

Dealing with Anger before it turns to hatred

The following study is what the Bible says on this topic of Anger. As much as is possible I'll give references so that you can examine my statements in light of Scripture, so that you can do your own study on this important issue

Anger is a normal sentiment we feel when something unjust has happened to us, or when someone has let us down or hurt us (whether deliberately or not). We can see many places in the Bible where God becomes angry. This anger usually comes as a reaction to injustice and sin. The problem with anger is not anger itself, but anger that remains unresolved, and that leads to bitterness and unforgiveness.

You're wise not to bottle up your anger, as it tends to grow, becomes uncontrollable and eventually comes out with the force of a volcano. Remember, the emotions you bury do not die, but they may kill you.

If we are very hurt and very angry, our anger can overcome us. Bitterness can take on a power all of its own. Bitterness towards the person who has hurt us or let us down leads to hate. This is quite the opposite of love - love being the experience that believers should always aspire to know within. We need to know God's love for us. We also need to have a love for other people, and we can give this out of the inspirational love that God provides in our lives.

In **Mark 11:25**, we read of the importance of forgiveness. Forgiveness is described as being necessarily present before we can know the forgiveness of God for our sins. So, first of all, we see that to forgive is an act of obedience. God requires this of us, and surely for a good reason. As God through Christ has forgiven us of so much sin, we need to respect this gift of forgiveness by extending a forgiving attitude towards those that have wronged us. The consequence of us not forgiving others would be an inability for us to know the forgiveness that God has offered us. If we are not merciful as he has been merciful to us, where really is our repentance? How can we claim to have known his grace?

God Himself tells us to "be angry and sin not" **Ephesians 4:26**. Here's an eye opener. The person in the Bible who got angry the most was God Himself. The word "anger" comes up over 450 times in the OT and

approximately 83% of those occurrences refer to God's anger. Now that's instructive. The problem doesn't seem to be anger, but what it is based on and how it is expressed. Again, God instructs us, "be angry and sin not," so I'm confident that anger in and of itself isn't always the problem. We must be honest with what we feel and yet not allow it, which in this case is anger, to control us. The bible tells us to be "slow" in expressing our anger. **James 1:19; Ecclesiastes 7:9; Proverbs 25:8.**

Ephesians 4:26 instructs us not to procrastinate in dealing with the issues that have produced our anger. **Ephesians 4:26** says "do not let the sun go down on your anger." Deal with the issues while they are clear and before they grow. We need to take care of our anger and the issues that produced it before sinless anger becomes sinful bitterness, which is the product of long held resentment.

This may be a bit simplistic, but anger is first an emotion, then an attitude and finally action. Anger begins as a feeling of displeasure, but can develop into an attitude of hostility and become an aggressive destructive action or behavior if we do not deal with it early on.

Anger that is not dealt with not only creates a problem between us and God, but also causes dis-functionality within us. If we want to be free of the pain and the affects of pain that our hurt emanates from within ourselves, we need to know healing. Without forgiveness, we are not co-operating with God's will, and therefore are not in a place of Grace in order to receive healing for the hurt that we have experienced. Forgiveness is an essential element to the process of inner healing. The presence of bitterness also causes problems with our current, or any prospective friendships and relationships. It can act as a poison, gradually choking many aspects of our lives without us realizing.

It has been claimed by some that deep bitterness can give rise to many emotional and psychological problems, for example such as depression or nervousness. Whether or not this is possible to establish, it is certainly not difficult to imagine bitterness being a major cause of such problems, at the least feeding and aggravating them. Also, we may locate our anger upon innocent parties who are around us, causing us to hurt others needlessly and potentially isolating us from the human contact that we all need.

Matthew 5: 21-26, covers anger, forgiveness and reconciliation. As Jesus clearly teaches, we should always try to make amends with people that we

have fallen out of friendship with. It may not always be the case that others are prepared to forgive us when we have wronged them, but the act of animating our remorse to them is essential. Through this act we are communicating our own desire for peace with the other person, as well as God's requirement towards everyone of love and forgiveness.

How is anger expressed destructively?

Anger is very destructive if you allow yourself to blow up and vent your anger upon another person. Some people call this "letting off steam", when in reality, it is the sinful use of anger and wrath to destroy or manipulate another person. The Scripture declares, "The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God" **James 1:20**.

David commands, "cease from anger and forsake wrath; Do not fret, it only causes harm" **Psalms 37:8**.

Solomon also declares, "A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise man holds them back" **Proverbs 29:11**.

The use of anger in this manner is clearly a violation of God's commands, which ultimately hinders effective communication and relationship with others.

A second way anger is used destructively is to internalize or bury your anger inside. This action is just as wrong as blowing up and venting your anger.

Paul taught in **Ephesians 4:27**, "do not let the sun go down on your anger." This passage commands you not to allow your anger to boil within your heart even for one night. God wants you to deal with your anger and what is causing it, quickly, even before you go to sleep tonight. This is what God was trying to get Cain to do when he asked him, "Why are you angry" **Genesis 4:6**?

