

Sinning Like A Christian: Anger #4
Holy Emotion or Hellish Passion?
November 22, 2009
Ephesians 4:26-27

(Sermon notes are a transcript from the sermon with only minor editing, retaining the conversational style.)

Have you ever gotten so angry that you found yourself out of control? Perhaps you did something stupid? Bob Wiley, a multiphobic psychiatric patient, pushes his egotistical psychiatrist, Dr. Leo Marvin, over the edge.

CLIP: What About Bob

Jack Nicholson, starred in a movie, *Anger Management*. Ironically, years ago he was cut off on the highway, so he got out of his car and smashed the man's Mercedes with a crowbar.

Have you ever felt like doing something like that?

Former Chicago Cubs outfielder **Andre Dawson** paid a \$1000 fine for disputing a strike called by umpire Joe West. On the memo line of his check Dawson wrote: "*Donation for the blind.*"

Is there anyone here who has ever gotten so fed up with someone at work, or on a ball field or even at church that you wanted to strike out at them? Maybe you got to the point where you didn't think you could take it anymore. Have you ever felt that way?

The titled of this sermon is, **Holy Emotion or Hellish Passion?**

Is it bad to be angry? When we picture anger, it can be ugly and violent, **OR** invigorating and alive with passion.

There is something inspiring about **Martin Luther King Jr.** denouncing injustice from the pulpit. If he had not been angry at racial injustice, his words would have lacked the right force. But anger can destroy too - we are aghast of an abusive parent lashing out at a child. We are shocked by what is being displayed in sports.

William Willimon once asked a police officer, *What causes you the most fear in your work as a policeman?* The officer said, *Anger is my greatest fear. The bloodiest crimes are usually domestics - crimes of passion...When anger is the cause of the crime, things get horribly, terribly bloody.*

What makes the conflict with the Taliban scary is that there is so much anger involved, demonstrated of what happened at Fort Hood.

There is this tension between holy emotion and hellish passion.

The Bible tells us that even **God burns with anger**. We all know that Jesus got angry at the temple.

Yet, in Gal 5:20; Col 3:8, Paul gives strong warnings against fits of anger.

The famous verses in Ephesians 4:26-27, *In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry. Do not give the Devil a foothold.*

When we become angry our faces get red, our adrenaline surges, our hearts beat faster, and our blood pressure rises. Anger can make us alert and ready for action. Anger would be an appropriate response if you saw someone knocked down an elderly woman and stole her purse. Or angry at child prostitution.

This is appropriate anger. Anger reminds us of the horrible injustice of the world in which we live, a world to which too many of us become settled and accustomed.

William Willimon says, Instead of "calming down, we should be praying, *Lord, give me more righteous indignation.*

Martin Luther extolled righteous anger as the engine that drove him on to some of his very best work. *I never work better than when I am inspired by anger; for when I am angry I can write, pray, and preach well, for then my whole temperature is quickened, my understanding sharpened, and all mundane vexations and temptations depart.*

Holy anger is a powerful human motivating force for good.

Here is the dilemma: Anger is such a complex emotion that we don't know how to express our anger in healthy ways. We don't know where the line is between healthy anger and destructive anger.

Garret Keizer confesses that he wrote his book on anger because: *My anger has often seemed out of proportion - that is, too great or too little, more often too great - for the occasion that gave rise to it. My anger has more often distressed those I love than it has afflicted those at whom I was angry. My anger has not carried me far enough toward changing what legitimately enrages me.*"

Interesting Thomas Aquinas goes so far as to say that the **lack of anger** can even be a sin, because it indicates a "weak movement" or a failure to engage on the part of our will.

HEALTHY ANGER:

When anger is good, it is a passion for justice, motivated by love for others. We get angry when someone we care about is hurt or threatened.

Rebecca DeYoung writes, *The fiercer the love and the greater the good at stake, the more intense our capacity for anger. Great love is the root of great anger. You don't get angry unless you care.*"

When Jesus turned the tables over in the temple, what was it that angered him?

* He was grieved at the Pharisees' lack of love for another human being.

* He was angry at the hardness of their hearts toward others in need. Jesus was angry that they cared more about being justified by their own rule-keeping than about the restoration of God's kingdom.

