

# **GOOD AND ANGRY**

**By**  
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If we say that someone is good and angry, we usually mean that he is really mad. But as the title of this series of five radio messages by E. Harold Henderson, that expression takes on new meaning. These studies show that you can be good at the same time you are angry. But it will take some spiritual discipline.

Anger often leads to sin. It makes us vulnerable to Satanic control because we lose self-control. However, anger is not a sin in itself if it is directed toward the right object and kept under control. These studies show that some anger is valid and that sin can be avoided when we become irate. The biblical injunction, *Be ye angry, and sin not*, is the key text, You can be good and be angry at the same time.

## **DEFINITION OF ANGER**

Is it a sin to be angry? If so, you would expect the Bible to speak on the subject wouldn't you? Anger is such a common human passion that the Bible does speak about it quite often. And surprisingly, the Bible answers both Yes and No to the

question, Is it a sin to be angry?

Mark 3 recounts Jesus' reaction to a group of hard-hearted men. The Bible says he *looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts* (Mark 3:5). It was not a sin for Him to feel anger at that time because the Bible says He never did any sin at all.

On the other hand, Ephesians 4:26 gives a warning, *Be ye angry, and sin not*. That shows it is possible to sin through anger. Williams translates the statement, You must stop sinning in your anger. Knox chooses the wording, Do not let resentment lead you into sin.

We could conclude that anger is a sin when it is aggressive, vindictive and selfish. It is not a sin when it is directed against wrong and not against a person. But does the Bible draw such distinctions? We need to investigate its teachings to learn when it is possible to be Good and Angry.

### **Concept of anger**

The dictionary defines anger as a strong emotion of displeasure; a response to wounded love, emotional agitation aroused by great displeasure. We use words like mad, indignant, furious, provoked, irritated, hostile to indicate our anger. Is it possible that there are different kinds of anger, some being sinful and some being holy?

I was surprised when I read in the Bible that God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit each expressed anger. Psalm 7:11 says God is angry with the wicked every day. Mark 3 tells of Jesus' anger towards certain heartless men of His day. I Samuel 11:6 indicates the coming of the Holy Spirit upon King Saul aroused his anger against evil. There must be a way anger is not a sin or God would never have expressed it. Our concern is to keep our anger as holy and sinless as God's anger.

### **Causes of anger**

There are many issues which can result in anger. The frustration from being blocked from one's desires can arouse anger. Genesis 4 recounts an occasion when Cain and Abel came to worship God. God accepted Abel and his offering (for he offered in faith) and rejected Cain's offering. Cain became so angry the expression of his face changed and his spirit was greatly aroused against God. Why did he get angry? God pointed out to him that if he had sin, he could offer a sin offering and be forgiven. If he had not sin, he and his offering would be received before God. But Cain wanted to be accepted of God on his own human terms. When God refused to accommodate him, the blocking of his desires resulted in his anger.

Have you ever been there? Have you wanted something most earnestly, but some person or something kept it from you? Do you remember how anger sought to arise because you were frustrated because your desires were unfulfilled? That is a common source of anger. Then the anger is directed toward the person or thing ( even toward

God, as in Cain's case) which seemed to thwart your desires. Physical or emotional pain is sometimes the cause of anger. You remember the sufferings of Job. He lost his wealth, his health and the understanding sympathy of his friends. Read chapter 19 of the book that bares his name in the Bible and notices the anger of that man. I have visited patients in the hospital who were suffering greatly. Often their patience was exhausted. Anger was just under the surface, when they were in control, and ready to burst forth at the slightest provocation. In such a case the sufferer might become upset over the slightest thing. I have known people to burst out in anger as I visited them in their sick room, only to apologize with tears the next day when they were feeling better.

Anxiety might cause anger in some situations. A person who loves dogs, for instance, might injure or even kill a dog which endangered a small child. In such a moment of concern for the child, one's anger would lead to actions one would not do in calmer moments. Have you experience that?

In justice to self or to another might arouse anger. King Saul thought that David was a threat to his throne and to the succession of Jonathan to the throne. He became so angry at David that he tried to kill him more than one time and gave order to his officers that they should secure the young man's death (I Samuel 20). The offence he supposed was not real, of course, but his thinking it was a danger aroused his anger to the point of insane rage.

Jealousy or a selfish spirit will arouse anger. If one feels he is not receiving what he is due, particularly if another person is getting it instead, anger is the common response. When the singers of Israel praised David for killing the tens of thousands in battle, while Saul was praised for killing thousands only, he was filled with murderous anger towards David ( I Samuel 18).

### **Questions to ask when angry**

There are some urgent questions to be asked when you grow angry.

