

What's So Wrong with Getting Angry

Thomas Robinson, *Seeing Life Through Jesus' Eyes 5*, February 12, 2012

Matthew 5:21-26

- ²¹ “**You have heard** that it was said to those of old,
 ‘**You shall not murder;** [Ex 20:13; Dt 5:17]
 and whoever murders will be **liable to judgment.**’ [Num 35:10-30]
- ²² **But I say to you**
 that everyone who is **angry with his brother**
 will be **liable to judgment;**
 whoever says to his brother, ‘**Idiot!**’
 will be liable to the **council** (Sanhedrin);
 and whoever says, ‘**Fool!**’
 will be liable to the **hell** (*gehenna*) **of fire.**
- ²³ So if you are **offering your gift at the altar**
 and there remember that **your brother has something against you,**
 ²⁴ **leave your gift** there before the altar and go.
 First be reconciled to your brother,
 and **then come** and offer your gift.
- ²⁵ **Come to terms** (make friends) **quickly with your accuser** (antagonist)
 while you are with him on the way,
 lest your accuser hand you over to the judge,
 and the judge to the guard,
 and you be put in prison.
- ²⁶ Truly, I say to you, **you will never get out**
 until you have paid the last penny.”

Ephesians 4:25-27, 31-32

- ²⁵ Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. ²⁶ **Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,**
²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil. ...
- ³¹ Let all **bitterness** and **wrath** and **anger** and clamor and **slander** be put away from you, along with all **malice.** ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, **forgiving one another,** as God in Christ forgave you.

James 1:19-20

- ¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers and sisters: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak,
slow to anger; ²⁰ **for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.**

Romans 5:10-11

- ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were **reconciled** to God by the death of his Son, much more,
now that we are **reconciled,** shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through
our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received **reconciliation.**

2 Corinthians 5:18-19

- ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ **reconciled** us to himself and gave us the ministry of
reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was **reconciling** the world to himself, not counting their
trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of **reconciliation.**

“But I Say to You...”

Jesus taught in a striking, authoritative way that amazed people (7:28-29). In 5:18-20 he affirmed the Law and emphasized righteousness exceeding “the scribes and Pharisees,” teachers noted for rigorous obedience to every commandment – a fence around the law. The law was moral / civil / criminal, enforceable by courts and subject of intense debate. If judgment found you in the right, you were right with God. Biblical code plus tradition. Jesus’ language creates an expectation that he sets the fence further out, more rigorous, pure. Jesus gives a series of contrasts that use that expectation but paradoxically undermine it. Jesus is not giving new law, rather a new starting point for thought & action, new default.

Deeper and Different

Jesus’ first contrast is both serious and outlandish. The old law is reasonable and enforceable: Don’t murder – stopping bad action, real harm. Then court, witnesses, guilt or innocence. Jesus does two things: First. Avoiding murder doesn’t get to righteousness. The heart / will of the person is central. Thus he focuses on anger, contempt – thought that produces action. Second. Jesus uses hyper-legal language with ironic humor to show that real righteousness can’t be reached by the Pharisees’ plan of legal rigor – take an insult to the supreme court. Jesus expects us to have a sense of irony, humor, and proportion as we listen seriously.

Anger and Contempt

Jesus’ Kingdom righteousness goes straight to our inner practices of heart & will that may break out in harm to a neighbor, but definitely harm and destroy us like inner cancer. Anger, like judging, may have its place, but we are self-deceived and not good at it. We are responsible for our anger. We blame: “You make me angry.” No. We choose anger. We use anger and contempt to block reconciliation. “It’s their fault. They don’t deserve it.” Patterns of self-defensiveness and conflict easily become the regular way we treat others. Jesus focuses on relationships close at hand: brother/sister, where it’s hardest. In marriage, for example, words of contempt are a strong indicator of marriage breakdown. Jesus slaps us in the face with the Sanhedrin and Gehenna fire. Not a new, harder legalism, but a new sense of where the real problem lies, a new orientation of mind & heart.

Reconciling with People and God

Jesus tells two parables. The first emphasizes how important reconciliation is to God. Jesus is remaking the disciples’ understanding in preparation for the astonishing Gospel that will explode from Jesus death and resurrection – dying to reconcile us enemies to God. Leave the gift at the altar. God want’s reconciliation more. Strive to overcome the anger, hurt, grudge of the brother whether it’s justified or not. Proactive forgiveness & reconciliation, that is what we experience from God, that should be the default position of our hearts.

Beware the Myths of Controlled Anger

The second parable warns against thinking that we can use and control conflict and anger. They easily get out of hand with destructive results. Make friends. You may not be as intimidating as you think. Even if you “win” by destroying the other, you lose. The almighty God chooses to forgive and reconcile and gain a beloved child. We imitate.