

THE SIN OF ANGER

Bob Marcaurrelle

"If you churn milk you get butter, if you twist a nose you get blood,
and if you stir up anger you get trouble." (Proverbs 30:33)

THE SERIOUSNESS

Anger is both strange and serious. It is *strange* because we all do it; most deny doing it; and a few of us call it a sin. We brag about it like the man who said, "I weigh 130 pounds. When I'm mad, I weigh 200."

To God anger is *serious* and *sinful*. The Bible repeatedly condemns it and gives examples of its destructive power. It is the first sin expressed by our evil nature outside of Eden (Genesis 4). God asked Cain why he was mad. It kept Moses from entering the Promised Land (Numbers 20:10-13). It is the sin that killed Jesus. The religious leaders were "angry" at Him because He healed on the Sabbath (John 7:23) and the end result of their anger was the cross.

Anger is a *heart* problem. In Galatians 5, Paul lists 17 foul works that come from our evil nature and seven of them point to this sin.

HATRED is enmity or the natural, fighting instinct of the human heart.
VARIANCE points to conflicts that arise between people who are by nature hostile.
WRATH, the blazing anger or fits of rage, point to the harmful words and deeds that come out of conflict. STRIFE means "factious" (Barclay) where the angry person seeks support for his side. The result is SEDITIONS or "divisions" where homes, churches, businesses, neighborhoods, countries, etc., form opposing, hostile groups. HERESY points to dissent that crystallizes into settled hatred between groups.

Conversely, of the nine character traits of the Spirit led life, five point to the conquering of this particular sin (Galatians 5:14-26).

LOVE, Paul says, is not irritable (1 Corinthians 13). PEACE is the absence of conflict. PATIENCE, is literally "long tempered" in the Greek language. GENTLENESS, according to Aristotle, is the mean between too much and too little anger. And SELF CONTROL, which means "to take hold of", is most often used in our language in the context of anger as we speak of "controlling" our tempers.

Anger is a *home* problem. David and Vera Mace, after almost a half a century of marriage counseling in America, said; "The number one cause of divorce in our nation is plain, old-fashioned anger." Anger is a problem in the *House of God*. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 12:20, wrote the Church at Corinth:

"I'm afraid that when I come I may not find you
being what I want /there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger,
selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit and disorder."

This sounds like an autopsy of a church killed by angry people. One man said, "The church is like Noah's ark. If it weren't for the storm on the outside, we couldn't put up with the stink on the inside." At home, at church, at work, at play and in your neighborhood, this sin will wreck your life quicker than any other. That's why an ancient proverb says:

"Whom the gods destroy, they first MAKE MAD."

THE SCRIPTURES

Psalm 37:8 says, "Refrain from anger and forsake wrath." Proverbs 14:17 says,

"A quick tempered man acts like a fool." My favorite verse is Ecclesiastes 7:9,

"Be not quick to anger, for anger lodges in the bosom of a fool."

Ephesians 4:31 says, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind

to one another." James 1:20 says, "The wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God." Our Lord said "If we are angry at our brother,

we are in danger of the judgment. If we insult him we are in danger of the council (a greater judgment). But if we call him RACCA, you fool, you good for nothing; we are in danger of hell-fire." (Matthew 5:21-22)

What about *Jesus' anger* at Pharisees (Mark 3:5)? What about His driving out the money changers (John 2:13-25)? This is righteous indignation, a virtue we all need but which few of us have. It is anger over someone else's nose being punched and 99.9% of our anger is over our own nose being punched.

Abraham Lincoln, as a young man, saw a mother being sold away from her child on the slave block. He clinched his fists and said,

"If I ever get the chance to hit this, I will hit it hard."

What about Ephesians 4:26, "*Be angry and do not sin; don't let the sun go down on your anger.*" The Greek scholar A. T. Robertson, calls this a "conditional imperative" which means, "WHEN YOU GET ANGRY" deal with it immediately, before you do something foolish and harmful.

THE SOURCES

Anger comes from within. The Bible says, "*Anger lodges in the bosom of a fool*" (Ecclesiastes 7:9). No one can make us mad. They get out of us what is already inside of us. (Some folks can flat get it out in a hurry) If we have a heart full of Jesus, love and peace, we will not get angry. Where does anger live inside us?

1. *Fear of Failure-Insecurity* (1 John 4:18) If I say two plus two is four and you say it is five I won't be upset because I KNOW what two plus two is. But if you ridicule my reasons for believing the Bible is the word of God or question my

right to preach; the hair will bristle on my neck and we can get a pretty good battle going, especially if you have some good arguments. Politician Huey P. Long wrote in the margin of his speeches, "Argument weak, shout!"

