Anger Conquered With Righteousness

Contributed by H.G. Bishop Youssef
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"Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" (James 3:18).

Introduction

The question frequently asked, "is anger a sin?" finds its answer in St. Paul's words to the Ephesians "Be angry, and do not sin, do not let the sun go down on your wrath" (Ephesians 4:26). Anger is a complex energy initiated by various attitudes such as impatience, unmet expectations, stress, and the like. It is an inevitable natural reaction to an undesirable situation. St. Paul did not say not to get angry. Rather, he urged us not to sin. Sinning resides in the way anger is expressed and the length of time it is allowed to dwell in the heart. For inappropriate expression of anger will displease God; and by time it will breed other types of undesirable sins. The Holy Bible is full of incidents where the negative emotion of anger had found its way in the heart. These incidents exemplified anger as being one of two types: justifiable and unjustifiable anger. While the former leads to spiritual rewards and kingdom-related fruits; the latter leads to external violence and internal bitterness.

Justifiable Anger

This type of anger referred to as "holy indignation" is represented in many incidents in the Holy Bible. In the Old Testament we read about God's holy indignation for His glory "My glory I will not give to another" (Isaiah 42:8), His Ark of the Covenant "And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. Then the anger of the Lord was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God" (2 Samuel 6:6,7), and for His people "So Moses and Aaron came in to Pharaoh and said to him, "Thus says the Lord God of the Hebrews: 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before Me? Let My people go, that they may serve Me" (Exodus 10:3).

Another example from the Old Testament is Moses' reaction to the Israelites worshipping of the golden calf; "So it was, as soon as he came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing. So Moses' anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. Then he took the calf which they had made, burned it in the fire, and ground it to powder; and he scattered it on the water and made the children of Israel drink it" (Exodus 32:19,20).

In the New Testament we read about our Lord Jesus Christ's indignation for His Father's house. "Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves'" (Mathew 21:12,13).

Notice the difference between this genuinely induced, sacred, indignation, and the pretentious, ego driven one cited by the high priests and scribes. "But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant, and said to Him, "do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes. Have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise'?" (Mathew 21:15,16).

The difference resides in the motive. In the first incident the motive is purely the love of God which should always be the one driving our actions; for "For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died" (2 Corinthians 5:14). In the second, the motive is obviously dictated by self love.

Unjustifiable Anger

This type of anger, (or rather, tree of anger) usually born from a seed of rejection, has its roots well established in the ego; and its branches bear the fruits of many other iniquities. The first human being to manifest this type of anger is Cain. "The Lord accepted Abel and his gift, but He did not accept Cain and his gift. So, Cain became very angry and felt rejected" (Genesis 4:4-5). God, in His goodness and mercy, had advised him to revise his act, pick up the chance of repentance available and the subsequent acceptance by Him. However, instead of listening to God's advice, Cain succumbed to his feelings of anger and self pity which eventually turned into envy of his brother's success. Exactly as, through His foreknowledge, God had warned him, Cain gave in to sin, his anger eventually developed into a thirst for his brother's blood and he ended up killing Abel (Genesis 4:3-7). Another example is Saul's angry hatred for David. David

and Saul started out as two very good and close friends. However, jealousy and personal interests turned that beautiful relation into a sad story which extended to mar the relation between the father Saul and his son Jonathan as well (1 Samuel 20:24-34).

Types of Unjustifiable Anger

- Wrath: defined as the outburst which leads to hurting the others with words or actions. Wrath is listed among many other sins that are outside the scope of imagination: "Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies" (Galatians 5:19,20).

An example of this type of anger is the Jews' against Christ because he had reminded them of God's undiscriminating love for all mankind, "So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff. Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way" (Luke 4:28-30)

- Bitterness, irritation or boiling: this type of anger usually leads to psychological and psychosomatic disturbances such as depression, high blood pressure, diabetes, stomach ulcers. St. Paul provides healing and remedy from these physical and psychological ailments: "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice" (Ephesians 4:31).

Unmanaged Anger Leads to Several Sins

- "An angry man stirs up strife, and a furious man abounds in transgression" (Proverbs 29:22).
- "For as the churning of milk produces butter, and wringing the nose produces blood, so the forcing of wrath produces strife" (Proverbs 30:33).