Are you angry at the wrong or at the person who did the wrong? Sinful anger is directed against persons; Righteous anger is directed against wrong. It is important that we discern that difference.

God shows the difference between sinful anger and righteous anger. He is angry with the wicked every day, yet He loves them enough to give His only begotten Son to die for them. He will punish severely the evil they do, but He has no pleasure in destroying them. Do you see the difference between the act and the person who does the act? We must make that distinction as we deal with persons day by day. Our anger must be against the wrong done, not against the wrong doer.

When anger arises in your heart, evaluate the issue before you permit it to remain. Ask the question, is this worth getting upset over? Some things are not

preferable but are not worth the consequences of opposing them. The grizzly bear can whip any animal alive in a fight. Yet, it permits the skunk to share its food. Why? Because it is not worth the trouble to get in a fight with a skunk. Is it worth getting upset over? Is my anger unselfish? Am I angry at the wrong done or the person who did the wrong? Is my anger in this situation a reflection of the attitude of God toward it?

Answer those questions and you will learn how to be angry and sin not. As a child of God you want your emotions to reflect His and He never sins in anger

## **DAMAGE OF ANGER**

Have you ever been good and angry? If so, your anger met certain limits. (1) It was aroused over a worthy cause, an injustice was done before God or man. (2) It was aroused in a proper spirit, not personal feelings of anxiety, selfishness or vengeance. (3) It was aroused toward the right object against the wrong done and not against the person who did the wrong. (4) It was aroused for a limited period of time it lasted no more than one day.

Anger can be dangerous. It can do great damage if permitted to stay in one's heart to burn and grow. It can hurt a person socially, physically and spiritually. So I take this opportunity to warn you of the potential damage caused by anger.

### **Social damage**

Anger can destroy relationships with other persons. So many times I have sat with a husband and wife whose marriage was on the verge of divorce, in spite of the problems it would bring to them and their children. As the counseling developed, it became quite evident that the root cause of the problem was unreconciled anger. Sometimes the offense had been committed years before. But it had been kept in the heart, unreconciled and unforgiven. There it had smoldered and eaten away at the oneness God established in marriage. It would burst into view on occasion when some irritation arose. But sometimes one party would not remember the incident that caused the anger in the first place. What suffering has come because people refused to deal with their anger toward some member of their own family? Am I describing your problem?

### **Mental damage**

Lasting guilt can come from an unthoughtful act done in a moment of anger. Alexander the

Great caused the death of his dear and trusted friend Cletus in a moment of anger. The great warrior lived the rest of his life in torment of mind because of it. Some of you have borne indescribable grief because of a word spoken or a deed done in the thoughtless haste of an angry spirit. Some of you will take that to your

grave unless you deal with the issue before God. That is one reason the Lord offers forgiveness and speaks of the renewing of the mind through Jesus Christ. Only He can relieve the mental distress which plaques you day by day.

### **Spiritual damage**

There are two common responses to anger: One will blow up, or he will clam up. Neither is appropriate. To lose control of one's judgment through anger is like turning loose of the steering wheel of the car when it is traveling at highway speed. Something tragic will happen. Beware of how you respond to the anger you feel from time to time.

Men have sinned against God and against their loved ones by not handling anger correctly. Cain became angry that God would receive the offering of his brother Abel while refusing to accept his offering. He became angry with God, but he hid it from all except God. Able probably had no idea of the secret intentions of his brother. But one day, when they were alone in the fields, Cain suddenly rose up and killed Able. That is what anger can do when it is unreconciled.

Moses spent almost six weeks with God on Mount Sinai. He came down from the mountain with two tablets of stone. The Ten Commandments were written on them with the writing of God Himself. Think about that! But when Moses saw the people had turned from the Lord God and were worshipping a god made by their own hands, he became angry. He threw down those tablets of stone and broke them into pieces. He sinned against God and his people by that rash act.

I have mentioned King Saul's jealousy toward young David. His jealousy grew into anger, and his anger into a murderous rage. Not only did Saul try to kill David, but he even tried to kill his own son Jonathan, who defended David.

Jonah, prophet of God, became angry to the extent that he entered into a spirit of depression and had thoughts of suicide (Jonah 4). Not even God's reasoning with His distraught prophet was sufficient to resolve his anger.

Turn your mind back to Ephesians 4:26, 27 and read, *Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil.* The text contains a warning against permitting your anger to lead you into sin. It warns further that there must be a time limit set on your anger: never let the sunset find you still nursing anger over something that happened during that day. Settle it before you go to bed. To do otherwise will give the devil an opportunity to work, and the issue will grow worse and worse.

