

Faithbook Series: What's the Status of Your Anger?
Matthew 5:21-27
March 6, 2011

Introduction: As I have started to use Facebook a little more I have noticed how some people while on Facebook vent their feelings of joy, excitement but also frustration and even anger. Some do a better job than others of expressing themselves in a respectful way, and some people not so much. The Bible has instructions of how we are to handle our emotions because God has created us to have a wide range of feelings. The overall biblical and Christian expectation is for our emotions to not run wild or out of control. Anger is one of the emotions the Bible often addresses because if left unchecked, anger can do immense damage.

The great General Robert E. Lee once said **“I cannot trust a man to control others who cannot control himself.”** (source, Tom Harper, sermon central.com) So as we continue in readings from the Gospel of Matthew and our Faithbook series, we are going to be looking at the teachings of Jesus on handling our emotions. Today we look at anger, next week we'll examine what Jesus said about lust and temptation.

Let's start with a question. Is it wrong to get angry? If it is, then what do we do because the Bible describes times when God was angry. The New Testament contains stories when Jesus at times became angry. We want to show a clip that is based on the Gospel of John 2:13-17 of a time when Jesus became angry. It is known as the Cleansing of the Temple story. Take a look.

Jesus was mad. But he was angry because of the evil committed against God. Author Becky Pippert writes,
“Think how we feel when we see someone we love ravaged by unwise

actions or relationships. Do we respond with benign tolerance as we might toward strangers? Far from it...Anger isn't the opposite of love. Hate is and the final form of hate is indifference...God's wrath is not a cranky explosion, but his settled opposition to the cancer ...which is eating out the insides of the human race he loves with his whole being." (source, Reasons for God, by Timothy Keller p.73)

So lets take a look at the words of Jesus about anger: **Matthew 5:21-26**

Anger Clarified – Two Types of Anger v.22

In these verses Jesus takes aim at mishandled anger. New Testament scholar William Barclay states that in the Greek there were two key words for anger. There is "thumos" which comes from the image of dry straw that quickly is consumed by fire and then just as quickly burns out. So one form our anger can take is that we get angry about something and then we're over it. Its "Thumos type of anger. "Thumos" is not the word Jesus used in this passage to describe anger.

The word actually used in verse 22 for anger is "orgizesthai" which is anger that according to William Barclay is an anger we allow to brew inside of us. We keep the heat of this anger simmering for a long time. We hang onto it. (Barclay, p.138) So when Jesus says, **"if you are angry with your brother or sister you will be liable to judgment..."** The reason God will hold us accountable is not because we got mad; its because we choose to stay mad and **resentful**. Jesus was teaching that if we choose to hold onto anger, allow it to stir and brew like a pot of soup on the stove at just the right temperature ready to serve up at any moment, that anger is wrong. Let's consider the words of Jesus and some other scripture of why that type of anger is hazardous to our relationships.

The Dangerous Consequences of Anger

1.) self-serving - Anger that Jesus condemns is a self-serving type of anger. It's the anger just for our pleasure; but not working the righteousness of God. **Proverbs 27:4 states, "Wrath is cruel and anger is overwhelming..."** The type of anger Jesus is concerned about is self serving anger and if left unchecked it becomes passively exploitive. Meaning, we may never say we are angry with our words but our actions in relationships say loud and clear we are angry we are holding hostility.

Marlene had some one on Facebook "un-friend" her which means they didn't want to be able to receive messages from Marlene, but this person never wrote and said why they were "un-friending her."

Its anger that comes out in silence, avoidance, cruel humor that also disrespects. Christians aren't above this type of anger. One of the first things I learned a long time ago in ministry is that there are the designated meetings in the church where issues are discussed and then there are the undesignated church meetings in the church parking lot or other locations where conversations can continue with things said that people were too afraid or angry to say in the board or council meeting.

2.) contagious - Anger that is allowed to hang around has a great chance of to be contagious and infectious to others. There are stories in the Old Testament like Exodus 15, and 27, Numbers 14 where the rebellious anger of the people turned against Moses as he tried to lead the people to the Promise Land. There was the anger by the religious leaders toward Jesus that was used to infect the crowds and call for Jesus to be crucified. It is no wonder that scripture like **Proverbs 22:24-25 says, Do not make friends with a hot tempered man...or you may learn his ways.**" Anger that is just brewing and not working toward resolving the issue will miss lead others. It poorly role models for others how to handle their anger.

Billy Martin - Mickey Mantle Story - Legendary baseball player Billy Martin tells about the time he was invited by another hall of fame player, Mickey Mantle to go deer hunting on a farm in Texas. Mickey Mantle drove Billy out to a ranch that belonged to one of Mickey's friends. Mickey told Billy to wait in the car while he went up to the door of his friend's house to let his friend know they were heading out to hunt. When his friend answered the door, he was distraught. He told Mickey that an old mule he had for 21 years was blind and needed to be put down; but he didn't have a heart to do it. So he asked that before they went hunting that Mickey would go out behind the barn and shoot the mule. Mickey agreed.

