

Keeping Cool When Things Get Hot

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March 13, 2005

Introduction:

A. Look in the paper or on the news and you will see the devastating effects of anger:

1. GA man on trial attacks a guard, takes his gun, shoots the judge and several others
2. An employee who has been fired or feels he's otherwise been done wrong retaliates
3. Someone chases down another car and beats up the driver all because the driver senseless simply because the driver had cut him off → Road Rage
4. Parents who abuse their children because their kids made them mad or irritated them

B. While we may not react quite like these, we do battle with anger! Anger is difficult to control! The Bible clearly recognizes the struggle we face:

1. Solomon recognized the inner fortitude that it takes: **(Prov. 16:32)**
2. **Illustration:** Man ordered by judge to attend anger management workshop for assaulting his girlfriend. He arrived drunk and late at the seminar. This so infuriated the anger-management counselor that he punched him, knocked him to the ground, and continued beating him. The man later died!
3. Anger is something that every Christian has to deal with in some form or another!
 - a. Someone defined it: "Anger... is the emotion that arises whenever we encounter what we perceive to be wrong." (a reaction to a perceived injustice)
 - b. Sometimes it's a seething resentment or indignation at some large or small offense (whether real or imagined) → It often grows and eventually explodes!
 - c. When we become angry we can greatly hurt others, often those who are closest to us! Yet the ultimate person we truly hurt is ourselves!
4. Is it really wrong? When am I justified in being angry? How can I control it?

I. What Should Be My Response To Anger As A Christian?

A. The Bible is clear: Christians are not to be angry people!

1. The Old Testament is full of examples of what happened when people became angry:
 - a. Cain's murder of his brother Abel was rooted in his anger! **(Gen 4:5-6)**
 - b. Balaam struck his donkey three times in his anger! He didn't realize that by not walking forward the donkey saved his life! **(Numbers 22:22ff)**
 - c. When Jonah saw that Nineveh responded to his preaching with repentance, he was angry because he wanted them to be destroyed → **(Jonah 4:1ff)**
2. As we consider these, it comes as no surprise that when we look to the New Testament we find that anger is not compatible with the Christian character:
 - a. Anger, wrath, & malice are all to be put off → They are antagonistic to the new man who is being created in Christ's image! **(Col 3:8-10; Eph. 4:29-32)**
 - b. James tells us that when we became angry (or respond in wrath) that God's righteousness cannot be produced in us! **(James 1:19-20)**
 - c. Paul lists "outbursts of wrath" as a work of the flesh! **(Gal. 5:20)**
3. Jesus emphasized that not only are the outward manifestations of anger toward one another wrong, but simply being angry carries the same penalty! **(Mt. 5:21-22)**
4. As Christians, when others think of us they should not think of someone who is "hot-tempered," easily agitated, or prone to blow our cool!
 - a. How do we respond when things just aren't going our way?
 - b. When our family crosses us, what kind of reaction do they see?
 - c. In the office, while playing sports, stuck in traffic, and in shopping settings?

B. There is, however, a place for anger where it is right and good:

1. We know this the scriptures often speak about the Lord and His anger! **(Rom. 1:18)**
 - a. God's anger is not an unjust "spur of the moment" reaction which is later regretted, but rather a righteous anger that is an aspect of His perfect divine nature
 - b. In fact, if we are going to be like the Lord we need to understand that He is

- merciful, gracious, and slow to anger!
- c. There was an instance we see Jesus becoming angry and even acting in it!
 - 1) Cleansing the temple is often called “righteous indignation” (**John 2:13-17**)
 - 2) There is not one morsel of self-interest in His response to these people!
 - 3) When personally abused, Jesus silently took it! (**1 Pet. 2:21-23**)
 - d. We need to be careful in justifying our anger by saying, “God was angry at times!”

→ God’s anger was never unjust or unkind! Can I say the same about me?
2. Many turn to Paul’s words to try to justify their anger in a general sense (**Eph 4:26-27**)
 - a. First of all, we need to understand this verse in light of all the verses that condemn anger → The Bible does not contradict itself – but be another explanation!
 - b. It could be that this anger is an anger that is unselfish and in response to sin
 - c. It seems to me that Paul is using this quote from Psalms accommodatively simply to emphasize not allowing anger to occupy our minds
 - d. Notice → Paul’s not approving of anger in general because he condemns anger just a few verses later! (**vs. 31**)
 3. You might find yourself angry when you hear about abortion or someone speaking blasphemously toward the Lord
 - a. There’s no self-interest there! It’s righteous! It’s out of love for the Lord and others!
 - b. Be careful! Often sinful anger is masked under the guise of “righteous indignation”