What will you do with this warning? I have warned you that anger will damage you physically, mentally, socially and spiritually. I have sought to point out examples from the Bible and human experience to illustrate the damage done in each of the four areas. Will you heed it? Will you go beyond recognizing the truth of it and do something about it in your own life?

Anger can work good or bad in your life, depending on how you handle it. I urge you to memorize Ephesians 4:26, 27 and put those verses into practice in your life.

## **DEALING WITH ANGER**

God warns us, *Be ye angry, and sin not* (Ephesians 4:26). The Bible tells us of a right way and a wrong way to deal with anger.

We are far too familiar with the wrong way to deal with anger. It is wrong for us to let our selfishness arouse anger. It is wrong for us to seek vengeance because we are angry. It is wrong for us to anger against a person instead of against the wrong done by that person. It is wrong for us to let anger go unchecked and unresolved, rather than settling the issue in the day it occurs. It is wrong for anger in us to be other than a reflection of God's own attitude toward sin. We see illustrations of the wrong way to deal with anger almost every day in our dealings with people. So our attention should be directed on the right ways to handle anger. Here are suggestions on how to deal with anger.

### **Control your anger**

Do not permit your anger to run free. You have power over your emotions. You can set limits past which you will not permit yourself to go. We sometimes speak of a person's flying off the handle or losing his cool when he gets angry. By those slang expressions we mean he does not control it. What a shame. It is a reflection on the maturity of the person who loses control.

Proverb 16:32 reads, *He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that takes a city.* Think about that! To be slow to anger indicated self-control. To rule one's spirit indicates self-control. God is saying the humble person who controls his emotions and desire is greater than the famous and acclaimed general whose armies accomplish great feats and gain surprising victories. That is how much he values self-control. So, the first principle on dealing with anger is this: Control your anger, permitting it to arise over proper issues, at proper times, in appropriate ways, for the right purposes; Express it in correct ways, and allow it to remain only for a limited time. Control your anger if you would please God.

### **Make no plans to retaliate**

That means you have neither hatred nor malice toward any person, even one who arouses your anger. Take Jesus as your example: *When he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously* (I Peter 2:23). Bear a wrong in patience rather than to sin by taking acts of vengeance. God instructs us, *Dearly beloved, 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)

Leave it to God to work out what is right. Even if yours is a righteous indignation in the purest sense of the word, you and I are neither qualified nor authorized to execute vengeance. Bear no spirit of malice toward any person. Leave it to God to set things right.

### **Keep your emotions unselfish**

Direct your anger at the wrong done, not at the person who did wrong. You continue to love yourself even when you have done wrong. So continue to love another person when he has done wrong to you.

Suppose someone stole a valuable item from you. You must hate theft without hating the thief. If someone told a lie on you, you must hate lying without hating the liar. If that seems too demanding, turn it over to God. He has had ample experience in dealing with us that way hating the wrong done while loving the wrong doer.

Suppose a child disobeys his parent, willfully and repeatedly disobeying. The parent might become angry. But check the nature of the anger. Is the parent angry because his personal wishes and instructions were ignored? Or is the parent angry because the child is setting a life pattern which will bring great harm later? The first response is selfish and unworthy. The second response is proper and honorable. It is not easy to keep anger directed against wrong things and not against persons. But it is essential if we handle anger correctly.

### **Respond with positive and constructive actions**

Respond with positive and constructive actions to right and wrong. Abraham Lincoln saw the slave market and resolved to do something about it. He did not attack slave owners. He attacked the institution of slavery. He sought to cut the tap root of the evil practice and to stop the growth of the plant.

Someone has said, It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness. Apply that to the subject of anger. It is better to correct the problem than to complain about the consequences. Do something constructive. Anger alone is never constructive. I read of a certain location where the highway ran close to the edge of a cliff. Once and again an automobile failed to make the curve and ran over the cliff. Someone suggested there should be an ambulance kept at the bottom of the cliff to hasten people to the hospital. Another suggested there should be a guard rail built beside the road. Which solution was better? Head off the danger before it happens, of course. So I suggest you do not wait until anger has lashed out and done its worst. Head it off. Do positive and constructive things to remedy the problem.

People deal with their anger in different ways. Some repress it. They do not admit it even to themselves. Those people are often accident prone. They suffer headaches or stomach problems. They experience periods of depression or perhaps times of anxiety. They are often critical and irritable. Why? They do not deal with anger in

the right way.

Some suppress it. They hold it in. They hide it so that people do not know of it. In some instances that is good (Proverbs 14:29; 15:18; 16:32). But it may cause emotional problems. It is better to deal with anger in the right way than to pretend it does not exist.

