

How to Control Your Anger

Romans 12:14-21 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. ¹⁷ Never repay evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all people. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all people. ¹⁹ Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written: “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. ²⁰ “But if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing, you will heap burning coals on his head.” ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

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

Last Sunday I talked about the A-B-C’s of how to handle our anger at God: *Avoid bad theology (be grounded in the Bible). Be humble in your anger (show your respect to God). Choose to trust in God not your own feelings.* Today we are going to think about how to control our anger towards each other.

Anger plays a big role in our lives. Sometimes, more than we wish it to. Expressed in a wrong way, it often negatively affects individuals, families, communities, even nations. Consider human history. Since the beginning of the world, many wars and personal conflicts are triggered by anger. E.g., Hitler (filled with bitterness in his growing years, he would fly into temper at the slightest things), Virginia Tech shooting, and so forth.

The distinctive role of anger in human life is also found in the Bible. For instance, words that are related to human anger appear 80 times in the Bible (cf. divine anger – 310 times). For your info, other words related to emotions are also found in the Bible: love (730), fear (‘afraid’ included - 540), joy/rejoice (230), sorrow (43), happy (36), sad (11), mad (7), and sorry (2).

One thing that I learned anew from my study on anger is that it is **normal for us to feel angry** at times. Here's why: first, even the LORD God Himself gets angry with wickedness and injustice. For example, the Lord was provoked to anger by **idol worship among His people Israel**. Our Lord Jesus Christ also got angry with people's **hypocrisy, commercialism** in God's temple, **stubborn heart**, and **unbelief**.

The other reason why we feel angry at times is because anger is a part of our emotions. That's how God created us. He built in us anger as part of our emotions; therefore, God acknowledges the legitimacy of our anger. After all, doesn't the Bible command us to be angry but not to sin (Ephesians 4:26)? **Anger itself is not a sin** (therefore, it is a bad theology to say that it is a sin to be angry). However, we are prone to express our anger in a destructive way that we need to be mindful on how we vent out our anger towards each other. That's what I am going to talk about this morning: how to handle our anger.

Content

So, let's begin with a question of 'What makes us angry?' Two authors, Les Carter and Frank Minirth, claim that anger is ignited when we feel **rejected**, when our essential needs are **unmet**, and when our convictions are **violated**. As long as we live in our physical body, we may not be able to entirely avoid occasions of being angered. However, we can learn how to handle our anger both constructively and biblically so that we may live a healthy life and to preserve our relationships with one another.

God's Word identifies three entities that we vent out our anger to; others, self, and God. Let's check them out one by one.

Vent out on Others: First, we **vent out** our anger **on others**, especially **on our enemies**. This anger often appears in the form of rage. This anger is uncontrolled and sometimes dangerous. This has been a long tradition in human history as far as we can remember. When people are wronged by others, they put revenge in their own hands. For instance, Cain (the first born of Adam and Eve) was so consumed with rage against his brother Abel that when they were alone in the field, he murdered his own brother.

Although the form of revenge can be different (emotional, mental, financial, verbal and even physical punishment), the goal is always the same: to get even and to bring some type of punishment to those who wronged us. It may seem fair to us to put the revenge in our own hands, but in reality, it may only worsen the situation (E.g., "eye for eye

principle”— the principle for recompensation, not for revenge. The Israeli/Palestinian situation).

Bury within: The next way to deal with anger is to bury it deep down within ourselves and suppress it. This can be not only subtle but also very destructive. Since we hide our anger deep inside, most of us hardly notice any symptoms of anger outside. In my humble opinion, this approach is more dangerous and harmful than the first approach, because it eats us up from within and eventually affects our health causing cancer.

Two potential dangers are associated with this approach: people who bury their anger within themselves can **either be suicidal or fall into depression**. E.g., Remember Jonah—“death is better to me than life! (Jonah 4:3,8)” E.g. 2, 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 burying anger within us is **depression**. A 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 warrior. He defeated many enemies in battle. Except one. Goliath—a 10-foot-tall giant from the Philistines. When David killed Goliath and led Israel to victory, the women sang as they played, saying, *“Saul has slain his thousands, And David his ten thousands.” Then Saul became very angry, for this lyric displeased him; and he said, “They have given David credit for ten thousands, but to me they have given credit for only thousands! Now what more can he have but the kingdom?”* (1 Samuel 18:7-8).

Such comparison haunted Saul for the rest of his life. So angry with his own inability and cowardice, King Saul was consumed with jealousy of David’s fame that he fell into depression and stayed in such misery for the rest of his life. The repressed anger and jealousy inside trapped this fine king in a permanent depression until he died.

Take It to the Lord in Prayer: How about the third approach to handle our anger? That is to take our anger to the Lord in prayer. In fact, this is the healthiest and the most constructive way to handle our anger. It may require faith, trust, discipline, and patience, but it surely is rewarding. If you would like to take this approach, listen to the following commands from the Lord. **S-L-O-W**.

1. **Slow to Anger** (James 1:19). Imitate God who is slow to anger. Remember the story of Moses? After the first tablets of the Ten Commandments were destroyed, Moses

went up to the Mountain to receive the Ten Commandments again from the Lord. Before the Lord wrote the Ten Commandments on the stone tablets, He passed by in front of Moses and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and merciful, **slow to anger**, and abounding in faithfulness and truth; (Exodus 34:6). Be compassionate with each other (Colossians 3:12). Learn from the LORD who doesn’t retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy (Micah 7:18). Slow to anger.

2. **Let Go and 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). Let go and let God.
3. **Overcome Evil with Good.** Pray for your enemies. Bless instead of cursing them (Matthew 5:44). 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 (E.g., Lee Joo-Yeol story, the one who persecuted me in my the Army for a year, yet in the end, he turned from foe to friend after I showed Christian love for him). Overcome evil with good.
4. **Work It out. Reconcile** after the exchange of angry arguments (Ephesians 4:26-27). I truly believe more than half of troubled marriages can be saved if the spouses learn how to reconcile with each other after the arguments. Do not give the devil an opportunity. Develop own strategy and stick to it. E.g., My strategy for reconciliation deadline is ‘15 minutes.’ Also, learn to separate the tone of the messenger from the message itself.

Conclusion

When it comes down to anger, we all take the three approaches: we vent our anger to others, or suppress and bury it deep in our sub-consciousness, or we take it to the Lord. Yet, the bottom-line is this: the more we take our anger to the Lord in prayer, and the less we vent out anger to others or self, the better off we are both spiritually and physically.

In my 35 years of ministry as pastor, I have observed some relationships destroyed through uncontrolled anger or lack of reconciliation. I’ve also seen people carrying their anger deep inside for years to the point where they got depressed or suicidal. 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. Start today. Let's pray.