

# Let Go of Rage (Anger)

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January 16, 2011

Texts: Hebrews 12:1-3, Ephesians 4:25-5:2 (CEV)

We continue our discussion of topics for our New Year's Resolutions list, beginning with those things that we would do well to be rid of – drop them like a weight that is dragging us down as Hebrews says. We have on our list so far regret and resentment. Today I invite you to add “Rage” or anger in general.

In thinking about illustrations for anger I was overwhelmed with ideas from both the Bible and the news. But, I thought of one in my golf bag. (Hold up broken golf club.) Haven't you seen pictures of an angry golfer missing his shot and smashing his club? Not a pretty picture. That's not how this one got broken. I haven't done that because I don't take golf nearly that seriously as to break a club over a missed shot. If I did I wouldn't have any clubs left. Anyway, not to worry, I haven't played in several years, even though I still have my clubs. Should anyone want a good laugh...

## Biblical Examples

There are hundreds of examples of outbursts of rage found in the Bible. We could mention the rage of Cain against his brother Abel that led to his killing him to begin. There are some even more horrific. Sometimes the emotion seems to be justified but often out of proportion with the offense.

- **Esau** was enraged that **Jacob** extorted his **birthright** from him.
- **Job** was very angry with God for his misfortune.
- **Jonah** was livid when God did the very thing he feared sparing Israel's enemies in Nineveh.
- **King Herod** angry at the being tricked by the Magi he ordered all baby boys in Bethlehem slaughtered in hope of killing Jesus. Of course God saved him family.
- One of my favorite stories is about the prophet **Balaam** and the **Israelites** as they are journeying toward the Promised Land. The king of Moab is in dread of the huge mass of foreigners camped on his border and calls Balaam to curse them. The first time God warns Balaam not to go. The next time he goes anyway, but his donkey balks three times and will not go forward, scraping his leg against the rocks. Each time Balaam is enraged giving his donkey a severe beating. Finally, God opened the donkey's mouth and he speaks to his master, “What have I done to deserve this kind of treatment? Have I ever acted this way toward you in all these years? What's the matter with you; don't you see that angel with the sword standing there in front of us? I am trying to save our lives, and this is how you treat me?” Needless to say, Balaam's anger did not help the situation. And, again Balaam is only able to bless God's people instead of curse them. That may make you think twice pounding the dashboard of your car the next time you get angry while driving.
- There are examples of **God** being angry with human behavior. Remember when **Jesus** was angry at the way the temple was being abused by profit-seeking money exchangers and animal dealers? He drove them all out. **At this occasion, rage was appropriate.**

**In the News** the examples of outbursts of anger and rage are so common lately that we hardly know where to start.

**On Nov. 5, 2009, Dr. Nidal Hasan**, a US Army Major at Fort Hood, shot and killed 13 people and wounded 30 others. It is believed he was expressing his rage because of his radical Islamic beliefs that killing U.S. Army personnel was his duty and was pleasing to Allah. What happened on 9/11 and frequently in the Middle East has come to our home in Central Texas. Anger and rage are the logical progression of hatred, often stemming from ideological or religious differences. In this case he had

been taught to believe that because the American military are present in Islamic countries they are justified in *jihad*, or holy war against us.

Of course, just over a week ago there was another horrible occasion, **Jared Loughner's** attack on **Congresswoman Gabrielle Gifford, killing six** others including a nine-year-old girl in Tucson, AZ.

The examples are endless. Most of such reports of violence are by men, but not all; **women are capable of such outbursts of rage as well**. Suicide bombers in Iraq, Palestine, and other places have been women as well as men.

A psychologist taught me that anger is very often a result of fear. It may be fear of loss of power, significance, or possessions that comes out as anger. Anger may be either a cause or a symptom of depression and may be expressed in many ways. Men and women often express their feelings differently. For women, they are more likely to share their feelings in conversation with friends or family members, while men are often afraid of showing weakness by sharing such feelings with anyone or even recognizing their feelings. Talking is good therapy, even for men, as I have found.

Jesus and New Testament writers have much to say about anger. In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, he gives clear **warning about anger**. He says it is **just as bad as the very act of murder** as far as God is concerned; both are **grounds for severe judgment**. He goes on to say that if you are at odds with someone, you must first settle things before coming before God to worship. Our gifts to God are worthless unless we are at peace with others in our lives.

Other New Testament writers are careful to point out the importance of avoiding anger and its consequences. As we read in Ephesians Paul offers rules for living as a Christian community: Eph. 4:26-32 (Contemporary English Version)

*<sup>26</sup> Don't get so angry that you sin. Don't go to bed angry <sup>27</sup> and don't give the devil a chance...  
<sup>31</sup> Stop being bitter and angry and mad at others. Don't yell at one another or curse each other or ever be rude. <sup>32</sup> Instead, be kind and merciful, and forgive others, just as God forgave you because of Christ.*

What seems to matter the least is usually most important to us, such as: **whose fault it is?** There are ways of dealing with disagreements no matter who is at fault. It takes two to argue and there is usually enough **"FAULT"** to go around to everyone. We let our pride get in the way. Paul calls that kind of pride **IDOLTRY, putting something or ourselves ahead of God**. **Pride** is the **root** of most every disagreement and of sin itself. It seems that when we become Christians and embrace the lifestyle (are "born again"), the last thing to get converted is our pride. Since most **anger** stems from **fear**, often it is a fear of damaging our **pride**. When we take **pride** out of disagreements they are usually easy to resolve.

