

Managing Anger, Part 1

Resolved. There is nothing righteous that comes from anger out of control. James 1:19, 20: "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." God, knowing this, also says, "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath" (Ephesians 4:26). John Wesley wrote concerning this verse: "Be ye angry, and sin not - That is, if ye are angry, take heed ye sin not. Anger at sin is not evil; but we should feel only pity to the sinner. If we are angry at the person, as well as the fault, we sin. And how hardly do we avoid it. Let not the sun go down upon your wrath - Reprove your brother, and be reconciled immediately. Lose not one day."

Anger management belongs to Christianity. Much of today's counsel deals only with symptoms. In other words, how to control yourself, compartmentalizing and steps to behavior modification are the modus operandi. Christianity goes to the source, cuts off excuses and frees the person to substitute anger with love. Let's talk about anger management from a biblical viewpoint and how it can, through Christ, be controlled.

I. RIGHTEOUS INDIGNATION IS WHEN WE TAKE SIDES WITH GOD AND EXPRESS FROM HIS VIEWPOINT THE OFFENSE AND WHY IT SHOULD CEASE AND DESIST.

In all honesty, righteous indignation has often been the blame for someone's out-of-control conduct. If one can feign spirituality in their backsliding, in their mind it is justified, but not in reality. I caution at this point - do not do this or attempt to get close to this; great harm can come from it. For instance, if you have expressed to someone who is not a Christian or is an immature believer that you are championing a cause for God when in fact you are just "blowing off steam" from a personal offense, you have allowed this person to have a wrong view of God. How sad when the unconverted person's only view of God is given by an angry person.

Let me give you a prime instance where righteous indignation is appropriate. John 2:13-15 reads, "And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up."

A. The offense is recognized as against God.

At the Passover God's people (many being financially challenged) came to the Temple to worship and prepare for the Passover and were confronted by financial scam and sacrilege. The scam was between the moneychangers and

the priests. The sacrilege was using this holy time and place of worship to profit their illegal marketing.

B. There was no loss of temper.

The phrase, "I lost my temper" is reflective of one's being out of control. Jesus was not out of control. He carefully and contemplatively put together a scourge of small cords. He did not come in there yelling and screaming, as many perceive. By the way, there is a verse of Scripture in the New Testament that comes to us from Isaiah's prophecy of Jesus' demeanor which says, "He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets"(Matthew 12; 19). Although I believe the main teaching here is that our Lord will not rouse an army to lay stake to His claim as Messiah, it is appropriate to say he will not be screaming in anger to demand His rights. These phrases our Lord uses tell us much about His temperament: "...learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls."(Matthew 11:29); "But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy..." (Matthew 9:13); "But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy..." (Matthew 12:7). Christ did not lose His temper; He planned to express the indignation of God. He was in total control. Referring to His approaching crucifixion and death for our sins, Christ says, "No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father" (John 10:18). The Lord Jesus was all power under perfect control.

C. No one was physically hurt.

It can only be presumed that he struck these violators of justice, but the Bible does not say this. It says Jesus drove them out. He did turn their tables over, but it is apparent there was no bodily harm inflicted by our Lord. If He had, we would have heard about it in the accusations trumped up against Him at His trials.

There are occasions when righteous indignation is appropriate, but the offense should be recognized as against God. We should not lose our temper and as a rule, our act of indignation should not hurt someone.

Augustine wrote of the need for "just war." This is an exception to turning the other cheek and/or inflicting physical harm. The ancient Church Father made a strong case that "just war" was never an answer to personal offense and never an act of vengeance. If someone is hurting an innocent person and they will not stop, if you must hurt them to save the innocent, it is understood. In most cases this is done by the "powers that be" as describe in Romans 13. A classic worldwide example came at the outbreak of World War II. Adolph Hitler and his Nazis refused the peace for our time as offered by Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. He would not be stopped until physical resistance was applied and although it took life, the action saved so many more lives. A great verse that helps us discern a correct approach to any given situation is Romans 12:18, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."

II. ANGER CAUSES LIFETIME AND SOMETIMES ETERNAL CONSEQUENCES.

The oldest brother, Reuben lost his inheritance due to his immoral conduct and the next two in line for the inheritance of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, forfeited their right because of an uncontrolled anger. The Bible says, "Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel" (Genesis 49:5-7). Their sister had been treated wrongfully and these brothers decided to take matters into their own hands. The Bible says, "...avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Romans 12:19). In Genesis 34, Simon and Levi parlayed with Hamor, the father of Shechem, who defiled their sister, but who now was willing to marry her. They tricked him into receiving circumcision as part of the deal to secure Dinah to become his wife and when they were incapacitated, they slew the son, the father and all the men of the city and stole all their livestock. Jacob called them cruel, cursed their anger and said they would be scattered throughout the tribes of Israel.

(To be continued next week)

-Pastor Pope-