2. *False Expectations (Luke 7:20)* John the Baptizer boldly proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah. When he was suffering in prison however, and Jesus did nothing about it, he sent his disciples to ask, "Are you He who is to come or should we look for another?" (Luke 7:20). There could have been a lot of hurt and a little anger behind this. We get angry with people because we build false expectations and they don't live up to them.

All I ever wanted in a wife was for her to cook like Betty Crocker, be as godly as Mrs. Billy Graham and look like a movie star. I got my image of a wife from my grandmother and from Ozzie and Harriet on TV. A wife sings all day while she does housework; looks like she just came from the beauty shop; and has supper on the table every night at six.

I grew up doing EVERYTHING on Saturday (Going to the movie, the grocery, the barber, etc.). My wife grew up in the big city and her family stayed in the road every day. During the first few years of my marriage it infuriated me to see an empty carport on Tuesday, Thursday or on any day but Saturday. I wondered what she was doing burning gas and wearing out tires, when she ought to be home cleaning house, cooking, and singing?

My problem was not with her, but with what I expected of her. Until we talked about it, I never realized today's hectic pace is nothing like the simple life I grew up knowing. We all have false expectations that make us angry. You and your spouse fuss and fight all the way to church. But when you hit the parking lot and get out, it's all smiles and "honey" and "sugar." Another couple, fighting all the way to church, sees you and says, "Why can't we be like them?" That's the trouble. You are.

3. *Frustration (John 18:15-18)* When the Jews couldn't get anything on Jesus at his trial, they slapped Him. The hardest work I ever did was cut pulpwood; but it is far more difficult to assemble a toy your wife gives you to put together on Christmas Eve. The holes don't match and you know there has to be a piece missing, but there isn't. You just can't get it together. You want to throw it out the window and your wife along with it. This is frustration; having a goal and not being able to reach it.

Our life is filled with this. The four "gods" of America are: beauty, bucks, brawn and brains. We envy those who are good looking, well off financially, athletic, and make good grades. The rest of us feel trapped and inferior. You have a job you hate but cannot quit. You didn't make the team, the cheerleading squad, the beauty pageant. You have poor health. You are too tall or too short. We feel

trapped, frustrated and aggravated. We see this daily on the highway where “road rage” lies just beneath the calm exterior of the drivers.

4. *Fighting Over Rights (Luke 15:28)* In Jesus' story of the Prodigal boy, the father threw a party to welcome him; but the Bible says his older brother, "Was ANGRY and refused to go in."(Luke 15:28) He felt he deserved attention like this.

When I was in forestry and was running a property line, an old farmer walked up and told me I was wrong. He moved it over so a beautiful stand of timber was on “his” property. When I told him I was right and that I had graduated from the University of Georgia, he was not impressed. He said, "I'll go get my gun, and we'll see who is right." Needless to say, I decided he was right and we put the line exactly where he said it went. That man would have killed me for a few trees.

Children will fight like vultures and hate each other for years over the division of their parents' possessions. Like spoiled children, we are enraged when we don't get our rights, our way, etc. Cheated people are angry people.

THE SADNESS

“If you churn milk you get butter, if you twist a nose you get blood,
and if you stir up anger you get trouble.” (Proverbs 30:33)

Angry people are dangerous people. The root cause of the terrible school shootings in places like Columbine is rage over being looked down on or made fun of by the “in” crowd. (beauty, bucks, brawn and brains) This does not justify violence, but it explains it.

The week after I first preached this sermon, in the late 1970's, a man got mad when he missed a shot while hunting, threw his shotgun against a tree and it discharged and killed him.

The week I wrote this sermon for the first time (May 1, 1992), was when rioting was going on in Los Angeles over the acquittal of four policemen video taped beating a black man lying on the ground. As of right now, twenty five people are dead, eight hundred are wounded, and close to 2,000 fires have been set. That same week I read a Reader's Digest article where a teacher with migraines, an executive who took his own life and a young man who climbed up on a tower at the University of Texas and started shooting and killing people all had one thing in common. They were being treated for suppressed anger.

The week I was writing this article (September 15, 2009), the best female tennis player in the world (Serena Williams) pitched a fit at the US Open on national television, by breaking her racket on the ground and cursing a line judge.

Suppression (Job 1:21)

What anger does destructively is determined by what we do with it. Do we suppress it or express it? Job, at first, suppressed it. His life caved in and he was a good little Christian, saying exactly what he was "supposed" to say, "*The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Praise the name of the Lord.*" (Job 1:21) We give him an "A" in spirituality but the problem is – he was not being honest with himself. We get the real Job in 3:1, "*Finally, Job broke the silence and cursed the day he was born.*" The next thirty plus chapters deal with his angry outbursts at God and his friends over the harsh blows he experienced. A lot of Christians do this. They say they are not mad; they are "hurt/disappointed/etc.) when the truth is they are "whopping mad." Denial is dangerous. It is like holding acid in our hands. It will burn its way out in many ways.

