

Anger in God's Service

How do you respond to the arrival of new Covid variants, rules and restrictions? How do you feel about the social and legal changes aggressively promoted by those with new ideas on sex, family and gender? Are you concerned? The issue that frustrates you may be more local, at your workplace, your church or in your family.

In my own heart I have noticed growing irritation when I see how some politicians and media outlets silence alternative voices and promote half-truths in order to advance a particular ideology. I hesitate to use the word *anger*, but sometimes it certainly feels that way. Is this good? Can God use my anger?

Anger can be good: Righteous anger will help us stand up and fight for truth and justice. People with anger usually *do something*! The apostle Paul pointed out that it is possible to be angry and “not sin” (Eph 4:26). The Lord Jesus overturned tables and with a whip cleared out the temple courts! (John 2:14-16). In the Old Testament we find several occasions when God’s anger burned against unfaithful people.

Anger can be destructive: Some parents, unwisely, wait until they become angry before they stand up and discipline their child. We know that correcting when angry is dangerous. Strong emotions can override sound judgement. When angry we can easily say things that injure and destroy. Some use their anger to impose their will on others. Anger can damage relationships.

Explosive anger: Sometimes anger is a powerful short lived event. In some, this explosion is very visible. In others the explosion is internalised. Either way, such explosions damage something. James therefore urges his readers, “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and *slow to become angry*”. Why? “Because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires” (James 1:19,20). God is not pleased with the anger generated by our sinful nature. He will not use it to achieve His righteous purposes. Go slow on anger. Force it to go through the filters of humility, love and God’s glory before you allow yourself to express it.

Long-lasting anger: Wrongs and injustices usually develop over time. Unless identified and addressed, small angers pile up within us. Anger can become our base attitude. It can shape our character and the

way we view the world. Those around us will notice our negativity and relational detachment. The great danger with simmering anger is that it can kill other emotions, especially the noble ones like peace, joy, love and gratitude. Like a very hot chili, it can overpower all other flavours! It can also blind us to what is beautiful and to the many blessings we have around us. That is why Paul urges believers to limit the duration of their anger, even righteous anger, “*do not let the sun go down while you are still angry*” Why? Prolonged anger gives “the devil a foothold” in our life and it grieves the Holy Spirit within us (Eph 4:26,27,30).



King David on anger: Long ago there were also evil deeds and unjust social structures. How could David remain positive and continue to write and sing joyful Psalms? He did not allow anger to dominate or take root in his heart. “Do not fret [get upset, be agitated] because of those who are evil” he wrote, “Trust in the Lord and do good... Delight yourself in the LORD... *Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret – it leads only to evil*” (Ps 37: 1,3,4,8).

Acting without anger: Anger, like fear, is a powerful emotion. But is not the only motor that can make us move. When instructed to “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger” (Eph 4:31) we are not being told to be passive neither to ignore what is wrong. Other powerful motors are available, a Biblical conviction or a specific calling. Love and kindness can also move us. The Lord Jesus was driven by “the joy set before Him” (Heb 12:2). Rid yourself of anger and consciously choose to move with a different motor.

Conclusion: When you sense anger, you are responsible to ensure that it starts slowly and that you are soon rid of it, definitely before you go to bed. Maybe that frustration is better seen as a trigger to recall the fact that God is in control and then ask Him: “Lord, what can I do today to promote the love, growth and righteousness that You desire?” A hot chili has its rightful place. But do not let a hot chili overpower all other lovely flavours!