C. We need to understand the devastating impacts that anger can have if we allow it:

1. Sometimes we may feel like being angry will make us feel better, that it brings some sort of vindication or satisfaction → It only brings sorrow!
 - a. How often has being angry paid off? Does it bring you joy or sorrow? (**Prov. 22:8**)
 - b. Not only brings us sorrow but it brings sorrow to those around us! (**Prov. 21:19**)
 - 1) When we become angry we say and do things with concern only for self
 - 2) We lash out at those close to us – Sometimes those who are innocent!
2. When we become angry we often act without much thought at all! (**Prov. 14:15-17**)
 - a. How often have you said something in anger that you regretted much later?
 - b. If we allow it, it’ll take over our thinking! Say & do things we might not normally do!
3. If you just suppress your anger it can be just as deadly as anger that is expressed!
 - a. Anger that is suppressed only damages the container it is in! (**Prov. 30:33**)
 - b. **Illustration:** Bombs of WWII are still killing in Europe. They turn up and sometimes blow up in construction sites, fishing nets, or on beaches 50 years after guns fell silent. Unexploded bombs become more dangerous with time. With the corrosion inside, the bomb becomes more unstable with time and the detonator becomes exposed.
 - c. You are fooling yourself if you think that by holding your anger inside you are not hurting anyone – You are destroying yourself from the inside out! It will show!
4. When we act or speak in our anger it is almost always (if not always) accompanied by other sins! (**Prov. 29:22**)
 - a. Why do two boys fight? Crimes of passion? Feuding between two neighbors? Splits within a congregation? Divorces (even in “Christian” families)
 - b. Anger promotes sins of gossip, self-righteous judgments, revenge, complaining, back-biting, bitterness, and many others! (**Hebrews 12:14-15**)

II. How Can We Control Our Anger?

A. When we start to realize anger is taking root, stop and take an “emotional time out”

1. **Illustration:** Carl on Family Matters → Steve had just wrecked the garage and so before he blew up he counted to 10 forwards, backwards, then he blew!
2. Proverbs tells us to be “slow to anger” (**Proverbs 14:29; 16:32; 19:11**)
 - a. In order to be slow to get angry we have step back and think before we react
 - b. By calling an “emotional time out” we give ourselves time to cool off and we provide ourselves time to carefully consider our actions & words!
 - c. Sometimes the best way to prevent an explosion of anger is to remove yourself from the detonator – The source of your frustration

3. Some have utilized the “counting to 10” method → Why not step back and pray before you react, sing a song to yourself, etc → Just cool first! **(Phi. 4:8)**
4. As you back away emotionally from the source consider why you are angry?
 - a. Is this really worth getting angry over? It could well be that getting angry will not help the situation at all! In fact, it might only make things worse!
 - b. Is it possible that I not have accurate or incomplete info? **(Prov. 18:13)**

C. We take a major step in overcoming anger when we learn to overlook minor offenses and to forgive major offenses:

1. Part of spiritual maturity is realizing that some things should simply be passed over:
 - a. Sometimes we feel as though we have to react to every single perceived wrong
 - b. **Illustration:** In major disasters medical professionals practice what they call “triage.” They separate the victims by the severity of their injuries and treat them accordingly. Someone who has a severed arm will have priority over someone whose arm is broken. Some injuries like minor bruises, scrapes, and burns will not be attended to because they’ll heal on their own with time.
2. We may sustain emotional “minor injuries” from others – even on a daily basis!
 - a. Like scrapes or bruises – such injustices are real and painful, but they don’t need the same reaction that a major injury would merit.
 - b. We should learn to over look such things: **(Prov. 19:11)**
 - c. It may be that what we see as “being wronged” is nothing more than someone crossing us the wrong way → We need to be patient with one another!
3. This doesn’t mean burying it inside and letting it brew – Already noted the danger in that!
 - a. By choosing to overlook it we are letting it go! This means not holding grudges!
 - b. **Illustration:** Comedian Buddy Hackett said, “I’ve had my share of disagreements in life, but I’ve learned never to carry a grudge, because while I’m carrying the grudge, the other person is out dancing!
4. There will be times when something someone does to us cannot just be overlooked, what should we do then? FORGIVE! **(Col 3:12-13)**

D. Finally, do not associate with those people who are prone to be full of anger:

1. I think everyone, when honest, will admit that our friends do rub off on us!
 - a. When you spend time around a friend with a “catch-phrase” you’ll soon say it
 - b. Their mannerisms, their attitudes, and even their actions will rub off on us
 - c. This is why the admonition: “Evil companions corrupt good morals” **(I Cor. 15:33)**
2. Anger as well can be highly contagious! **(Prov. 22:24-25)**
3. If you associate with people who are hot-tempered, don’t be surprised when you find yourself having a harder and harder time keeping your cool!

Conclusion: Anger is a problem we all struggle with. While anger does have its proper role, we must be careful to not to deceive ourselves into thinking we are justified when we’re not! It is something that can be overcome! **(Psalms 37:8)**