

PBC Men's Ministry

Wednesday Night Study

May 26, 2010

Handling anger is an important topic. Christian counselors report that 50 percent of people who come in for counseling have problems dealing with anger. Anger can shatter communication and tear apart relationships, and it ruins both the joy and health of many. Sadly, people tend to justify their anger instead of accepting responsibility for it. Everyone struggles, to varying degrees, with anger. Thankfully, God's Word contains principles regarding how to handle anger in a godly manner, and how to overcome sinful anger.

Anger is not always sin. There is a type of anger of which the Bible approves, often called "righteous indignation." God is angry (Psalm 7:11; Mark 3:5), and believers are commanded to be angry (Ephesians 4:26). Two Greek words are used in the New Testament for our English word "anger." One means "passion, energy" and the other means "agitated, boiling." Biblically, anger is God-given energy intended to help us solve problems. Examples of biblical anger include Paul's confronting Peter because of his wrong example in Galatians 2:11-14, David's being upset over hearing Nathan the prophet sharing an injustice (2 Samuel 12), and Jesus' anger over how some of the Jews had defiled worship at God's temple in Jerusalem (John 2:13-18). Notice that none of these examples of anger involved self-defense, but a defense of others or of a principle.

Anger turns to sin when it is selfishly motivated (James 1:20), when God's goal is distorted (1 Corinthians 10:31), or when anger is allowed to linger (Ephesians 4:26-27). Instead of using the energy generated by anger to attack the problem at hand, it is the person who is attacked. Ephesians 4:15-19 says we are to speak the truth in love and use our words to build others up, not allow rotten or destructive words to pour from our lips. Unfortunately, this poisonous speech is a common characteristic of fallen man (Romans 3:13-14). Anger becomes sin when it is allowed to boil over without restraint, resulting in a scenario in which hurt is multiplied (Proverbs 29:11), leaving devastation in its wake, often with irreparable consequences. Anger also becomes sin when the angry one refuses to be pacified, holds a grudge, or keeps it all inside (Ephesians 4:26-27). This can cause depression and irritability over little things, often things unrelated to the underlying problem.

We can handle anger biblically by recognizing and admitting our selfish anger and/or our wrong handling of anger as sin (Proverbs 28:13; 1 John 1:9). This confession should be both to God and to those who have been hurt by our anger. We should not minimize the sin by excusing it or blame-shifting.

We can handle anger biblically by seeing God in the trial. This is especially important when people have done something to offend us. James 1:2-4, Romans 8:28-29, and Genesis 50:20 all point to the fact that God is sovereign and in complete control over every circumstance and

person that enters our path. Nothing happens to us that He does not cause or allow. And as these verses share, God is a good God (Psalm 145:8, 9, 17) who allows all things in our lives for our good and the good of others. Reflecting on this truth until it moves from our heads to our hearts will alter how we react to those who hurt us.

We can handle anger biblically by making room for God's wrath. This is especially important in cases of injustice, when "evil" men abuse "innocent" people. Genesis 50:19 and Romans 12:19 both tell us to not play God. God is righteous and just, and we can trust Him who knows all and sees all to act justly (Genesis 18:25).

We can handle anger biblically by not returning evil for good (Genesis 50:21; Romans 12:21). This is key to converting our anger into love. As our actions flow from our hearts, so also our hearts can be altered by our actions (Matthew 5:43-48). That is, we can change our feelings toward another by changing how we choose to act toward that person.

We can handle anger biblically by communicating to solve the problem. There are four basic rules of communication shared in Ephesians 4:15, 25-32:

- 1) Be honest and speak (Ephesians 4:15, 25). People cannot read our minds. We must speak the truth in love.
- 2) Stay current (Ephesians 4:26-27). We must not allow what is bothering us to build up until we lose control. Dealing with and sharing what is bothering us before it gets to that point is important.
- 3) Attack the problem, not the person (Ephesians 4:29, 31). Along this line, we must remember the importance of keeping the volume of our voices low (Proverbs 15:1).
- 4) Act, not react (Ephesians 4:31-32). Because of our fallen nature, our first impulse is often a sinful one (v. 31). The time spent in "counting to ten" should be used to reflect upon the godly way to respond (v. 32) and to remind ourselves how anger is to be used to solve problems and not create bigger ones.

Finally, we must act to solve our part of the problem (Acts 12:18). We cannot control how others act or respond, but we can make the changes that need to be made on our part. Overcoming a temper is not accomplished overnight. But through prayer, Bible study, and reliance upon God's Holy Spirit, ungodly anger can be overcome. Just as we may have allowed anger to become entrenched in our lives by habitual practice, we must also practice responding correctly until it becomes a habit itself.