret it as we pay for the unpleasant consequences. E.g. Kicking the tree in rage may break your toes.

Before I go further, I want you to understand one thing: Although the ways in which we express/handle anger can cause us to sin, *anger itself is not a sin*. In fact, it is normal for us to get angry at times for the following reasons: first, anger is part of our emotions. When God has created us in His image and likeness, He built in us anger as a natural part of our emotions. The other reason is that even the Creator Himself gets angry with some wicked people and at some types of sin and evil. For instance, in the Old Testament, the Israelites often provoked the LORD God to anger through their idol worship. In the New Testament, Lord Jesus Christ also got angry at hypocrisy, commercialism in God's temple, stubborn heart, and unbelief. The Bible calls such anger righteous anger.

Remember that God acknowledges the legitimacy of our anger. After all, doesn't the Bible command us to be slow to anger (James 1:19)? Or, be angry but not sin (Ephesians 4:26)? It's a matter of how we express and handle it.

Content

As long as we live in our physical body, we may not be able to avoid the occasions of being angered (e.g. *anger is ignited when the person feels rejected, essential needs are unmet, or convictions are violated—Carter and Minaret*). However, we can learn and stay disciplined in handling our anger both constructively and biblically so that we may live a healthy life without ruining our own lives or the relationships with others.

The Scripture identifies at least three ways in which we handle our anger.

First, vent. We vent our anger **on others**, especially **on our enemies**. This approach often makes us feel sweet. However, it is often uncontrolled and dangerous. Secondly, we

bury our anger deep in our hearts. Taking this approach, we ourselves later suffer its negative consequences. Thirdly, we **take our anger to the Lord**. This is the healthiest approach of all. Let's check them out one by one.

Anger on Others:

Many a people, Christians and non-Christians alike, take this approach. When wronged by others, they put the revenge in their own hands. This has been going on in human history as far as we can remember. For instance, consider Cain the first born of Adam and Eve. He was so consumed with envy that when they were alone in the field, he vented his rage on his brother Abel and killed him.

Revenge can be carried out in different ways (e.g. emotional, mental, financial, verbal and even physical punishment), however, the goal is always the same: that is, to get even and to bring punishment to those who have wronged us. We may feel good about putting the revenge in our own hands, but in reality, it often boomerangs on us (e.g. “eye for eye principle”—a story about two families losing all their sons one by one due to family vendetta).

Anger Buried within Us:

The next way to deal with anger is to bury deep down within us and suppress it. This can be not only subtle but also very destructive. We may hardly notice symptoms of anger outside. Furthermore, if you hold a grudge and pent up anger, it will harm you more than the perpetrator, because it eats you up from within and eventually affects your health such as cancer.

Experts point out two potential dangers of suppressed anger: *suicide* or *depression*. E.g. Prophet Jonah in the Old Testament is a typical example. In chapter 4 of Jonah, we find him a happy camper. One hot day Jonah was extremely happy with a plant that God had caused to grow up over his head. He was resting under the plant which provided a nice shade over his head that protected him from the scorching sun. On the following morning, however, to Jonah's great dismay, the plant withered, and the sun began to beat down on him mercilessly. So exhausted with heat was Jonah that he grumbled and begged God to let him die. In his anger, he said to the Lord, “Death is better to me than life!!!” (v. 8). The surface issue was the withered plant, but the real issue was this: Jonah was lashing out his anger that was buried deep in his heart. In other words, his death wish was not about the dead plant but about God's mercy that spared the Ninevites from destruction, the enemy of Jonah and the enemy of Israel.

Another example: a suicidal case of a man named Elliot. He was a victim of the Lincoln Savings & Loan Scandal in 1990. He lost \$200,000, his life savings, on worthless junk bonds. He became so bitter about the whole situation that he eventually took his own life (11/29/1990, the Lansing State Journal).

The second danger of suppressed anger is depression. Good example is Saul the King of Israel. He was the first king in Israel's history. At first, he was a fine king. He was a mighty warrior. He defeated many enemies in battle. Except one. Goliath—the 10-foot-tall giant from the Philistines the enemy of Israel. When David the youth killed Goliath and led Israel to victory, people shouted in the ears of Saul, “David killed more than Saul.” That comparison greatly upset King Saul and haunted him for the rest of his life. In fact, Saul got angry with his own inability and cowardice; he was so consumed with the envy of David's fame that he fell into depression and stayed in such misery for the rest of his life. The repressed shame, anger and jealousy inside surely trapped this fine king in permanent depression.

Anger into God's Hands:

How about the third option to handle our anger? That is to take anger to the Lord in prayer. Hand it over to God's mighty and trusty hands. In fact, this is the most healthy and constructive way to handle the anger. It may require faith, trust, patience, and discipline, but it surely is rewarding.

There are three ways in which the Lord wants us to handle our anger.

1. *Let God take over your anger.* The Bible clearly points out that it is God not we who should take revenge on our enemies. Listen to what God says, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay” (Romans 12:19).
2. *Overcome evil with good.* Pray for your enemies. Bless them in your prayers instead of cursing them. Do something good to them, especially when they are in trouble. Listen to the word of God again: “But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head” (Romans 12:20). Do not be overcome by anger, but overcome your anger with trusting the Lord and obeying His word.
3. *Reconcile after the exchange of angry arguments* (Ephesians 4:26-27). I truly believe more than half of the troubled relationships can be saved if we learn how to reconcile with each other after the arguments. Be reconciled before sunset each day. Practice it each time you have argument with your loved one. Have

your own mechanism of reconciliation. E.g. Mine is now 15 minutes (that is, to initiate reconciliation within 15 minutes after the argument stops).

Note: The Amish community in Nickel Mines, PA, practiced just like that when they lost their children to senseless shooting. They let God handle their anger. They forgave the perpetrator. And, they did it in the same day of shooting.

Conclusion

When it comes down to handling our anger, we take all three approaches: often we vent our anger on others. Sometimes we suppress it. Other times we take it to the Lord. Yet, folks, the bottom-line is this: the more we take our anger to the Lord in prayer, the better off will we be both spiritually and physically.

In my 30 years of ministry as pastor, I have seen some Christians preserve their relationships healthy with proper anger management. I have observed other God's children destroy their relationships through uncontrolled anger or lack of reconciliation. I have also seen people who have been carrying their anger deep inside for so many years until they get depressed. If you were one of those, today is the time to let go of your anger into God's hands and let Him handle that. God will do the best job, only if you let Him.

You can be angry, God says. But when you do, do it slow and make sure that you don't sin. You can be angry at your loved ones, God says. But when you do, reconcile before the day is over. You can be angry. But when you do, be sure not to give the devil any opportunity or foothold to cause you to sin more.

Let's pray.