Some express it. They manifest violent passions by word or action. Others express it by extending energy, walking or working. Yet others deal with it in a way to solve it, release it without hurting others, and to be at peace with God.

Here is my suggestion. If you have anger, confess it to yourself. Face in an honest way the feelings you have, why you have them, who is involved in them, and what you should do about them. Settle it in your own heart first.

Then confess your anger to God. Tell Him all the details of it. If you have been selfish or uncontrolled, confess that to Him as a sin. Get His forgiveness and the assurance of His help.

Finally, confess your anger to the person involved and settle the issue with him in the spirit of Christ. You will be surprised at how liberating that will be. **Be angry without sinning in it.** That is God's counsel to you.

## **HEALTHY RESPONSE TO ANGER**

How can you make sure that when you are good and angry, you are both good and angry at the same time? Or, another way to ask that question is, **What is a proper response to anger so that you handle it correctly? How can you be angry and not sin in your anger?**

The Bible answers those questions. It answers by giving us several guidelines which, if followed, enable us to handle our anger in a healthy way. We need to know and follow those guidelines.

James 1:20 warns, *The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.* Since it is possible for us to sin in our anger and our sinful anger never works out the righteousness of God and since God has given us guidelines to enable us to handle our anger in a healthy way, we need to know and apply divine principles to our daily lives.

So I propose the question once more, **How should we respond to anger so that we handle it in a healthy and God-honoring way?** Here are principles He has given us to follow.

### **Make your anger of temporary duration**

Ephesians 4:26 reads, *Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.*

What does that mean? It means the anger of each day must be settled in the day it occurs. Hear how various translators have chosen to word that principle. Phillips

translates it, A Never go to bed angry. Knox chooses the words, The sunset must not find you still angry. The New English Bible reads, Do not let sunset find you still nursing it (anger). The meaning is evident: deal immediately with your anger and do not permit it to remain for long in your heart. Why is that so important? If anger is not dealt with correctly, it will grow into bitterness and hatred. If it remains in the mind and emotions, it will eat at your emotional health as a cancer destroys your body. If it is not dealt with as God says it must be, it becomes a greater sin of rebellion against God. An immediate response to anger is essential to your emotional and spiritual health.

### **Effect reconciliation as soon as possible**

It is not enough that you get over your upset emotion caused by anger. You were angry with someone, with a person. Reconciliation must be made between you and the person you aroused your anger or toward whom your anger was directed. Jesus said such a reconciliation is more important than worship. If you come to God's altar to present a gift to Him and then remember your brother has an offense against you ( or you have one against him), leave your gift at the altar, go and be reconciled to your brother, then return and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:23,24). Unreconciled anger will hinder your worship of God, however sincere you may be in your acts of worship. Settle the issue without delay. You cannot worship God aright until the anger offense is settled. Your efforts at reconciliation may be humbling, difficult or embarrassing, but do them. You can never handle your anger aright until you move to be reconciled to the one at whom your anger was directed.

### **Seek to establish peace**

Hebrews 12:14, 15 has two solemn statements which relate to our subject. (1) *Follow peace with all men.* There is no excuse for any Christian to be in conflict with another person. He can have a spirit of peace and forgiveness in his heart whether the other person does or not. It is a principle of Christian life that one live at peace with his neighbor. (2) *Looking diligently, lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you.* If anger is not dealt with properly, bitterness will result. That will cause you much trouble. It is so much better to settle the issue of anger and be freed from bitterness of spirit.

It is our business to work so as to maintain *the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace* (Ephesians 4:3). The Holy Spirit of God is grieved if we do not preserve the peace Jesus has given us. So, to handle anger healthily, seek at once to establish peace with the person toward whom your anger was directed.

### **Apply the grace of God**

Remember how gracious God was toward you in all your failures. Then show the

same spirit of grace toward others with they fail.

Jesus gave a parable about a man who owed a great debt. It was such a large amount that he could not possibly pay it. He went to his creditor and requested, Be patient with me, and I will pay you all. He was freely forgiven the debt! That same man went to another who owed him a small debt. He was unable to pay also. He made the same appeal for mercy and for more time but was refused. Jesus said when the man who forgave the large debt heard of that, he would call in the unforgiving man and require it all of him. Why did Jesus give us that parable? He was teaching us to forgive one another as God forgives us. Deal in grace with the person who has aroused your anger, and you will handle it properly.

