

# What Does the Bible Teach About Managing Anger?

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake from multiple sources)

## Introduction:

- A. Article in Newsweek ("Better Temper That Temper!" 1/3/83) raised the question: Is it best to let off steam? (reduces blood pressure, but produces hostility in others), or is it best to suppress one's anger? (raises blood pressure, but prevents hostility).
- B. Anger is a powerful emotion driven by strong motivation and seemingly unlimited energy to expend itself.
  - 1. It can be controlled, channeled, redirected, and reduced.
  - 2. God requires that we do so.
  - 3. Perhaps it would be helpful to learn how.
- C. However, is all anger sinful?

## I. A LOOK AT ANGER

- A. In the Old Testament - Prov. 14:17; Ecc. 7:9; Psalm 37:8
- B. In the New Testament
  - 1. Uncontrolled anger is not compatible with the Christian disposition.
    - a. Eph. 4:31-32; Col. 3:8; James 1:19-20
  - 2. Yet, there is a place for a certain kind of anger.
  - 3. John 2:13-17; Mark 3:5; Matt. 23:13; Rom. 1:18, 2:5; Eph. 5:6, 4:26

## II. A CLOSER LOOK AT ANGER

- A. God's anger is always a just reaction to evil - Rom. 1:18, 2:5-9
  - 1. His wrath is never misguided; He is therefore capable of properly manifesting anger.
  - 2. Man, with his imperfections, is not so capable. His anger is often misguided and misdirected because of ignorance, assumptions, misunderstanding.
- B. Christ's anger has nothing of self-interest; only anger against unrighteousness
  - 1. He could be angry, but only for God's honor
    - a. When personally abused, He said nothing - 1Peter 2:21-23
    - b. But when abuse was directed against God, He displayed righteous anger.
  - 2. Man, with his imperfections, does not always properly use anger in matters of righteousness; often it becomes self-righteous anger.
    - a. We remain silent when sin is exalted and God is dishonored.
    - b. Then we get angry when someone offends us personally.
- C. "Be angry, and do not sin"
  - 1. Context of Eph. 4:26-27, 31 - If anger comes to the heart...
    - a. It must be controlled,
    - b. It must be dispelled before nightfall,
  - 2. Compare this with the meaning of the Greek words often translated anger and wrath.

- a. Thumos (most often translated wrath) “the sudden outburst of passionate anger” - ZPEB; “the blaze of temper which flares into violent words and deeds, and just as quickly dies” - Barclay
  - b. Orge (often translated wrath, but also anger) “indignation which has arisen gradually and become more settled” - Thayer; “suggests a more settled or abiding condition of mind - Vine
- 3. The point is simply this:
  - a. It is wrong to "blow off steam" (thumos)
  - b. It is wrong to "have a lasting, suppressed anger" (orge)

### **III. PUTTING AWAY ANGER AND WRATH**

- A. Transformation in the life of the Christian - 2Cor. 5:17
  - 1. Rom. 6:16-18
  - 2. This does not mean that we cannot or do not sin, only that we do not have to sin - Rom. 7:14-24
  - 3. We are now free to present ourselves to God, to serve as instruments of righteousness - Rom. 6:11-14, 19
- B. Made possible by renewing our minds - Rom. 12:1-2
  - 1. This renewing of our minds occur as we:
    - a. Set our minds on things above - Col. 3:1-2
    - b. Contemplate the glory of the Lord - 2Cor. 3:18
- C. With a mind renewed in this way, it becomes possible:
  - 1. To put off things like anger, wrath - Col. 3:8-11
  - 2. To put on things like kindness, love, the peace of God - Col. 3:12-15
- D. Transformation leads to reacting differently.
  - 1. The world reacts - Gal. 5:19-21
  - 2. The Christian reacts - Gal. 5:22-23

### **IV. YET, WE NEED RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION**

- A. In view of what we know about God, what should be our attitude toward the problems Satan uses to hinder us in this world?
- B. We need to stop viewing ourselves as just getting by. In Christ we are conquerors - Rom. 8:35-39; Rev. 21:1-7
  - 1. Our personal weaknesses are not obstacles to what God can accomplish through us - 2Cor. 12:9-10; 1Cor. 15:58
- C. We need to adopt the viewpoint of a warrior, to answer the Lord's call to arms
  - 1. 2Tim. 2:3, 4:7; 1Tim. 1:18
- D. It is important to be clear about who the enemy really is. Often we treat those bound by sin as if they were our enemies, even against brethren - Gal. 5:15
  - 1. We need to learn to distinguish the enemy from victims of the enemy.
    - a. 2Tim. 2:14, 24-26; Acts 10:38
  - 2. Victims of the Adversary need to be rescued not despised.
    - a. James 5:19-20; Jude 22-23
- E. It is important to be vigilant and strong - 1Cor. 16:13; Joshua 1:9; 1Sam. 4:9
  - 1. Eph. 6:10; 2Tim. 1:7; Rev. 2:10