However, when Mickey agreed, he came back to the car and he played a joke on Billy. Mickey got in and slammed the car door shut and told Billy Martin that his friend changed his mind and refused to let them go hunting. Mickey said, "that makes me so mad I am going to go behind his barn and shoot one of his mules. Mickey drove like a maniac for the barn while Billy protested what he was about to do. Mickey got out of the car walked around to the back of the barn and shot the mule. As Mickey was heading back to the car he heard two shots. He ran to the car and asked Billy what he was shooting. Billy stood there with his gun and said, he got so mad at Mickey's friend for not letting them hunt; he shot two of the guys cows. Beware anger can be contagious. (High Maintenance Relationships, Parrot, p.132)

3.) Punitive and destructive - Right after Jesus warns about being angry in this way, in verse 22 he states we are guilty if we insult and call someone a fool. I believe the words of Jesus are trying to point out the progressive destructive pattern of holding onto anger for too long.

- Hanging onto anger causes us to begin to insult others and lose respect for them and see them as a fool.
- To hang onto the anger blinds us from being grateful to others.

- Ongoing resentment fails to acknowledging the good in others.
- Simmering anger strives too only have the desire to get even.
- The anger Jesus speaks against is holding onto anger that has the single minded mission to punish and destroy.

4.) Lose credibility - Anger like this undermines our credibility as a Christian. Remember the story of Moses in Exodus 2:11-15 when he saw and Egyptian soldier beating a Hebrew slave? Moses at that time was still a prince in Egypt. He had power to simply order the beating to stop. He had the influence and connections to have had the man brought before Pharaoh; but in stead Moses struck the Egyptian soldier and killed him and then hid his body. Later when Moses witnessed two Hebrew men fighting, he tried to intervene and one man quickly said to Moses, “are you going to strike me like you struck that Egyptian.” Moses knew his secret was blown and he fled Egypt. Moses ran because he feared punishment. It is pointed story how mishandled anger will cost us credibility with others.

No wonder Jesus has such a strong warning about this type of anger. Keep in mind he is teaching his disciples, and some of his disciples like Peter would stumble in how they handled their moments of anger.

Attributes of Godly Anger

The key is to fulfill the words of the Apostle Paul who said in Ephesians 4:26, “be angry and sin not.” The key is to have our anger be like dry straw, that burns quickly and then it is done, it is behind us, it is over. The goal is to always strive to be as scripture like **Proverbs 16:32 states, “One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and one whose temper is controlled than one who captures a city.”**

I see in the words of Jesus and some help from other scripture how to do this. If you are a leader in the church this applies to us even

more.

1.) Limited duration - In verse 23 after Jesus has given this warning about anger that just brews, he said, “So if your at the altar worshipping and you know your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift at the altar and go to them.” One principle the words of Jesus support is that we **put a time frame on how long we are going to be mad.** Put yourself in charge and accountable of the situation and how long will we remain angry. Don’t let anger forever hang in the air if you can do something about it. **Now if we are expected by Jesus to go to someone who we think is displeased with us, how much more does God expect us to take charge of our own emotions, especially anger that can be so destructive and address the issue and then move on.**

Anger is normal, helpful, and it is healthy when anger lives only long enough to address what needs to be addressed.

2.) Targeted/Purposeful Jesus said “go to the person who has something against you.” **Our anger needs to a have a clear specific target. So often many issues continued to be fueled by anger because we refuse to go to the real source. But** look at the many stories when God gets angry. God’s anger has a target. God’s anger is about his people doing wrong and doing that which ultimately reduces who they are to become. God gets angry with individuals and nations. But God knows who he is angry with and why he is angry with them. God’s anger is targeted at the sin so that right living can be restored.

- If you’re angry about something today, do you know why?
- Do you have a specific reason for being angry.
- But even more importantly do you have a specific plan and willingness to address it?

3.) Gives way to redemption: Jesus said go to your brother or sister and be “reconciled with them.” Reconcile means your going

to them to try and rebuild the relationship; not allow your anger to build higher the wall or further the distance in the relationship. Dealing with anger in a Christ-like ways knows that punishment isn't the end or goal; it's always reconciliation. Getting even is not the goal or objective.

Getting our way is not the spirit of the word reconciled. In the Greek the word reconciled here means "alteration, to exchange." We exchange the rift between us for a restored friendship. Story after story in the Old Testament has God who is angry with a person or group for a season but the anger and yes even the punishment finally gives way to a second chance, and a new beginning.

I was reading through Jeremiah 18 this week which contains the story many people know as the story of the Potter and the Clay. It's a great story/analogy that tells us, God's anger punished Israel like the potter to doesn't like the way his vase has turned out, so he will breaks down the clay to try again and mold it. Anger needs to have a purpose to break down the wrong but also focus on a way to do some rebuilding.

Even Jesus after getting angry with his disciples would then begin once again to teach them to get them back on course. Jesus after going into the temple and turning the tables over and the grabbing a whip and running the people misusing the temple does all that for the sake of cleansing and the temple so it could restored for its rightful purposes.

Conclusion: Today is communion Sunday. Communion is when we especially remember that the bread and cup of grape juice symbolize the body and blood of Jesus laid down for us. Jesus who cleansed the temple, who verbally raked the religious leaders and his disciples over the coals when he was angry with them, was willing to go to the cross. His anger was only for a moment to address the wrong. His anger was a part of his love that would lead him to say while he was hanging on a cross, "forgive them for

they know not what they do.”

As we celebrate communion, there isn't a one of us who has an excuse to keep our anger and resentment simmering ready to serve like a bowl of hot soup. Even if we were nailed to a cross; God would call us to forgive those who put us there.