### **Do good to the person toward whom you felt anger**

Jesus discusses that in Matthew 5:38-48. If a person sues you in a court of law, settle the cause to his benefit rather than seeking revenge upon him. If one in authority compels you to go one mile in serving him, go the second mile, also. Do not do your least duty and show a bad spirit about having to do that. If one shows himself to be an enemy to you, show yourself to be a friend to him. If you do that, you will show yourself to be a child of your heavenly Father. You will point people to Him. That is so much better than being vindictive and seeking to get even. It is better to suffer wrong, if the witness of Christ can go forth from you. Depend upon God to bring justice to pass. Leave it in His hands. If you are right, He will prove you right. If you are wrong, He will forgive you.

Human anger is usually selfish anger. It is self-defeating, self-destructive and contrary to the will of God. *The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.* (James 1:20). Be free from such bondage. Move into the realm of spiritual liberty as Jesus makes you free from the bondage of unworthy emotions.

Love is the better way. It produces the soft answer which turns away wrath. It manifests the maturity of the people involved. It testifies to the difference God makes. It gives you victory over anger.

The way you handle anger is a matter of your own choice. You are not enslaved by your emotions. You can control them. Anger arises only if you permit it. It remains only if you choose it. God will give you grace to be truly Christian in your emotions as you are in your faith. Give your anger to Him.

## **VICTORY OVER ANGER**

Some people seem to pride themselves in having a bad temper. I am a redhead, so I am temperamental. I am an artist, so I am naturally quick tempered. Ridiculous! If you are ill tempered and quick to anger, it is only because you have chose to be so. You can choose to be gentle and kind and forgiving. You can have victory over anger.

Here are six principles, taken from Holy Scripture, which tell you how to enjoy victory over anger. Consider them and apply them to your life. You will be amazed at what a difference you will find in controlling your emotions.

### **Choose to forgive**

Choose to forgive those who have wronged you. Ephesians 4:31, 32 teaches us to lay aside all bitterness, wrath, anger and malice. Instead, we are to be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God for Christ's sake has forgiven us. Notice those verbs are in the imperative mood, indicating they are commanded of God. God would command us to do nothing we are unable to do. So the text teaches that we are able to lay aside all those hurtful emotions (including wrath and anger) and to substitute forgiveness in their place. We can if we will. Forgiveness means to surrender the right to hold an issue against a person ever again. It is an act of the will. You choose to forgive those who have wronged you, and the problem with anger is solved. Thus, you have the victory.

### **Focus on God's promises**

Begin each day by resisting Satan's spirit of anger and focusing on the promises of God. The devil will try to keep your thoughts on your self. He will remind you over and again how you have been ignored, wronged or unappreciated. He will stir feelings of resentment and anger toward persons who have done a real or imagined wrong to you. You will begin each day loaded down with such cares if you listen to the devil. Resist his enticement to sin.

Focus on the person and promises of God instead. Remember His loving kindness toward you. Remember how His love is spread abroad in your heart by the Holy Spirit. Remember how He enables you to rise above petty hurts and live in His gracious provisions. Turn your full attention to Him, and He will give you victory.

### **Accept your circumstances**

Accept your circumstances as coming from God to develop the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life. Galatians 5:22, 23 lists the fruit of the Spirit as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, goodness, gentleness, faith, meekness and temperance (self-control). How can one cultivate the grace of longsuffering if he never has to suffer long? Suppose a difficult person comes into your life. He is of such a contrary nature that he puts a great burden upon you. How will you react to him? You might react in anger because of the inconvenience and burden he brings to you. On the other hand, you might see him as God's instrument to cultivate the grace of longsuffering in you. If so, your anger will be gone, and humble dependence on God's grace will fill your heart and mind.

Which is the better way to respond to a difficult person? Is it better to respond in anger or in patience? Is it better to take matters into your own hands to set things

right or to depend on God to settle the issues? It is much better to depend on God. Then do it and win the victory over anger.

### **Ask God to use you**

Ask God to love through you, forgive through you, and serve through you. The Christian can truly say It is no longer I who lives but Christ who lives in me. (See Galatians 2:20) Since Christ lives His life in you, your life should be a reflection of His life. You should love as He loves, forgive as He forgives, and serve as He serves. But you cannot do that unless you ask God to minister His life through you. The Bible says the love of God is spread abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us in Romans 5:5. It says we are to forgive one another just as God for Christ's sake has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32). It says we are to serve people in the same way Christ served them, since we are members of His body (I Corinthians 6:15; Ephesians 5:30). He who is joined to the Lord Jesus is one spirit with Him and lives one life with Him. The Christian is the agent of God, who ministers through him by Jesus Christ. So ask God to love, forgive, and serve others through you. You will have victory over selfish anger as He does. Try it and see!