

Anger: Spiritual Drano®

by David F. Maas

Forerunner, "Ready Answer," December 1997

Most of the time an article on anger would focus upon its negative aspects.

- » "For the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (James 1:20).
- » "Do not let the sun go down on your wrath" (Ephesians 4:26).
- » "Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul" (Proverbs 22:24-25).

However, Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:26, quoting Psalms 4:4, "Be angry, and do not sin." At first glance, the encouragement to be angry on the one hand, and the caution to give no place to anger on the other seems a gross contradiction. But there is more to anger than meets the eye.

In the Bible both the Hebrew and the Greek words for *anger* mean nostrils, suggesting the violent, quick breathing—or even snorting—of an enraged person. "Rage," "temper," "wrath," "indignation" and "fury" all cluster around this concept of rhythmically snorting nostrils. A dirt-pawing bull, glaring and snorting at a maddening matador, comes to mind.

We can even consider anger as a godly characteristic or behavior. The Bible speaks often of God's anger or wrath flaring out at sin. Consider God's fury as compared to a whirlwind in Jeremiah 30:23-24:

Behold, the whirlwind of the Lord goes forth with fury, a continuing whirlwind; it will fall violently on the head of the wicked. The fierce anger of the Lord will not return until He has done it, and until He has performed the intents of His heart. In the latter days you will consider it.

Jesus Christ executes the justice of God the Father with wrath and indignation, as we read in Revelation 19:14-15:

And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

Why would God deny to us, His children, something that constitutes part of His character? Have we not been created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26)? The truth is that God did create us to express anger, and He expects us to use it. Just as sex is a good, pleasant and wholesome activity within marriage, anger has a legitimate function when the target is legitimate. An old Yiddish proverb suggests that if it is done at the right time, it constitutes no sin.

Vital and Necessary

God Almighty expects us to be able to call up a supply of anger for a very specific, vital, and necessary purpose. Sometimes anger is the appropriate response to a situation, and we need to know when and how to be angry in a proper, godly way.

Some people have deficits when it comes to marshaling and sustaining anger. Having served as a Spokesman/Ambassador Club director for nearly ten years, I have had the opportunity to listen to and evaluate many "attack" speeches. Many times I had to fail the speaker because he lacked intensity. One evening I failed the speaker who had won, and deservedly so, the "Most Effective Speech" cup. At one point in his speech, he reached a fleeting peak of white hot anger, but he could only sustain it for a matter of seconds.

After the club meeting he said to me, "But sir, I'm not sure whether I could ever reach that peak of anger again."

I told him that not only would he have to reach that point again, but he would have to surpass it. He would need to have enough of a reservoir of godly indignation, of rage and intensity, to do it over and over and over.

The scriptures contain many examples of men of God exercising, without reproach, righteous anger. Exodus 32:19-20 gives an example of Moses' righteous indignation:

So it was, as soon as he came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing. So Moses' anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. Then he took the calf which they had made, burned it with the fire and ground it to powder; and he scattered it on the water and made the children of Israel drink it.

Yet God later censured Moses for striking the rock in anger at Kadesh (Numbers 20:1-13). Christ rebuked Peter for cutting off the ear of the high priest's servant, Malchus in the Garden of Gethsemane (John 18:10-11). Simeon and Levi were cursed for the anger they showed against the defenseless Shechemites (Genesis 49:5-7; see 34:25-31). It is vitally important to understand when anger is justified and good and when it is not.

Anger's Target

The godly purpose of anger is to consume and destroy its target utterly. Nothing was to be left. When Saul was told to destroy the Amalekites, the command was to exterminate every man, woman, child and beast (I Samuel 15:1-3). Did God command this because He hated the Amalekites? No, He wanted this to be done because He hates sin. At this point, extermination was really an act of love and mercy.

In every case in which godly wrath is exhibited, the target is sin, not people, although sometimes people get caught in it. Such people are not "lost," just reserved for a time when conditions will be more conducive for God to straighten them out. In the Great White Throne Judgment, they will have their "day of salvation" (Ezekiel 37:1-14; Isaiah 65:20-25; Revelation 20:5, 11-13).

