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“Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath”
(Ephesians 4:26).

The Habit of Hostility

Central Truth: To control aggressive anger one must recognize it as a sin.

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Topic: Anger: Of Men.

Is it a sin to become angry? The Bible answers, “Yes and no,” Anger is a sin when it is aggressive, vindictive, and selfish. Anger is not a sin when it is opposition to a wrong rather than against a person.

Concerning sinful anger the Bible admonishes, “*Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath*” (Ephesians 4:26). Jesus demonstrated righteous anger when He “*looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts*” (Mark 3:5).

Whether your anger is sinful or not depends entirely on you. A “*righteous indignation*” is against wrong. Sinful anger is against persons.

Why do we have a study on anger? Because it is often a sin and because it can be controlled. If a man who is fussing at his wife picks up the telephone receiver and speaks kindly with the caller, he indicates that he could control his anger toward his wife if he tried. We excuse anger; God never does. Much anger that is manifest in human relationships is simply a form of selfishness expressing itself.

Pursue this study with this central truth in mind: “To control aggressive anger one must recognize it as a sin.”

I. DEFINITION OF ANGER

Anger is “a strong emotion of displeasure; a response to wounded love; emotional agitation aroused by great displeasure.”

Because it takes so many forms, we think of anger as being

synonymous with mad, bitter, sore, vexed, indignant, furious, provoked, irked, irritated, hostile, ferocious, vicious, and many other terms. Perhaps one problem in dealing with anger is that it expresses itself in so many different ways that it requires constant discipline to keep it from expressing itself.

But all anger is not bad. It becomes bad when its motive is wrong and its expression is wrong. Anger is attributed to God the Father who is “*angry with the wicked every day*” (Psalm 7:11). It is attributed to God the Son who looked with anger when He saw the heartlessness of religious men who had no concern for a poor crippled man but sought to use him to trap Jesus in some wrong act on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1-5). It is attributed to the Holy Spirit whose coming upon King Saul resulted in his anger being kindled against injustice (1 Samuel 11:6). God does not sin; yet He was angry. Therefore, there is an anger that is not sinful.

II. CAUSES OF ANGER

Many different things can arouse our anger. Some are wholesome and appropriate; some are base and unworthy. Can you identify with any of the following causes of anger?

A. Frustration can cause anger. We tend to be angry when we are blocked from our desires. Cain wanted God to accept him on his own terms, perhaps to accept him and reject Abel. When God accepted Abel and rejected Cain, Cain became angry enough to kill Abel and lie to God (Genesis 4:3-9). The prophet Jonah became so frustrated at his ministry in Nineveh that he became angry enough to die (Jonah 4:1-9). Such anger is sin.

B. Pain can cause anger. Job suffered the physical pain of “*sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown*” (Job 2:7). He suffered the emotional pain of accusation by his three “*friends*” who came “*to mourn with him and to comfort him*” (Job 2:11). Finally he cried out, “*How long will ye vex my soul, and break me in pieces with words?*” (Job 19:2). Ten times they had told him that his suffering was because of his sins (which none could name) and that God was punishing him. A person suffering pain may become irritated even with those who are trying to relieve him. Pain produces an emotional stress which might express itself in anger.

C. Anxiety can cause anger. One who is threatened with injury to himself or the loss of his possessions may lash out in anger at whatever he sees as a danger. That was probably why Peter tried to kill the servant of the high priest in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:47).

D. Injustice can cause anger. King Saul, thinking that his son Jonathan was betraying the family in befriending David, became so angry that he tried to kill his own son (I Samuel 20:30-34). David afterwards became so angry with a man who had wronged his neighbor that he decreed death to him (II Samuel 12:1-6). You may be angered if you see a little child being abused by an adult or a poor person being wronged by a wealthy person. God himself becomes angry at the sins of injustice.

E. Jealousy can cause anger. When the women of Israel sang a song praising David more than they praised King Saul, the king became infuriated (I Samuel 18:7, 8). That jealousy grew until Saul left the affairs of the kingdom to chase David over the wilderness in an attempt to kill him. That is still a major cause of anger and ill will between people today. What makes you angry? When anger begins to arise in you, ask yourself the question, “Is it worth getting upset over?” It is said the grizzly bear can whip any animal alive except the buffalo and the Kodiak bear. Yet, he lets the skunk share his food. Why does he not drive it away? It is not worth what it would cost! Think of your anger that way and “*be ye angry, and sin not*” (Ephesians 4:26).

III. DAMAGE DONE BY ANGER

A. Anger can destroy relationships with other people. Words spoken or attitudes displayed in anger can create hurts which may last for years. Even an apology after the fact may not remove the hurt. Parents who deal with their children in a bitter spirit may influence personality development which will last a lifetime. A hand that is reached out often enough to punish will one day reach out to caress, only to see a child pull away from it. Think of the consequences before you permit anger to arise in your emotions.