Ecclesiastes 7:9 says that anger is **STUPID!** It's usually a waste of energy.

There is an old Jewish story about the virtue of not getting angry.

Some students of a rabbi heard that there was one known to be patient and not easily angered, the eminent Rabbi Hillel. So they made a wager as to who could arouse his anger. One of the men devised a plan; he waited until the evening before Sabbath when he thought Rabbi Hillel would be taking his bath and he knocked loudly on his door and shouted "Hey, is Hillel here? Where is he? I am looking for him." Instead of ignoring or chastising the man, Rabbi Hillel left his bath, calmly put on his robe, and went out to greet his guest. "What may I do for you, my son?" he asked. "I have a question to ask you," the student asked. "Then please ask, my son."

Thinking the rabbi would lose his patience over a ridiculous question, the man said, “Tell me, why are the **heads** of the Babylonians so **round**,<sup>3</sup>**like you?**”

The rabbi did not grow angry. Instead he replied, “You have asked a very important question, my son. You see, the heads of the Babylonians are round because they have no skillful midwives. Few tasks are so important as that of a midwife.”

Frustrated by Hillel’s patience, the man left. Thinking of another way to make him angry, he decided to go back and try it again, being every more disrespectful.

Once again Hillel left his bath and answered the door, “Please, how may I help you,” he said.

“I have a question to ask you,” he replied.

“Go ahead and ask my son.”

“Tell me, why are the Palmyreans so bleary-eyed?”

The rabbi did not grow angry. Instead, he answered, , “You have asked a very important question, my son. You see, the Palmyreans live in the Syrian desert. Their lives are very hard, and the wind is always blowing sand into their eyes.”

Again the man was frustrated by Hillel’s patience, so he left and tried to think of how he might make the rabbi angry. He returned once more to Hillel’s house, and pounder on the door again even more rudely shouted, “Hey, is Hillel here? Is he in there taking a bath?”

Again, the rabbi left his bath and in his robe answered the door,

“How may I help you, my son?”

“I have a question for you,” the student asked.

“Please, my son, feel free to ask.”

“Why are the feet of the Africans so wide?” he demanded.

But Hillel did not grow angry. Instead, he said, “You have asked a very important question, my son. The feet of the Africans are wide because they live among watery marshes. It is very important for a man to be able to stand in the places where would dwell.”

“I see,” he said, “I have many questions, but I think that you may become angry if I persist in asking them.”

Then, still in his robe, Rabbi Hillel sat down before the man and said, “Please ask all the questions you want.”

“Are you truly Hillel,” the man asked, “the one<sup>4</sup>they call the Prince and the Patriarch of Israel?”

“I am.”

“If that is so, may there be no other like you in all of Israel?”

“Why do you say that, my son?” the rabbi wondered.

“Because on your account, I have lost four hundred (zuz).”

“Be careful about your moods, my son,” the rabbi cautioned him. “The fact that I have not grown angry with you may be worth your four hundred (zuz). And even if It should cost you another four hundred, I still would not lose my temper, **for the price of anger far exceeds any amount of money.**”

What is the cost of anger for you? What is the value of patience? Some learn only at a high price, the consequences of having lost theirs. Anger is not worth the cost. God can help us if we remember the scriptures in James 1:19-20(CEV)

<sup>19</sup> *... you should be quick to listen and slow to speak and slow to get angry.*

<sup>20</sup> *If you are angry, you cannot do any of the good things that God wants done.*

Ephesians 4:25-5:2 (Contemporary English Version)

<sup>25</sup>We are part of the same body. Stop lying and start telling each other the truth. <sup>26</sup>Don't get so angry that you sin. Don't go to bed angry <sup>27</sup>and don't give the devil a chance. <sup>28</sup>If you are a thief, quit stealing. Be honest and work hard, so you will have something to give to people in need. <sup>29</sup>Stop all your dirty talk. Say the right thing at the right time and help others by what you say. <sup>30</sup>Don't make God's Spirit sad. The Spirit makes you sure that someday you will be free from your sins. <sup>31</sup>Stop being bitter and angry and mad at others. Don't yell at one another or curse each other or ever be rude. <sup>32</sup>Instead, be kind and merciful, and forgive others, just as God forgave you because of Christ. <sup>1</sup>Do as God does. After all, you are his dear children. <sup>2</sup>Let love be your guide. Christ loved us and offered his life for us as a sacrifice that pleases God.