All their religious activities were centered around with self-interest and had precious little to do with justice towards God or their neighbor. They were **cold keepers** of the letter of the law, ignoring the justice and love that inspired its commands.

Why does God become angry? Because he has this tremendous love for us and we don't give God his rightful place in our hearts. He becomes extremely jealous when we put other gods in place of Him. God becomes angry like a parent becomes angry at their child, when that child pridefully turns their back on his parent's advice and walk down the path of destruction.

Anger, when it is a holy emotion, has justice as its object and love as its root. Both love and justice are focused on the good of others. Anger is that paradoxical sin which can be the engine that drives us on to do our best. Unfortunately it can also be that which incapacitates us and leads us to do our worst. While admitting that anger can be a natural and healthy God-given emotion, we have to come to grips with the fact that more often than not, our anger burns out of control.

DESTRUCTIVE ANGER: When is anger destructive?

Thomas Aquinas breaks down the destructiveness of anger into three categories:

1. We can get angry too easily (for example, when we are quick-tempered)

This type of anger often takes a form of irritability. When anger poisons our mood, every little thing sets us off. We feel quarrelsome and contrary. We respond to the slightest irritation with bickering, rudeness, complaint, annoyance, cutting remarks, and profanity.

2. We can get angrier than we should (for instance, when our anger is disproportionate to the offense); This is where a person blows up over some small incident.

The excess of our anger is a symptom that there is some bigger issue involved but we are not recognizing it. We yell at our kids, and kick the dog, but the bigger issue is there has been a lot of tension at work.

3. And we can stay angry too long (that is, when anger smolders into resentment and grudge holding.). Resentment is often expressed in sullenness, the refusal to forgive or to accept reconciliation or fantasizing about vengeance.

When resentment smolders beneath the surface, we go through the day like a snake poised to strike at the first sign of movement. When a situation comes up, we become quick tempered where our anger swells to the

size of rehashing the whole history of the harm that was done to me.

Resentments is devastating. It's because of resentments that people relapse into destructive behavior. Resentment more than anything can **distort the truthfulness of our memory**. What was perhaps a small incident, now turns into this major violation that was done against you.

As the saying goes, *the older I get, the more vividly I remember things that never happened*. Those are the three categories of Anger that Thomas Aquinas give us.

All expression of destructive anger move us beyond being upset about an injustice, to wanting to set it right at the expense of hurting someone, or to inflict some sort of punishment. **Rebecca DeYoung**, *Wrath leads us to demean our offender by magnifying our own importance and the gravity of the offense*.

Unresolved anger reeks havoc to our internal being. Anger leads us to isolation. We are right, the world is wrong. We are the victims of injustice, the world is unjust.

William Willimon tells a story in his book: [Sinning Like a Christian](#)
I once taught a student who had been abused by her ex-husband. I heard her story the first day of class when she told me that, due to her history of abuse, she had trouble with men as professors. Then the class heard about her victimization of every opportunity. Repeatedly we heard of her continuing resentment at what this man had done to her. Ten years ago! I had the unpleasant task of telling her that if she could not do something about that anger, she would never be able to function in ministry. There was no way that she could help others, until she first helped herself.

The reason I share this story is to look at someone else's anger objectively, and then ask the question? **Could this ever happen to me?** Am I nursing anger inside of me where I am emotionally and spiritually stuck in this quagmire. Without even realizing it is my relationship with God and my relationship with other people deteriorating because I'm refusing to forgive?

Anger protects the status quo of the ego. Anger isolates us, keeps us from having to be affected by the world around us, from having to change. If I am forced to deal with my anger that forces me to make changes in my life that I simply refuse to make.

Here is the kicker. When I am angry I feel as if I am in **control**. The irony is, any control that anger appears to give me, any empowerment, is illusory. Anger is the master that keeps me out of the world of others by **locking me** within myself.

When we don't let go of that anger it will begin to cause turmoil in our soul and led to major depression. Depression is anger turned inward. Anger doesn't just kill the soul it kills the body as well. Most everyone knows that the number one killer in America is heart disease. But would it interest you to know that the number one cause of heart disease is anger?

