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The Problem of Anger Ephesians 4:26-32

Much of the mail in my mailbox lately has been revolving around anger. Therefore, I would like to speak on this subject in a general way. The following is an excerpt from the upcoming book, LORD, WHY AM I CRYING?

Let's look now at anger. What to do about it? Anger can range from icy hate to boiling rage. Anger should, then, be one of our best understood, most carefully managed, and most effectively channeled emotions. It is much too powerful to be overlooked, much too dangerous to be ignored.

The first step in resolving anger is to admit that anger, in and of itself, is not sin. Anger is an emotion, and like all emotions, neither right nor wrong. It's what we do with it that eventually receives such a label. Paul confirms this when he instructs that we be angry and sin not. (Ephesians 4:26). Some counselors have failed to help their patients with the problem of anger because they do not accept that anger is a normal emotion. The fact is that God gave us the ability to feel anger. Therefore, we must realize that there are constructive, God-called uses for it.

None of our emotions are destructive in themselves because our emotional makeup is totally from God. But all emotions can become destructive when we fail to express them in harmony with biblical standards.

An angry person should look inside oneself and examine his heart. David Augsburger tells us: "In anger, one gets a rare chance to see the self sharply, unretouched. Look and learn. Your anger may be an index to your degree of self-love and self-conceit. Or it may be an unconscious admission of guilt. Guilt that needs to be confessed, forgiven, released. For example, anger is common to those with bad consciences or repressed guilt. A thief is far more angry to be accused of theft than is an honest man. It's more often the adulterer than the faithful spouse who flies into a rage when an affair is revealed. Anger can be far more revealing than even your conscience's warning signals.

"When you feel anger mounting, ask, What is my demand? How am I demanding change? What do I really want? An honest answer is like a dash of cold water."

Anger should not be released hastily. This is when one person ventilates his anger upon another person, aiming his destructive energies at someone else. We've heard many times the old prescription about counting to ten when we're angry. That's a good prescription. Sometimes the desirable thing to do is suppress the anger. That gives the necessary time for reaction to become response. Suppressing is not the same as repression. To suppress, in this case anger, is to hold it in abeyance until it can be dealt with in a healthy and rational manner. Repressing anger, on the other hand, is to deny the emotion with such force that it

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is pushed down into the unconscious. The patient then proceeds to “forget” about it on a conscious level. Remaining very much alive, however, it continues to grow and fester until it must once again surface in another form, usually bitterness and resentment. The dilemma that results is one of how to dispose of the normal anger energies in a normal and constructive way?

Jay Adams tells about two kinds of people: the problem-oriented, and the solution-oriented. “Christians who are problem-oriented tend to talk about the problem, feel sorry for themselves, start up blameshifting operations, and focus their energies upon who is at fault. Solution-oriented Christians size up the problem, try to fix responsibilities, and then turn as quickly as possible toward solving the problem biblically. In the process, often they find it necessary to rebuke, but when they do so, they are able to rebuke in love. The rebuke, though anger-motivated, will be done for a loving purpose and in a loving manner. The energies of the emotion will be focused upon the solution to the problem, not upon the problem maker.”

The energies of anger are wasted and used damagingly when they are directed solely toward oneself or another. Under control, anger is to be released within oneself and toward others only in ways that motivate one to confront others in a biblical manner in order to solve problems. Anger is a power emotion, but its power to motivate must be used, not abused. This motivating power is used properly when it drives one to begin to rectify any wrong situation between brethren as quickly as possible. It is used biblically when it impels one to become reconciled to his brother immediately.

Anger should be dealt with according to Matthew 18:15. Jesus starts by stating that *“if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother,”* What Jesus is talking about here is confrontation. You go alone to the one who has offended you. You don't take it all around the workplace or all around the church. Go to him alone. Usually this kind of confrontation, done in love, is successful, and the relationship is restored. But what if the brother doesn't listen?

Jesus goes on with His instructions of how to handle it. Each case involves confrontation. It does not involve repressing and hiding our heads in the proverbial sand in hopes it will go away. But we must learn the validity of Ephesians 4:15, and Speak the Truth in love. This will be covered in the next chapter.

God bless you,
Your friend,
Lynda Allison Doty

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