**How to Handle Anger**

4 26“Be angry, but do not sin.” Do not let the sun set on your anger; 27do not give a place to the devil. 28He who has been stealing must no longer steal; rather, let him labor, doing honorable work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with the one who is in need. 29Do not let any unwholesome word come out of your mouth, but only what is good for edification as there is need, so that your speech may give grace to those who listen. 30Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31Get rid of all bitterness and rage and anger and clamor and slander, along with all malice. 32Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other just as God by Christ forgave you. 5Therefore, become imitators of God, as beloved children, 2and walk in love, just as Christ also loved us and gave himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God [that is] a pleasing fragrance [to him]. (Eph. 4:26-5:2)

**Introduction**

All the trouble started at third base. The third base coach got into a fight with the opposing third baseman. Within minutes both dugouts emptied and all the players were engaged in a brawl. The melee quickly spread to the grandstands, as supporters of both teams began to battle each other. The conflict went from bad to worse; someone set fire to the grandstand and the entire ballpark burnt to the ground! And it didn’t stop there; the fire spread to 107 other buildings in that section of the city. That’s what happened back in 1894 when the Baltimore Orioles came to Boston to play the Red Sox (Our Daily Bread, 8/13/92.)

Carol’s family called their pastor to solicit his help. It seems that Carol was very depressed; she would not eat, she would not communicate, she was withdrawing from the world around her. The pastor came to visit her in the hospital; he didn’t know what to say or do. Just then Carol’s doctor came into her hospital room; the pastor excused himself while the doctor examined her. When he came out, the doctor encountered Carol’s pastor in the corridor, he shook his head and said, “That sure is one very angry lady!” The pastor was shocked by the doctor’s diagnosis, but he admitted that he had learned something that day.

Here are two examples of people who did not know how to handle anger. The ballplayers and the fans in Boston allowed anger to destroy everything around them. The lady allowed anger to destroy herself.

How about you, how do you handle anger? What does the Bible say that we as Christians are to do with anger?

**I. You May Express the Emotion of Anger (4:26a)**

Some Christians think that all anger is sinful and that every expression of anger is to be suppressed or denied. By way of example, a young man once responded to
the question, “What makes you angry?” by stating, “Anger is wrong and has no place in a Christian’s life.”

But the Bible here instructs us, “Be angry, but do not sin;” i.e., there is a legitimate place for anger, and there is a legitimate kind of anger. Consider the anger expressed by our Lord Jesus Christ on various occasions in His life and ministry:

Our Lord was angry when He saw how the house of God was being abused:

> In the temple courts he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers sitting [at their tables]. He made a whip out of cords and drove all [the animals] from the temple courts, both the sheep and the oxen; and he poured out the moneychangers’ coins and overturned their tables. To those who were selling doves he said, Take these things out of here; do not make my Father’s house into a marketplace. (Jn. 2:14-16)

Our Lord was angry when He witnessed the unbelief of the people:

> “Some of them said, ‘Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have prevented the death of this man?’ Jesus, again groaning within himself, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, with a stone laid against the entrance” (Jn. 11:37-38.) The Greek word translated, “groaning,” (ἐμβριμάωμαι,) means, “to be deeply moved,” or, “to express indignation.”

Our Lord was angry when He witnessed the hardness of the people’s hearts: “He looked around at them with anger, being deeply aggravated by the hardening of their heart.” (Mk. 3:5)

Our Lord was angry when He witnessed the hypocrisy of the religious leaders:

> Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are seeking to enter. (Matt. 23:13-ff.)

As Christians, we should be moved to anger by those things that anger God Himself. Note the Lord’s reaction to the golden calf the people had made in violation of His commandment: “And Jehovah said to Moses, ‘I have seen these people; indeed, they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them’” (Ex. 32:9-10.) Now note that Moses, upon seeing for himself the peoples’ sin (i.e., coming to see things the way God sees them), has the same reaction of holy anger: “When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain” (Ex. 32:19.) In contrast to this expression of holy, God-like, anger, note the unholy complacency and acceptance of sin expressed by Aaron.
Addressing Moses, Aaron says, “But Aaron said, ‘Do not be angry, my lord; you know how prone to evil these people are’” (Ex. 32:22.)