God knew that Cain was very angry and wanted him to identify its cause in order to help him resolve it. Without taking this action, sin would ultimately control him and cause an inevitable blow up.

If your anger has caused you to sin, seek God's forgiveness and the person's you have offended by your anger. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" **1 John 1:9**.

If you are holding in anger and resentment, identify why you are angry and then take the appropriate biblical action.

Dealing with Anger

First, you must make a choice to control anger. Is this possible? Have you ever been arguing with someone at home and the phone rings? What did you do? Didn't you choose to control your anger simply by making a choice to answer the phone and speak calmly to the caller? Paul says, "do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts" **Romans 6:12**.

This is a choice. You can also make the same choice not to allow your anger to reign in your heart. How many times, before you were a Christian, did a conflict occur at work with your boss. He or she said or did something to make you angry. But, you chose to control your anger and say nothing simply because you wanted to keep your job? This proves that even as a non-Christian you could choose to control your anger. How much more today should you as a Christian be able to restrain it? Today you have the restraining power of the Holy Spirit to help you.

It is often said that forgiveness is a process. Forgiveness can certainly be seen as an act of obedience. Even if we may still feel anger towards the one who has hurt us, and the effects of the damage - (emotional pain and other problems), are still with us, we can still be in an attitude of forgiveness to that person. We are effectively controlling our anger and inviting God to deal with it. Rather than the anger turning bad, and causing hate, we acknowledge it, state forgiveness and refuse through sheer will to engage in thoughts of bitterness, revenge or hate.

Choose to surrender to the Holy Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is self-control. He enables you to do all that I am about to explain. You need the "living water" of His Spirit to quench the fire of your anger **John 7:37-39**.

God's Holy Spirit is stronger than your anger. This is why Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" **Philippians 4:13**.

He will strengthen you to control your anger. If you will simply ask the Spirit of God to come and reign in you.

A feeling of complete forgiveness may take a significant amount of time to reach, as this often depends on the person receiving the full healing that

God wants to impart to them - through his Spirit and through the work of Christian supporters. However, in being forgiving in our attitude and sentiments to the other person, and in avoiding thoughts and feelings of hate, we are being obedient to God's command - even if anger is still present.

Choose to deal with the small issues before they build into resentment. Many times the failure to resolve small offenses with a person will ultimately lead you to those volcanic eruptions of anger and rage. Moses is one of the best examples of allowing multiple issues to frustrate and anger him to the point of this kind of explosion. Scripture reveals that he suffered the people and their contradictions year after year until finally he lost his temper. Moses became angry and "spoke rashly with his lips" **Psalms 106:32-33**.

The simple solution to this problem of building resentment was given by Jesus when He taught us to deal quickly with a conflict **Matthew 5:25**.

Forgiveness is not easy. Depending on the degree of hurt or betrayal that is involved, it will often take time and effort. However, when a hurt person actually comes to the place where they realize that their personal happiness, their emotional freedom, and their good relationship with God depends on that forgiveness, they have reached a point where they can move forward in hope. It should be said that there are times when we should be very cautious and sensible about how we practically extend forgiveness. If we feel comfortable and safe, it may be appropriate to tell the person who has hurt us that we have forgiven them. They might respond positively or negatively to this - either with remorse or with a denial that any wrong actually took place.

Choose to control and restrain your words. Solomon says, "a soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" **Proverbs 15:1**.

Harsh words stir up whomever you are speaking to, but it also stirs up your anger if you keep talking. Therefore, if you want to control your anger, "be swift to hear, slow to speak", and you will be, 'slow to wrath.'" **James 1:19** In other words, stop talking and listen more, this helps you to calm down and reason more clearly. If you will allow them to, harsh words will stir you up too.

This type of statement can be very significant in the forgiveness and restoration process. It may enable better relations with that person. On the other hand, close relations with a person who has significantly hurt us

always carries risks, and should be approached with wisdom. We have a right to guard our hearts from further hurt, and discernment is needed for us to see the degree of risk that we may be putting ourselves under. How close a friendship do we want to maintain with that person who has seriously let us down? What is safe? We certainly think that there are cases where it is justifiable to "downgrade" the closeness of some friendships. This is particularly where it is apparent that there is a significant risk for further hurt, and where the underlying causes of the initial problem have not been properly discussed and resolved

How can you restrain and control your anger?