The first is **depression**. My mother was a manic depressive and I have battled depression all my life and take medication prescribed by my local doctor.

(Christians, who think taking medicine for depression is a sign of lack of faith, are dead wrong. It is no more of a sin than taking high blood pressure medication. Our society, however, is over medicated as we want relief in a hurry. That is why people with depression should work closely with their personal physician and include exercise, relaxation techniques, positive thinking, etc. in their lifestyles.)

Experts tell us that 50 percent of depression is not organic. It is caused by unhealthy things we do, one of which is to get angry and bottle it in. In fact, many psychologists today define depression as "anger turned inward."

Anger comes out in **irritability**. Unable to contain the anger we feel, we dribble it out in small doses of irritability, cutting remarks and dirty looks. A lady went to see a psychiatrist and he asked her if she waked up grouchy every morning. She said, "No, I let him sleep."

It comes out in **physical illness**. The Mayo clinic estimates that 50 percent of the people in hospital beds are not there because of some organic disease; but because of harmful attitudes and emotions. The endocrine glands secrete chemicals into our system when we face the four demons of guilt, inferiority, fear and anger. We are all familiar with the physical symptoms of anger; our voice shakes, our palms sweat and our forehead turns red. When these become chronic the secretion becomes chronic and acts like a poison. That's why we call people "a pain in the neck" and say, "get off my back!" You may say you are not mad and even convince yourself you are not, but every cell in your body knows you are and you have the scars to prove it. Dr. S. I. McMillen, in his book None of These Diseases, traces high blood pressure, heart attacks, arthritis and back pain to suppressed bitterness. The type "A" personality, so prone to heart attacks is an angry, aggressive, competitive type, who lets his anger out in profanity. It is no surprise

then that the type “A” is at the top of the list of those prone to heart attacks and strokes.

Some people who appear sweet and don't give in to irritable words, dribble anger out in what psychologists call **passive hostility**. They do things that drive the people they are mad at up the wall. They will be late. They will forget to pick up the laundry. They will nag about little things.

Finally, anger often comes out in **furious explosions**. If we bottle up our anger long enough, it will sometimes blow up and cause us to do horrible things. It only takes one blow of the human fist to kill or cripple a child; and sadly some cases of child injuries come from an otherwise good parent who explodes in rage before he or she realizes it.

When I was a boy, a man in our neighborhood shot his wife in the face with a shotgun. As kids will do, we all ran to the house to get a look at the body as they brought it out. I heard a neighbor say to a policeman, "He was so quiet. I never heard them argue." The policeman said, "That's the kind you have to worry about. He took it and took it and took it, and probably killed her a thousand times in his mind before he did it."

Expression

Maybe you are the kind who lets your anger out. You don't suppress it, you express it. You don't GET ulcers, you GIVE them. A lady said, "Brother Pastor, I get mad quick but I get over it quick." The pastor answered, "So does a tornado, but look at all the damage it does while it's blowing."

Expressing anger will **make us a fool in the eyes of others**. Proverbs 14:17 says, "*A quick tempered man acts like a fool.*" A pastor, with one angry outburst, can undo 20 years of faithful service. One pastor, who pitched a tiny fit when he couldn't find his cuff links; after finding them, went to visit a young man dying of cancer. Impressed by the young man's peace and courage, he came home and said, "God's grace will see us through any crisis." His wife answered, "Almost any, because it didn't help you much when you lost your cuff links." I know personally how my temper tantrums have made me look foolish to my wife and girls.

Once, when I walked into a room to watch a bowl game, my wife said, "You missed it. I just saw a coach hit a player on the other team." I smiled and told her she was wrong, coaches don't do that and she should leave the football watching to men. Well, as you know, she was right. Woody Hayes, of Ohio State, hit Charlie Bauman of Clemson in the face, when he intercepted a pass in front of the Ohio State side-line. Hayes will not be remembered as one of the greatest college coaches of all time but as the "hot head" who hit another teams player on national television.

Foolish acts cause us to **take our anger out on the wrong person**. Saul was mad at David and threw a spear at his own son Jonathan (1 Samuel 20). You say, "That is insane." It is, but we all do it. Unable to tell our boss how we feel; we lower the boom on our wife, our kids and especially on the poor dog who runs up wagging its tail, unaware of the bad day we have had.

Expressing anger will make us **do things we regret**. Alexander the Great, in a fit of anger, killed his best friend and drank himself to death because of it. Cruel words, spoken in anger, can never be recalled; and though forgiven, will leave scars that last for life.

Being hot tempered will **destroy us physically**. Proverbs 17:22 says, "*A cheerful spirit keeps you healthy.*" Type "A" executives die early. If you clench your fist and say, "I'm going to get even if it's the last thing I do!", it may well be. Chronic temper tantrums mean you are asking for things like strokes, heart attacks and many forms of arthritis.