As a Christian, you may—and sometimes you should—express the emotion of anger. There is a legitimate place for anger, and there is a legitimate kind of anger. We should react like Moses and not like Aaron to those things that are a moral offense and affront to God and His divine character and His moral law.

II. You Must Not Allow Anger to Dominate Your Life (4:26b, 30)

“Be angry, but ... Do not let the sun set on your anger” (or, “your angry mood,” παραργισμός.) We are to express our anger, but we must not allow that anger to dominate our lives, we must not allow our anger to become a long term, permanent attitude, note Ecclesiastes 7:9, “Be not hasty in your spirit to become angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools.”

What is the dangerous consequence of retaining an angry spirit and allowing your anger to dominate your life? For one thing, you “give a place to the devil” (vs. 27.) You allow the devil to gain a foothold from which he can manipulate you and wreck havoc all around, creating broken relationships, foolish and shameful conduct, and the destruction of a Christian witness. You allow the devil to gain a foothold from which he can dominate you and wreck havoc on your very soul; consider the case of Cain: “We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother” (1 Jn. 3:11b-12a.)

Furthermore, when you allow your anger to dominate your life you “grieve the Holy Spirit” (vs. 30.) The Holy Spirit is the One by whom we have communion with God and by whom we are sealed (i.e., marked) for redemption. You do not want to grieve the Holy Spirit and thereby jeopardize and forfeit your connection with God.

In an extraordinary way, the sins that stem from anger (bitterness, malice, etc.) provide a foothold for the devil and alienate the Holy Spirit. Why? Because such sins usurp the role of God as Judge, note Romans 12:19, “Do not avenge yourselves, beloved; rather, allow room for the wrath [of God]; for it is written, ‘Vengeance belongs to me; I will recompense, says the Lord.'” By entertaining the sins that stem from anger you are not only seeking to usurp the role of God as Judge, you are also refusing to imitate the character of God in His mercy and long-suffering, note Matthew 5:44-45,

*But I tell you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.* (Matt. 5:44-45)
What guidelines does the Bible give as to how we are to handle anger? The Apostle Paul points us to Psalm 4:4-5, “Tremble [with anger]: but do not sin. When you are on your bed, search your heart and be silent. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in Jehovah.”

From his own experience, the Psalmist’s counsel is: “Tremble [with anger.]” It is legitimate to express your anger, to release that anger; but we must not allow it to dominate our life. How do we avoid having such anger control our life? By heeding the rest of the Psalmist’s counsel. “When you are on your bed, search your heart and be silent.” Ask yourself such questions as these: “What is making me so angry? Have not I at some time done the very same thing? To whom does justice belong?”

A case of settled, retained anger is very often related to a bad case of self-righteousness: in the darkness of the other person’s sin it is very easy to become blind to our own sin and to usurp the role of God as Judge and Executioner. If you clearly see the sin of the other person, but cannot detect your own sin, it usually means that you have your back to God: His light, shining over your shoulder, is illuminating the other person’s sin.

At other times, a settled, retained anger is used to cover up a bad case of guilt: by focusing on the wrong committed by the other person, you can seek to excuse or minimize your own guilt, or even “punish” him for your sins. Such an attitude is a devilish perversion of Christ’s atonement, of whom it is written, “the punishment that brought us peace was upon him” (ISA. 53:5b.)

Consider the example of the Lord Jesus: He expressed His righteous anger towards the Pharisees: “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are seeking to enter!” (Matt. 23:13.) But He identified Himself with the mercy of God: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you. How often would I have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wing, but you were not willing” (Matt. 23:37.) Here is a heartfelt expression of pity and the offer of forgiveness to these very offenders.