Choose to control and restrain your thoughts. When you allow angry and resentful thoughts and accusations to rule and control your mind, you will continue to boil inside. You need the peace of God to rule your heart and mind which enables you to think clearly and constructively as to a biblical course of action and solution to the problem. To accomplish this, you must first understand why you are angry. God asked Cain, "Why are you angry?" **Genesis 4:6.**

He asked this question before Cain killed his brother Abel in the attempt to help him resolve his rage. Therefore, determine are you angry at God, people, or yourself? Then you must re-think the issue biblically from God's perspective which will naturally enable you to control your anger. Solomon explained that "the discretion (wisdom or understanding) of a man makes him slow to anger, and it is to his glory to overlook a transgression" **Proverbs 19:11.**

God's wisdom and discretion will help you to think and act in an appropriate manner. To resolve why you are angry before you take an inappropriate action as Cain did. In addition, God's wisdom will bring peace as you choose to refuse the hateful and revengeful thoughts of bitterness. You must acknowledge these thoughts as sinful before God and ask His forgiveness. Paul promised that if you will meditate on "things that are true, things that are just... The God of peace will be with you" **Philippians 4:8-9.**

Choose to control and restrain your actions. Take a short time out when you realize that you, or the other party in the conversation, are beginning to get out of control. Solomon said, "It is honorable to a man to stop striving, since any fool can start a quarrel" **Proverbs 20:3.**

He also commanded in **Proverbs 17:14**, "Stop contention before a quarrel starts." Taking a time out will allow you and others to pray and get under

control before a blow up occurs. This will entail walking away from the confrontation before you explode. Even Jesus walked away from the emotionally charged moment when the Jews wanted to throw Him off a cliff **Luke 4:28-30**.

Don't grab, push, or have any physical contact with a person you are angry with or that you know is angry with you. If you try to force someone physically to do what you want, this will only increase their anger and resistance

Martin Luther King took his anger and directed it at promoting positive change via the Civil Rights Movement. Use your anger, don't let it use you! Be angry, but do not allow it to cause you to sin.

Here are some practical things you might want to consider doing.

- Get in touch with your feelings and, for the moment, feel them without judging them. Find the root issues in which your anger is sourced. A good friend who can be objective will be a valuable asset during this process.
- Delay taking any action so you can have time to think things over. **Nehemiah 5:6-7**
- Pray for understanding and guidance. **2 Kings 19:14**
- Identify the true cause for your anger. Key questions might be: What is it that is upsetting me? How am I being threatened? Why am I angry? Have I embellished the issues? Have I invested some statement or action with more meaning than the other party intended?
- Evaluate your anger to determine if it is legitimate. **Jonah 4:9** Maybe your anger in this instance is attached to other unresolved issues. Maybe you are angry because the other person or situation confronted something in you that needs to be changed. Maybe you're anger is justifiable.
- Make concessions when necessary and if possible. You must decide if being right is more important than having a right relationship. Argument for the sake of argument is not healthy. If both parties pursue the truth, then everyone wins.
- Practice active empathy. Give the other person the benefit of the doubt and do your best to be understanding.

- Communicate by listening. You don't have to agree, but you do need to know what you are disagreeing with. Communication isn't the art of convincing others you are right, but of understanding other and helping them understand you!
- Forgive them and forget it. This is not as hard as you might think. Remember, if Christ's death on the cross enables God to forgive us, then why can't we apply that same payment to others debts; the moral debts people owe us?

Unfortunately, there are some people we will never be able to have a healthy relationship with. They are too wounded and their anger won't allow them to process the issues that are destroying them and their relationship with us and others. We may need to temporarily accept the limitations they are placing on our relationship with them, but we can continue to pray that God will set them free and thereby enable us to develop a healthy relationship with them in the future. Keep the door open.

If you are dealing with immediate family members who are hard to get along with, don't fault yourself for what they are unable or unwilling to do. What you can do is love them, pray for them and continuously forgive them. By all means don't fault yourself for their disabling wounds and don't fall prey to guilt trips and manipulation. This is not healthy for you or for them.

Live in the freedom Christ has given you and the security that He approves of you. If you find yourself at fault, immediately ask His forgiveness and set things right with those you are at odds with.

How do you reconcile anger that is turned in toward yourself?

1. If you have dealt with your sin in the correct way: (repentance, confession, and forsaking the sin), then you must rest in God's knowledge. John says, "if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart and knows all things" **1 John 3:20**.

What does He know? He knows that you have sincerely repented and forsaken this sin. He knows your sincerity of heart in its desire to reconcile

before God and man. Stand on the Word of God on this issue, not your feelings.

2. Then take any action required in God's Word that will seek to rectify the problem. This will cause your conscience to approve your actions as you attempt to reconcile any sin or failure **1 John 3:18-19, Romans 2:15**. Taking the biblical action required is essential to quiet the accusations of your conscience.

3.. Once you have taken the above action, you must rest in the sovereignty of God to work even your mistakes and failures for good. Joseph encouraged his brothers not to be angry with themselves because God had turned all their evil around for good **Genesis 45:5**. Believe that God will do the same in your life.

You can control your anger with the help of the Holy Spirit, but you must surrender these feelings to him and trust him. You must make the choice to forgive those that have hurt you and surrender these feeling before they grow into rage or some other sinful action.

Change your mind by changing your Heart, this happens by studying Gods word (daily), continually repent and confess your sins (daily), pray for those that hurt you (Daily) and overcome the attacks of the enemy, through the strength of Christ who strengthens you, greater is he who is in you (The Spirit of God), then he who is in this world (The Devil or those people used by the Devil to hurt you). Be an over comer, Over come anger and gain peace in your life!