B. Anger can create lasting guilt. Have you ever spoken a word in anger and quickly wished you might retract it? Have you ever looked back on things done in anger and wished you could erase them? Have you ever felt guilty because you overreacted in anger? Thank God, there is forgiveness for sins of anger the same as for any other sins. But many people do not seek forgiveness from God and those wronged by their anger. They bear a continuing sense of guilt. Is anger worth its cost in such a case?

C. Anger can make the body suffer. First Samuel 25 reports the death of Nabal, husband of Abigail. When his wife gave some supplies to David and his men (who were fleeing from the wrath of King Saul), Nabal became so angry that he died of a heart attack. That is not surprising, since the blood pressure rises from the emotion of anger. The physical body is not designed

to carry anger without damage. Beware!

D. Anger gives the devil opportunity to work. Ephesians 4:26, 27 warns, “*Be ye angry, and sin not: . . . neither give place to the devil.*” Cain became angry and killed Abel (Genesis 4). Moses became angry and broke the tablets of stone on which the law had been written by the finger of God (Exodus 32:19, 20). Saul became angry and tried to kill his own son (1 Samuel 20:30-33). Jonah became angry and asked to die (Jonah 4). Do you see how the devil works when people yield control of their actions to their emotions? Do not give the devil an opportunity to work through your anger.

IV. HOW TO BE ANGRY

There is a “right way” to be angry. It must be a righteous indignation against wrong, coupled with an appropriate action to correct the wrong.

A. Control your anger. Do not let it run free. Emotions must always be under the control of the reason. Otherwise, they may cause great damage to the innocent as well as the guilty. Your will is the key to the control of your anger.

B. Make no plans to retaliate. Jesus set the example. He did not return harsh words for harsh words or threatenings for pain, but He committed the affair to God (1 Peter 2:23). God says that we are never to take vengeance in our own hands but wait for Him to set things right (Romans 12,19).

C. Direct anger at the wrong, not at the person who does wrong. You can love yourself but hate the wrong you do. So you can love others even while you reject their errors. You have the love of God which loves sinners and hates sin. Cultivate that discipline of discerning the sin from the sinner.

D. Be unselfish. Be as angry at wrong done to others as you are at wrong done to you. That will be a “righteous indignation,” indeed. It will also be an indication that you love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:31). Such an attitude demands true spiritual maturity.

E. Respond with positive actions to right the wrong. Jesus tells us to interrupt our worship, if necessary, in order to settle an offense against a brother (Matthew 5:22, 23). It is never enough to regret a wrong, or to resolve never to do it again. There must be constructive actions to correct the problem, even after the damage has been done.

F. Make your anger of temporary duration. “*Let not the sun go down upon your wrath*” (Ephesians 4:26). Never go to bed angry. You must not carry the anger of one day into another. A smoldering anger held in the heart will wreak great injury to body, mind, and spirit. Settle it immediately.

G. Bear no grudge against the one who angered you. God commands, *“Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart. . . . Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge”* (Leviticus 19:17, 18). Ill will is a subtle sin which God strictly forbids. Forgiveness, not resentment, is the mark of a Christian spirit.

H. Remember God's grace to you. Since He has forgiven you so great a debt, how can you be His child and not forgive the lesser debts (Matthew 18:21-35)? It is better to show kindness beyond what is required to the person who would wrong you (Matthew 5:40-44). That will manifest the grace of God in you and recommend Him to the offender.

I. Trust God to set things right. Jesus suffered, *“but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously”* (I Peter 2:23). He did not commit the offenders to God with the spirit, “God, You punish them for what they do to Me.” He committed himself to God instead. Think of that. True forgiveness does not plan or wish for retaliation. It trusts God to give personal grace and do whatever is necessary to vindicate right.

J. Choose to forgive the one who wronged you. Yes, you “choose” to forgive. It is an act of the will. That is why you are commanded, *“Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you”* (Ephesians 4:32).

Begin each day by committing your mind, emotions, will, and body to God. Accept your circumstances as coming from God to develop in you the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 23). Confess as sin against God any loss of control, and immediately set things right with the other person involved! Ask God to give you wisdom to handle rightly the pressures you experience. Then you will *“be . . . angry, and sin not”* (Ephesians 4:26).

Questions

1. What is anger?
2. What is the difference between righteous indignation and sinful anger?
3. What causes one to become angry?
4. How can you obey the command of Ephesians 4:26?
5. What damage might anger cause?
6. How can you control your anger?
7. How can you obey Mark 12:31?
8. What does Jesus teach about forgiveness in Matthew 18:21-33?
9. How can you follow Jesus' example in I Peter 2:23?
10. What principle from this study can you put into effect this week?