The meanest critter on mother earth is a grizzly. It weighs over 1000 pounds. It can run as fast as a horse. It can knock down an 8 inch pine. And it's mean. It can whip anything. But there is a little, five pound animal that can steal food from a grizzly. It can run the grizzly away. It is a SKUNK. Now a grizzly can smash a skunk with one blow but he doesn't. Why? Dale Carnegie says, "HE KNOWS THE HIGH COST OF GETTING EVEN." Anger will destroy others, homes, churches, offices and in the end will destroy you!

THE SAFETY (Galatians 5:14-26)

Turn It Over We are not to foolishly *suppress* or sinfully *express* anger; we are to humbly *confess* it for the sin it is and ask God to deliver us from it (1 John 1:7-2:3). Things like *love* (which is not irritable); *peace*; *gentleness*; *patience* (long tempered-slow to get angry); and *self control* are not in our power to create. They are the "**fruits**" of the Holy Spirit working in our lives. Fruit takes time. It must be planted, watered, fertilized, be exposed to the sun and rain, weeded, harvested, etc. We must spend time in prayer (talking to God) and in Bible reading (listening to God). When you are angry, ask God why, and search the Scriptures and your heart for the answer the Spirit wants to give you.

Work It Out Part of God's answer will come through our hard work and common sense. We don't fold our hands and wait for God to pour love, patience, and self control into us. God gives farmers their crops but they have to obey the

laws of nature and work hard to get them. It is the same with spiritual laws. One of the best ways to get anger out positively, in a way that hurts no one, is to do hard labor--jog, wash cars, garden, walk 18 holes of golf carrying your bag, punch a punching bag instead of your spouse, your kids, your boss, your employer, your employees, your Pastor, or your members (if you are a pastor).

Let It Out Positively When Jesus was slapped at His trial He didn't quietly take it; to help the one who slapped Him, He asked him to think about why he had done such a thing (John 18). When His brothers made fun of Him and told Him to go public with His miracles; He told them they were just like the world that was seeking to kill Him (John 7:1-9). They were later converted (Acts 1). We must learn to practice "positive aggression" where we confront those who do us wrong redemptively and honestly. I have learned, when insulted, to give myself time to cool off, and then say to the person something like this, "I did not deserve to be treated like that." Almost every time I have done this the person has apologized.

Think It Over The old advice to "count to ten" is good advice. When you are about to act, walk away and think about the consequences. Ask yourself, "Will I act like a fool; do something I regret; hurt the wrong person; hurt myself; dishonor God; etc.

A lady called me and never told me her name. Her story was tragic. As a child she had been sexually abused by her stepfather. Now she was grown and on the verge of getting right with God and joining a church. The problem was the pastor and members were telling her, she could not be saved until she forgave her stepfather. With tears in her voice, she said, "Pastor, I can't make myself love him. I can't forgive him. Does this mean I'm going to hell?"

Never have I been happier to have a good gospel word for someone. I said, "Ma'am, love is a journey to a destination; and when converted we start where we are and take baby steps towards that destination. That's why we sing 'Just As I Am' in our churches. The fact that you can't love or forgive him is why Jesus says we all must be born again (John 3). That is why you need the Lord; to give you the desire and power you need." I asked her if she wanted to be able to forgive him? When she said, "I don't know," I said, "Start there. Tell God you WANT to WANT TO. For that church to ask you to love him before you are saved is like asking a dead man to walk or asking a child to know algebra before he can enroll in kindergarten. Come to God just as you are and He will change you slowly into what He wants you to be."

I hope what I said next gave her the strength to come to Christ. I asked her about her health and life and she said she was on drugs, stayed depressed all the time, and was chronically sick. Then I said, "That devil is still hurting you and as long as you keep hating him he will continue to hurt you. Come to Christ and ask Him for the power to one day forgive your stepfather and you will help yourself more than you can imagine."

Express It To God (Job 3-40) Many of us are angry with God. You lost your job. You lost your child. You lost your health. Life hasn't turned out the way you wanted it to and you are bitter towards Him. When Job expressed his bitterness honestly, he was healed.

Catherine Marshall tells of the Christian surgeon trying to save a child's life.

When the child died, the surgeon shook his fist at heaven and said,

“D_ _ _ it God! Why don't you help me sometimes?”

He then was afraid he had committed the unpardonable sin and

expressed this fear to Mrs. Marshall. She said, “That was

probably the most honest prayer you ever prayed.”

I won't debate whether or not his prayer was right, and I certainly would not recommend using profanity when praying to God, but I know this man's prayer was HONEST and only when we are honest will we truly find inner healing.

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Bob Marcaurelle
2003 Lynn Avenue
Anderson, SC 29621-1535

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