

# Getting Rid of the Poisonous Root of Anger

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Anger is like a toxic waste. Sooner or later, it will come out. When anger is turned inward, emotional exhaustion manifested as depression is often the result.

When a person lets the sun go down on his or her anger, that person lets the devil get a foothold, producing such un-Christ-like actions that the Holy Spirit is grieved, and defeat is certain. Such grieving of the Spirit is dangerous because it leads to resisting the leading of the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51). This can lead to putting out the Spirit's fire and rejecting the supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

Paul tells the Thessalonians if they want to be victorious, they need to, "Rejoice always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil" (I Thessalonians 5:16-22).

Ephesians 4:26, 27 gives us some very valuable steps for avoiding every kind of evil that results from anger. It states: "In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold."

The first step in dealing with anger is to be honest and not deny your anger. People usually relate to anger in one of two ways. They are either intimidators or enablers. The intimidator uses anger to intimidate, while the enabler keeps it all inside until an internal explosion has taken place. Intimidators destroy other people with their anger, while enablers or internalizers destroy themselves and destroy other people by denying that anger exists when asked about it.

Ephesians 4:26 says: "In your anger do not sin." In other words, you must be honest in admitting that you may be angry, but you may not have all the facts and, as a result, your anger may be on the wrong basis. That is why Jesus said that if we had anything against anyone, we must go to them, one-on-one, and sort out the facts.

The second step we are given in verse 26 is to not sin in our anger. We are not told never to get angry, nor are we told to feel guilty over our anger. Instead, we are told to not sin when we are angry. Verse 31 of this chapter 4 of Ephesians goes into further detail. There it says, “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.” Anger that has turned into bitterness is sinful anger. Verse 31 goes on and tells us to get rid of rage and anger, brawling and slander along with every form of malice.

To willfully hate your enemies and persist in “bitterness, rage and anger” (Ephesians 4:31) is destructive and can result in actually insulting the Spirit of grace. “How much more severely do you think one deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace” (Hebrews 10:29).

When one refuses to forgive and insists on angrily holding a grudge, such an individual is not receiving the forgiveness that Jesus provided through His death and resurrection. It is impossible for such an individual to live a victorious life. Jesus says in Matthew 6:15 the result is, “If you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

The teaching of Scripture clearly states as we saw in Matthew 6:15, and in the parables that Jesus taught, we must forgive others. If we insist on refusing to forgive and extend mercy to others, it will block the flow of God’s mercy and forgiveness to us, and defeat is certain (Hebrews 12:15, James 3:11, 14). Unforgiveness is totally incompatible with all that it means to be a victorious follower of Jesus Christ.

To forgive and love our enemies, bless those who curse us, do good to those who hate us, and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44) does not mean to condone wrong or injustice. As Christians, our love for our enemies compels us to go humbly to them on a one-on-one basis and point out the error of their ways. Our approach is motivated by our desire to see the enemy repent from action that is destructive to them, rather than to get even. The offense may anger us, but it need not blind us to all that is right or moral. That is why Ephesians 4:26 says to be angry, but sin not.

We are not to let anger fester in us. That is why we are given the third step to deal with anger in Ephesians 4:26 when it says, “In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.” Anger that is not dealt with is anger that will develop into emotional toxic waste that will poison everything that the angry person tries to do. That is why it is so critical that one does not go to bed with yesterday’s anger. Verse 27 says, “*and do not give the devil a foothold.*”

When anger is allowed to remain and forgiveness is resisted, a root of bitterness is allowed to grow, and the devil is given a foothold. From a foothold, the toxic poison of persistent anger enables Satan to build a stronghold. Once this satanic stronghold has become established, then the devil, whom Jesus referred to as the father of lies, proceeds to deceive the one filled with the toxic waste of anger. “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

When one chooses to hold on to yesterday’s anger, the devil is given legal license to come in and establish his foothold and whisper his lies. He convinces the angry person that it is all right to steal and let unwholesome bitter language flow like water. James 1:19 gives us further insight on experiencing a victorious life when it says, “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.”

The poison of hatred and unresolved anger keeps us from experiencing the victorious life Jesus has for us. As this cancer of unforgiveness spreads within, because of the root of bitterness, the angry person finds it becomes easier and easier to hate their enemies. Because of Satan’s deceptions, each such action seems totally justifiable to the one from whom such venom comes forth. For that reason, Hebrews 12:15 warns, “See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”

If we are going to be victorious, we must, when an enemy attacks, trust God and not let it result in a root of bitterness. Trouble may come because of our Spiritual warfare with Satan (Ephesians 6:11-18). It could also be a test to strengthen our faith (I Peter 1:6-7) or prepare us for a ministry of support and comfort for others who are facing similar situations (2 Corinthians 1:3-5).

