

A Case Study of Anger

The first sin was tasting the forbidden fruit, but the second sin was anger. Certainly we can detect anger in Adam's response to God's confrontation--"Have you eaten?" "The man said, 'The woman you put here with me--she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it' " (Gen. 3:11, 12); but that is not the anger which was the second sin. Anger was the sin of the second generation--Cain.

Yahweh had apparently called for offerings from the sons of Adam. Abel brought his from his flocks--he was a shepherd. Cain brought his from the fruits of the field--he was a farmer. Yahweh accepted Abel's offering but rejected Cain's. The reason we can detect by Moses' very subtle record. Moses describes the offering of Cain as "some" of the fruits of the soil, but Abel brought the "first born" of his flock and the "fat portions." Keil and Delitzsch point out, "The reason for the different reception of the two offerings was the state of mind towards God with which they were brought, and which manifested itself in the selection of the gifts. ...Abel offered the fattest firstlings of his flock, the best that he could bring; while Cain only brought a portion of the fruit of the ground, but not the first-fruits." In Hebrews 11:4 Abel's state of mind is called "faith." This is what Cain did not have, and this was displayed by the fact that he just brought "some" fruit not his best or his first. Cain was faithless. So God approved of Abel but rejected Cain.

Then we are introduced to Cain's resulting unrighteous, fleshly, sinful anger. James calls it "man's anger" (1:20). Righteous anger is characterized by its cause and its expression. Righteous anger is stirred by sin, by the violation of God's will, while unrighteous anger is stirred by self-seeking interests. The second is more concerned about justifying and protecting personal interest than in justice, truth, and responsibility before God. Such was the character of Cain's anger. "So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast" (v.5).

Cain's place and standing before God was threatened, but rather than honestly examining himself he sought to justify himself. "It is not me; it is that Abel!" With echoes of his father's words, "The woman you put here with me--she gave me some fruit...", Cain follows in his father's steps. He becomes angry with a self-justifying, unrighteous anger.

Yahweh then redemptively probes Cain, instructing him in the way to deal with his anger. Note the steps: **First, "Why are you angry?"** When we

perceive a threat immediately our physiology "preps" us for action and then turns control of all that energy over to our minds. Like Yahweh we are to be "slow to anger", so we slow it down by asking ourselves some basic questions: Why am I angry? Have I accurately understood and rightly appraised this situation? Myself? Am I assuming my responsibility here? David wrote, "In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent" (Ps. 4:4). What is your motivation? Your object? Your disposition? Do I need to talk to someone? Should I seek counsel of someone else? Slow down your anger by asking yourself hard, honest questions? (Prov. 16:32; 19:11).

Second, Yahweh redemptively asks Cain, "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?" We must determine what is the right course of action. What is the righteous response? Should I listen (Jas. 1:19)? Should I confront? Should I take time out and calm down? Should I attempt to defuse the situation? Should I run? Should I attempt to reason? Should I repent? Should I forget it and let it pass? Should I confess my sin or wrong action and ask forgiveness? Should I politely comply? Should I wait on the Lord? Should I seek out someone in authority? Remember pain, suffering, and hardship are allowed into our lives so that we will learn to respond to every situation in righteousness (Heb. 12:4-11; 5:11-14). Hebrews 12:14 offers sound direction: pursue peace with all men (cf. Rom. 12:18) and pursue holiness. Peace here means to seek reconciliation but do it in a way which refuses to compromise the holiness of God in your life (cf. Mt. 5:23-26; 18:15-17; Gal. 6:1-5). Therefore step two is to determine the "right" course of action.

Third, you must realize that you have entered spiritual warfare. God instructs Cain: "sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you." "Sin" is personified, alluding to the serpent in Eve's temptation, echoing Peter's words, "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8). Satan's ploy is to stir up the sinful nature and desires in us. "Get mad!" "Get even!" "Take care of your self!" "Give it to them!" "Hurt them back!" (cf. Gen. 4:23-24). "Don't forgive!" "Don't humble yourself!" "Do whatever you want, you deserve it!" A prompt rebuke is spiritually warranted--"Get behind me Satan" (Mt. 16:23; cf. Tit. 2:11-12). You are in spiritual warfare as you determine what course of action you will follow (Eph. 6:12). The wrong, unrighteous, sinful course of action is the scheme of the devil, therefore you must approach every occasion of anger as such.

Fourth and last, Yahweh instructs Cain, "You must master it!" To master something one usually gains a competent knowledge, to knowledge practical experience is added, to experience a level of excellence in performance is added. Thus, to master "your anger" you must thoroughly

understand your anger; you must practice managing it so that it is under control; then you must develop a consistency of addressing your anger so that clearly your anger is controlled by you; and this is evident not only to you but to others as well (Heb. 5:11-14).

How do we master anger? Here we are called to self-control but the N.T. clarifies as anger controller (Rom. 8:4ff, Gal. 5:22f). Often, mistakenly, it is thought that such control is exerted by "not doing" something, but that is only half of self-control. It is as much doing the right thing. Scripture uses the terminology of "taking off" and "putting on" (Col. 3:8, 12; cf. Jas. 1:21). As an old, well-used dirt road usually has well-worn ruts, so our lives have ruts. When a wheel or tire falls into a rut it comes out only with a great deal of effort. Even after it is out it will easily slip back into the rut. The best way to avoid this is steering into a new rut. When we "take off" the acts of the flesh we need to "put on" the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-23). When we steer out of a bad rut we need to steer into a good rut. To say, "No," to ungodliness and to say, "Yes," to the Spirit is the state of self-control; it is mastery, it is being under the control of the Spirit.

Here are the four steps by which Yahweh instructed Cain to redeem himself from his unrighteous anger. First, slow your anger down by examining why you are angry. Second, determine the right course of action. Third, you must realize the Enemy is present and at work to lead you into unrighteous anger. Fourth, you must develop self-control to master your anger. so our lives have ruts. When a wheel or tire falls into a rut it comes out only with a great deal of effort. Even after it is out it will easily slip back into the rut. The best way to avoid this is steer into a new rut. When we "take off" the acts of the flesh we need to "put on" the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-23). When we steer out of a bad rut we need to steer into a good rut. To say, "No," to ungodliness and to say, "Yes," to the Spirit is the state of self-control; it is mastery, it is being under the control of the Spirit.

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