- H. We are not helpless victims who must despairingly, hopelessly surrender to the Adversary's tactics. We can go on the offensive and crush our enemy.
  - 1. John 10:29; 1Cor. 10:13; 1John 5:18-20
- I. Never give the Adversary an opening - Eph. 4:27; 1Tim. 5:14
  - 1. The enemy can be resisted - James 4:7; 1Peter 5:9; Gen. 4:7; Luke 4:8
- J. We need to be righteously angry with Satan for what he has done.
  - 1. In most places Satan has had it all his way for too long - Num. 25:7-11
  - 2. We must resolve that his work will not go unopposed where we live for one day longer.

## **V. ANGER MANAGEMENT**

- A. Seneca, a Roman philosopher-educator (4-65 A.D.), offered the following self-control techniques in his book "Of Anger":
  - 1. Avoid frustrating situations by noting where you got angry in the past.
    - a. Matt. 26:41; Prov. 4:14-15
- B. Reduce your anger by taking time, focusing on other emotions (pleasure, shame, or fear), avoiding weapons of aggression, and attend to other matters.
  - 1. Phil. 4:8
- C. Respond calmly to an aggressor with empathy or mild, non-provocative comments, or with no response at all - Prov. 15:1
- D. If angry, concentrate on the undesirable consequences of becoming aggressive - Psalm 37:8
  - 1. Ask yourself: Why give them the satisfaction of knowing you are upset?
  - 2. Or, it isn't worth becoming upset.
- E. Reconsider the circumstances and try to understand the motives or viewpoint of the other person - Phil. 2:3-4
- F. Train yourself to be empathic with others - 2Tim. 2:24-26
  - 1. Be tolerant of human limits and patient with weaknesses.
  - 2. Be forgiving (ask yourself if you haven't done something as bad).
  - 3. Follow the great lesson of Christ - Matt. 7:12

## **VI. CONTROLLING ANGER THROUGH BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION**

- A. Reduce your frustrations.
  - 1. Find the source of your frustration, whether people, subjects or situations.
  - 2. Attempt to reduce or eliminate your exposure to these negative stimuli.
- B. Reduce violent stimuli in your life.
  - 1. Avoid violent movies and violent, aggressive friends.
  - 2. Be very selective with your friends, so that they do not goad you into anger and rage.
  - 3. Eliminate drugs and alcohol as stimulants of anger.
- C. Reveal yourself to others and try to understand others.
  - 1. Announce you may be having a bad day to others.
  - 2. Attempt to indicate to others that you have noticed that they are having a bad day, and offer to listen or let them vent.

- D. Stop hostile fantasies.
  - 1. Cease dwelling on issues or people that aggravate.
  - 2. Think smoothly and calmly.
- E. Do not escalate the violence.
  - 1. Aggressive action on your part may cause an equally aggressive response which starts a vicious cycle.
- F. Suppress or convert your own violent reaction.
  - 1. Count to ten, take a deep breath, go take a walk, or get some exercise.
  - 2. Think of the source of the aggravation and whether a violent reaction will accomplish any purpose other than remorse, which is not a goal.
- G. Cease using temper to get your way.
  - 1. While successful in the short term, using anger to win points is a losing strategy in the long run.
- H. Use stress inoculation. This approach involves:
  - 1. Being aware of our own irrational fantasies.
  - 2. Learning a better understanding of why others are weak when they show rage.
  - 3. Rehearsing how to be calm in the face of angering stimulation.
- I. Meditation and prayer

Conclusion:

- A. Instead of trying to determine whether we should react to difficult situations, by letting off steam or by suppressing anger, the goal of the Christian should be changing the inner person; the more we are transformed, the more likely we will react with love, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control.
- B. Following the example of Christ, there may be a place for anger, but only in things pertaining to the honor and will of God; in all other things, we do well to remember:
  - 1. The example of Jesus - 1Peter 2:23
  - 2. The words of David - Psalm 37:8