Paul, in Ephesians 4:28-32, continues giving practical direction for resisting the foothold and schemes of the devil. He writes, “Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

Unresolved anger results in grieving the Holy Spirit who lives in each believer (Ephesians 4:30). The Holy Spirit, as the Third member of the Holy Triune God, can experience grief like Jesus, the Son of God, did (Matthew 23:37, John 11:35). When a follower of Christ lets the sun go down on his anger, he lets the devil get a foothold, producing such un-Christ-like actions that the Holy Spirit is grieved. Such grieving of the Spirit is dangerous because it leads to resisting the leading of the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51). This can lead to putting out the Spirit’s fire and rejecting the supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit.

Paul states in I Thessalonians 5:16-22, “Rejoice always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil.”

To willfully persist in “bitterness, rage and anger” (Ephesians 4:31) is dangerous and can result in actually insulting the Spirit of grace. “How much more severely do you think one deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace” (Hebrews 10:29).

When one refuses to forgive and insists on angrily holding a grudge, such an individual is in essence trampling the forgiveness that Jesus provided through His death and resurrection. Jesus says in Matt. 6:15 the result is, “If you do not forgive others their sins, your heavenly Father will not forgive your sins.”

To refuse to forgive is to directly insult the Spirit of grace. The word forgive occurs over 140 times in the New Testament. It means to let go of the anger, leave the offense behind, and cancel the debt you believe the offender owes you.

The teachings of Scripture clearly state as we saw in Matthew 6:15, and in the parables that Jesus taught, such as the one we find in Matthew 18:23-35, that if we want to be forgiven by God, we must forgive others. If we insist on refusing to forgive and extend mercy to others, it will block the flow of God's mercy and forgiveness to us. (Hebrew 12:15, James 3:11,14) Unforgiveness is totally incompatible with all that it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

To forgive does not mean to condone wrong or injustice. As Christians, our love for the offender compels us to go humbly to them on a one-to-one basis and point out the error of their ways. Our approach is motivated by our desire to see the offender repent from action that is destructive to them, rather than a desire on our part to confront them, resulting from personal anger. The offense may anger us but it need not blind us to all that is right or moral. That is why Ephesians 4:26 says to be angry but sin not.

In James 1:19 we read, "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry." The poison of unresolved anger keeps this from happening. As this cancer of unforgiveness spreads within, because of the root of bitterness, the angry person finds it becomes easier and easier to let the poison manifest itself in one outburst after another. Because of Satan's deceptions, each such action seems totally justifiable to the one from whom such venom comes forth. For that reason, Hebrews 12:15 warns, "See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many."

The root of bitterness, deep inner unresolved anger, can result from suffering, personal tragedy or the hardships encountered in daily living. Such difficulties can actually result in anger towards God. Heb.12:5-8 warns, "Do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and punishes everyone He accepts as a child! Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children."

When trouble comes, we must trust God and not let it result in a root of bitterness. Trouble may come as a result of our spiritual warfare with Satan (Ephesians 6:11-18). It could be a test to strengthen our faith (1 Peter 1:6-7) or prepare us for a ministry of support and comfort for others who are facing similar situations (2 Corinthians 1:3-5).

We must never forget in the fires of adversity “that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.”(Romans 8:28) We are also promised that no matter what problem or trouble we may face, we do not go through it alone, for “God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’” (Hebrews 13:5,6).

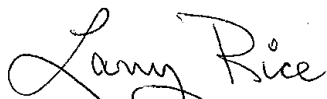
As you face hurt, pain and injustice, never forget you are not alone. “God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ So, we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?’” (Hebrews 13:5, 6).

If we are going to live a life of victory, we are told to, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?” (Matthew 5:44-46).

Now Jesus invites us to be set free from the prison of bitterness and hatred resulting from anger. When someone has angered us, we need to go to them and “speak the truth in love,” (Ephesians 4:15) following the directions given in Ephesians 4:26-32. Then we can begin to live the victorious life Jesus has for us.

The victory Jesus gives includes victory not only in this life but for all eternity. “...Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain” (I Corinthians 15:54-58).

Yours in Christ

  
Larry Rice