How to Deal with Anger

- Confess your sins before God, before yourself (i.e. take responsibility for your anger, do not blame it on others), and before your confessor father.
- Know the reason behind your anger. Is it the result of feeling oppressed; or are you just being inflexible and wanting to control people? Are you allowing life stresses to overtake you with impatience and despair? What do you think of the solution St. Paul offered after the hot argument between him and Barnabas concerning St. Mark "Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.' Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches" (Acts 15:36-41)!
- Train yourself to slow down your angry reactions "So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (James 1:19). Do so by drawing the sign of the Cross on your self, praying a short prayer, remembering how Christ tolerated patiently all guile, pray for the person who is aggravating your feelings. Slowing your anger is like applying your car brakes to stop your car whenever there is a danger. You need to have good brakes and good timing. In the same way, to stop your anger from hurting others you need to have good methods to slow your anger and also good timing. Do not wait till it is too late to slow down your anger.
- Remind yourself that angry reactions might induce irrational thinking, will not solve problems; rather might aggravate situations and complicate problems. Do not take any decision while you are upset or angry. Instead think in a logical realistic manner. Also angry reactions are not reactions to others' behavior but they are reactions to your own interpretation of others' behavior. The fact that different people respond differently to the same behavior proves that our anger is a reflection of our speculations. Do not stick to one single interpretation that will upset you. If you think rationally, you will find there are many other true explanations for the same action that bothers you.
- Face the problem courageously with a prayerful spirit, accept it, deal with it, and think of alternatives repeating with David, "I will bless the Lord who has given me counsel; my heart also instructs me in the night seasons" (Psalms 16:7).
- Change the place where the strife has initiated. Such a step would help calm feelings down and assist in restoring logical and rational thinking needed to deal with the situation.
- Tell yourself who you are in Christ: a new creation. Anger is not among the characteristics of a newly born who has received newness of life through Baptism. "But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new [man] who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him" (Colossians 3:8,9). Remind yourself of who dwells in you after having received baptism. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:22-24).
- Teach yourself how to deal with anger. You need to acquire three virtues: forgiveness, kindness, and tenderheartedness. "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:31,32).
- Take good care of your body (by giving it enough sleep, healthy food, and exercise); your soul (by having godly

entertainment, relaxing and laughing) and spirit (through spiritual exercises, repentance over sins, confession, support system, and spiritual friendship).
- Communicate correctly with your feelings and with the other people's feelings. Usually people express their negative feelings through one of four ways:
- Expressiveness which is the capability of clearly and respectfully expressing feelings without appealing to insults or derision. Expressiveness is highly recommended as a tool for getting rid of negative feelings.
- Repressiveness which is the act of controlling strong emotions and desires and not allowing them to be expressed so that they no longer seem to exist. Repression can cause depression, and many other psychological and subsequent health problems. Also repression can be turned around and utilized in a negative manner by ignoring the others, demeaning them and their behavior and the like.
- Controlling one's feelings which will lead to control of external emotions, facial expressions and hand movement. This is especially effective in the case of people who are less logical and unrealistic.
- Exploding which leads to abusing others verbally, physically, emotionally and socially.

Conclusion

St. Paul's words to the Ephesians are taken from David's psalms in the Old Testament. David experienced anger like no one else did. "My eye is troubled because of anger"(Psalm 6:7). Also, "the enemy has persecuted my soul; He has crushed my life to the ground; He has made me dwell in darkness, Like those who have long been dead" (Psalm 143:3). This enemy could very well be negative angry reactions leading to a series of other sins including hatred, despair, thirst for blood, to mention some. However, every time he experienced negative feelings, he would immediately realize how futile and detrimental those negative feelings of anger could be to his body, soul and spirit; and so remind himself that there was no other solution except in "the righteousness which is from God by faith" (Philippians 3:9)."Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord" (Psalm 4:5). Therefore, "Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him. For the help of His countenance" (Psalm 42:5).

Let us put our faith in God and in our savior Jesus Christ through Whom "my soul shall be joyful in the Lord; It shall rejoice in His salvation" (Psalm 35:9). Let us think twice before losing our temper and giving in to Satan to defeat us through anger; for

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Bishop Youssef
Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States