Our Lord Jesus in His humanity and in His role as the Servant of the LORD, did not usurp the role of God as Judge, He left the matter of vengeance in the hands of His heavenly Father: “When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself [or, his cause] to him who judges justly” (1 Pet. 2:23.)

As a Christian, you must not allow anger to dominate your life, causing you to reject the character of God in His mercy and usurp the role of God as Judge; on the contrary, you must reflect God’s character of mercy and not usurp God’s role as Judge.
III. You Must Replace an Angry Spirit with a Loving Spirit (4:31-5:2)

According to Ephesians 4:31, as a Christian, you are to put away and turn over to Jesus those life-controlling, life-destroying attitudes such as:

“bitterness:” that self-fed spirit of antagonism and ill will and hatred, which keeps a man in a perpetual mood of animosity; it sours the man’s complexion and poisons his heart

“rage:” when smoldering bitterness comes upon a new instance against which to vent itself, or when it regurgitates an old instance, it ignites into wrath or rage

“anger:” here is that settled attitude of resentment and implacable hostility; the emotion that keeps the ashes of bitterness ever smoldering

“clamor:” shouting, verbal abuse, physical explosions of the deep-seated animosity breaking forth into moments of uncontrolled vehemence; the social restraints can no longer hold back the malice residing in the heart

“slander” (or, “blasphemy”): any and all name-calling or circulating of malicious gossip against the one who is the object of wrath; also, the invoking of curses upon the one who is the object of hostility

According to Ephesians 4:32-5:2, as a Christian, you are to put on and receive from Jesus those new life-controlling, life-promoting attitudes, such as:

“kindness:” a gentle manner, a soft word, a giving spirit, sincerely extending good will towards others

“tenderheartedness:” being moved with compassion towards others, looking upon others with the same affection and pity with which God Himself looked upon you, holding each other dear in our hearts

“forgiveness:” motivated by God’s forgiveness of us, we are to imitate the heavenly Father; He initiated and extended forgiveness to us of His own free will

“love:” patterned after Christ who sacrifically gave Himself out of love for us; the sacrificing of our own offended self for the restoration of our brother or sister or neighbor

There are several things important to bear in mind: The whole matter of putting away the old sinful attitudes and putting on the new godly attributes requires an act of the will; we must place our will in submission to God rather than allow our sinful emotions to control our spirit and behavior. We must extend
forgiveness to others because it is the will of God, even if we do not feel like doing so. By way of example: Corrie Ten Boom, a former prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp, some time after that terrible ordeal encountered one of her former prison guards. The man asked for forgiveness and extended his hand to Corrie. Corrie did not at all feel like forgiving him, but in obedience to the command of Christ her Lord, she did so, and as she accepted the man’s hand she felt the love of God fill her being, bringing about true restoration.

Then, too, the whole matter of putting away the old sinful attitudes and putting on the new godly attributes requires our reliance upon the Person and the resources of the Holy Spirit, rather than reliance upon our own ability to forgive. Again, by way of example: A young man, having been wronged by his employer, found it humanly impossible to forgive him. When he looked into his heart, he found nothing there but hatred. He could not extend forgiveness to his offender, because, in his own sinful heart there was nothing but resentment. As Christians, we must look to the Holy Spirit to produce His divine fruit in our hearts and lives: “the fruit of the Holy Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness.”

Conclusion

At the outset of our study, there was presented two examples of people who did not know how to handle anger: they either allowed anger to destroy everything around them; or, they allowed anger to destroy themselves.

How are you, as a Christian, to handle anger? What are you to do with anger? The Epistle to the Ephesians gives us the following guidelines: 1) You may, and at times should, express the emotion of anger. 2) You must not allow anger to dominate your life. 3) You must replace an angry spirit with a loving godly spirit.

Let us look to the grace of God to help us handle anger in the way that is pleasing to the Lord our Savior.