According to **Dr. Redford Williams**, director of Duke University's Behavioral Medicine Research Center, *"The hostility and anger associated with Type A behavior is the major contributor to heart disease in America. People who struggle with anger are five times as likely to suffer coronary heart disease as the average person. People with heart disease more than double their risk of a heart attack when they get angry."*

There are three basic anger triggers that causes a person to become angry.

- * When a person feels a slight to their honor.
- * Their reputation is at stake.
- * Or they feel disrespected as a person.

Anger is deeply connected to our love of ourselves, especially our fear of exposure and our need for security. We are constantly in the business of bolstering our fragile egos and when something threatens our egos we become defensive and angry. A professor criticizes a students paper. Assuming that the professor is doing it to help the student. But the student's ego may be so fragile that he takes it as a deliberate attack on his reputation and becomes angry.

The tendency to get angry, or overly angry, seems rooted in vulnerability and fear. Is a parents sense of authority so frail that they blow up over a minor infraction by the child?

Rebecca DeYoung writes, *Anger often rains down with a big show of force, but perhaps the force is a big cover-up, an overcompensation for our own perceived weakness and vulnerability. Like a wounded animal backed into a corner, we're on the defensive and lashing out because we feel threatened.*

We find ourselves becoming angry when we can't control things. So we use our anger to try to regain control. When we have this need to control, or we become impatient when things are not put right immediately, there is this obsessive preoccupation of doing it our way.

The fact is, anger is self promoting. We can invent all sorts of rationalizations in the form of

- * why we deserve what we want,
- * why others didn't give us what we were really owed,
- * why we need to act this way to claim our rightful share.

The underlying message of highly angry people according to the **American Psychological Association** is that *Things oughta go my way!* It goes on to say, *Angry people tend to feel that any blocking or changing of their plans is an unbearable indignity and that they should not have to suffer this way. Maybe other people do, but not them!* The bottom line is: Anger kills. It kills mind, body and soul.

STEPS TO TAKE TO RESOLVE OUR ANGER

1. CLARIFY THE ANGER

We need to clarify the issue by asking ourselves what is really making me angry. The human mind is so complex that there are layers and it's hard to identify what is really going on inside of me. It is important to clarify the real reason for anger. To do this, you may have to dig deep and give yourself time to really think about everything that has happened. Sometimes we may have to trace back through our whole day, week, or month, to find out what first made us angry.

Anger can be a mask for other sorts of distress. For example, it is easier to lash out at others than to acknowledge what's really eating us up inside. One thing that can be helpful in clarifying your anger is to calm down, reflect on it and put it in written form. We can use paper to get our thoughts in order, so we can sort out what is healthy anger or destructive anger.

It is hard sometimes to tell someone in a constructive way how very hurtful their actions were when you don't have your thoughts together. When you clarify your anger it helps you to put into perspective to what degree are you angry. Sometimes when we get angry, we just jump all over the place like a bomb exploding, and nobody can understand what our problem is.

Clip in What about Bob, when the Dr. Marvin's wife says, *What has gotten into you?* In the heat of emotions, sometimes we simply don't know. Clarifying it is a huge step. What exactly am I angry about and to what degree should I be angry in regards to this particular situation.

2. Learn How to Express It Properly .

Justin John Boudin, a 27-year-old man from Minnesota, pleaded guilty to fifth-degree assault charges for violently losing his temper. Here's the irony: he was on his way to anger management class when he committed the crime. According to the criminal complaint, Boudin was waiting at a bus stop when he started to harass a 59-year-old woman. Witnesses say he yelled at her over what he felt was a general lack of respect. When she took out her cell phone to call police, Boudin punched her in the face. When a 63-year-old man tried to stop him, Boudin hit him with a blue folder that held his anger management homework. Police tracked him down by using the papers inside.

It is real easy to spue your anger in a careless way especially to people who are closest to us. Why would we say something to our spouse or to our children that we would not dare say to someone on the street.

Why is it that we have to get our little digs in, those little stabs. If that is not enough we have to twist the knife and put some salt on the wound.

3. The third way to deal with anger is to keep a door open for communication to take place.

Alexander the Great was an incredible strategist and soldier. At one time, one of his boyhood friends, who had been promoted to general in his army, was drunk and began to speak disrespectfully to Alexander. In a fit of anger, Alexander grabbed his spear and threw it at his friend. His intent was simply to scare his friend, but his aim was poor and he caught his friend in the heart, killing him instantly.