We should consider anger as a kind of spiritual Drano®. Its target is gunk, crud, or debris in the pipes. The crud in the pipes could easily represent sin, which prevents water from flowing through them. The water represents God's Holy Spirit, which cannot flow through a person if he has crud in the pipes. When used properly, spiritual Drano® can become a valuable aid in overcoming.

Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities [crud in the pipes] have separated you from your God [His Holy Spirit cannot flow through to you]; and your sins have hidden His face from you. (Isaiah 59:1-2)

The last part of verse 2 parallels Habakkuk 1:13, "You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness." God cannot tolerate sin. He refuses to coexist with it. He intends that we blaze with white hot anger at the sin in our life, that we take our fury out on the thoughts and behaviors that are taking our lives. So says Paul in II Corinthians 10:4-6:

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and *being ready to punish all disobedience* when your obedience is fulfilled.

Too many times we reserve our anger for after the sin has been perpetrated, and then, when the waves of guilt overwhelm us, we say: "I'm a dirty, low-down jerk, not fit to live! I'm a slob! I'm an idiot!" This kind of anger is not very effective in changing our sinful ways because we have already caused damage to ourselves and others. This kind of anger can be effective in helping us not repeat the sin, but is too late to prevent the sin we have already committed. So when is the best time to get angry?

The time to get angry is **before** we commit the sin—before we follow the path of destruction—before we separate ourselves from God. Then we need to pour the Drano® right on the sin, onto the behavior causing the guilt. And we should pour on the Drano® full-strength!

When a minister corrects a member of the congregation, of necessity a certain amount of indignation is involved, but the indignation is not directed at the person but at the sin. He must correct the person for his ultimate good, though it seems hard to take initially. Proverbs 3:12 shows that correction of this kind is done out of love: "God loves every son whom He corrects" (see Hebrews 12:5-11).

Handle With Care

Anger is, admittedly, a caustic substance. We read cautions all over the Drano® can:

- » Never use lye with any other chemical.
- » Never use lye in dishwashers.
- » Never use lye with aluminum utensils.
- » Harmful or fatal if swallowed.
- » Causes severe burns.
- » Keep out of reach of children.

God is slow to anger (Psalm 145:8); He uses it cautiously. Nahum 1:3 suggests that, though God does not quickly blow His top, He will use anger when necessary. We also need to treat anger as a controlled substance with a specific purpose. Proverbs 16:32 advises us also to be slow to anger, saying it is better than being mighty like a warrior.

Psychologists have taken a long time to discover that anger does not dissipate until it has totally and utterly consumed its target (see Proverbs 17:14). Some advise their patients to "let it all out," but Proverbs 29:11 says, "A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise man holds them back." Venting anger only brings in more "oxygen" to make the fire burn hotter and more destructively. Again, the only use for anger is to destroy everything in its path, a scorched-earth policy. This emphasizes how important a correct target for anger is.

However, anger that cannot reach and annihilate its target is turned inward, and as it was designed, it begins wreaking havoc. Physicians claim that anger turned inward can aggravate or cause digestive troubles, eye disorders, dental problems, skin diseases, hives and ulcers. It also interferes with logical thinking processes. A person who cannot find a target for his anger becomes like a rattlesnake that, if restrained, will strike its fangs into itself, effectively committing suicide. Those with unresolved angers need to focus on the sins that keep the anger boiling.

We have a long period to contemplate these things before the Passover season is upon us. We have an opportunity to make a growth spurt as we never have before. If we would pour a liberal portion of spiritual Drano® into our spiritual pipes, adding godly anger to our character, we will flush out and clear the sin that is retarding our spiritual growth.

Anger displaces complacency. Remember, where there is anger, complacency cannot exist, and once complacency exits, repentance can enter. God expects us to use godly indignation to flush out our sins. In II Corinthians 7:11, Paul writes:

For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, *what indignation*, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

Try using a little spiritual Drano® this winter to unclog the crud that has collected in the pipes. Then God can pour out His Spirit in greater measure, and it will flow through us to His glory!