This man who was able to conquer nations could not conquer his own anger. As a result, he lost one of his dear friends. He was so distraught that he wept for days and even tried to kill himself.

The reason I mention this story is that we aren't actually going to physically kill someone with our anger. But we kill the relationship by refusing to speak to that person. *I will never speak to that person again.*

4. Don't hang on to your anger. Let it go.

Ephesians four.

Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.

Do not give the Devil a foothold.

We need to realize that it is pride that is the root of anger. It is pride that doesn't allow us to let go of our anger. It's pride that doesn't allow us the liberty to forgive. In fact there is a degree of a sick enjoyment of not letting go of our anger.

For the sake of being right, you can justify in your mind that you have a right to hang on to your anger. If you do it will consume you.

Fredrick Buechner's definition of anger:

Of the Seven Deadly Sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back - in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you.

If we are to let go off our anger, that means we will have to change. That means we will have to trust God that He will bring justice to the situation. Not you. Can you trust God enough to let Him do that?

Romans 12 - NLT

19 Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the Lord.

20 Instead, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads."

21 Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.

We are called to put on humility and gentleness. Humility and gentleness are twin powers against anger. Both are rooted in love, a love that "does not keep a record of wrong." I Corinthians 13

In his book *It Came from Within*, **Andy Stanley** tells of a man whose faith sprang back to life once he dealt with his anger. Stanley writes:

I met Joe at Starbucks. He was sitting in one of those overstuffed chairs with headphones on and a scowl that said, "Don't anybody come near me." Everything about his countenance and posture communicated anger. So when I saw him, I avoided eye contact and went on about my business. As I was waiting for my soy latte, Joe approached me and said, "Aren't you Andy?" At that particular moment, I wasn't sure if I should be Andy or not.... "Somebody gave me one of your CDs," he said. "I've been listening to it. But I've got to tell you, I have a real problem with God, and the church, too, for that matter."

Joe had been through two difficult divorces. His first wife had been sexually abused as a child and was never able to face the issues involved. After 30 years of marriage, the memories of abuse surfaced and eroded their marriage, which ended in divorce.

His ex-wife passed away suddenly two years later. Joe then remarried, but after three years, this too ended in a heartbreaking divorce. Joe was lonely, a recovering alcoholic. There was no evidence of the existence of God as far as he could see....

I got Joe's phone number and connected him with one of our pastors, John Woodall. John called Joe, met him for coffee, and struck up a friendship. That was the last I saw of Joe, for a while.

Three months later, I was sitting in that same Starbucks, talking to a student pastor from another church, when he walked Joe. When he saw me, he headed straight for my table. The first thing I noticed was that he was smiling. The second thing I noticed was that he was carrying a Bible, a notebook, and a book on marriage.

"I'm getting remarried next week!" he announced. I wasn't sure what to think. "To whom?" I asked. "To Susan!" he exclaimed. Susan was his ex-wife. "Susan and I are getting remarried. John is doing the wedding."

I could see in Joe's eyes that something remarkable had happened. And it had. Over the course of several meetings with John, Joe found the courage to quit blaming and, instead, take a look at what was rattling around in his heart. He had been an angry man, with reason to be angry. But like so many people, Joe had no idea what to do about his anger. And his unresolved anger had eroded his faith to the point where it was almost nonexistent.

John had helped...Joe's faith come to life. With his renewed faith came the motivation he needed to address other issues in his life. The transformation was so remarkable that Susan noticed and began asking questions. Soon after, she put her faith in Christ. The week before Susan and Joe were remarried, John baptized her in one of our morning services.

Making anger a holy passion rather than a hellish habit means resisting anything that threatens our hope and confidence in carrying out God's calling in our life.

In anger, we can ultimately demand our own way. OR

Turn our anger over to God and pray, *Thy will be done.*

The purpose of posting this sermon is for personal Bible study and resource material for pastors:

Resources:

DeYoung, Rebecca: Glittering Vices

Duncan, King. Managing Your Anger

McDaniel, Rick. Anger: Live Without It

Willimon, William: Sinning Like a Christian