

Jesus Got Angry Four Times

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James said, “for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.” (James 1:20). Why? Because God’s anger is perfectly justified and expressed. He alone knows, without error, how to identify and deal with wrongs.

Real or Perceived Wrongs

God never gets angry about a *perceived* injustice. He never flies off the handle because of an *imaginary* wrong. We, on the other hand, may do just that. In fact, I suspect we get angry at perceived wrongs or irritations, more often than real ones. That’s why we should anger slowly--as James said, our anger never “achieves the righteousness of God.”

The Anger of Jesus

When wronged, Jesus seldom got angry. In fact, we find just four instances in the gospels where he got mad--the two cleansings of the temple at the beginning and end of his ministry (John 2:13-25; Matthew 21:12-17), the time when the disciples prevented the children from coming to him (Mark 10:14), and when the religious leaders declared it unlawful for him to heal on a Sabbath (Mark 3:5).

The Greek word used in John 10:14 indicates Jesus felt “indignation” toward the disciples. Whereas when Jesus looked at the Pharisees with “anger” a different word is used, “orge,” which refers to anger as the strongest passions (W.E. Vine, Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, (McLean, Virginia, MacDonald Publishing Company, p. 57). Make no mistake about it, Jesus lost his cool and felt anger toward the hard-hearted Pharisees.

Anger and Compassion

Yet, in that same verse, at the same moment, Mark says Jesus felt “sympathy” or “grief” for the religious leaders. That blows my mind. I’m curious, how often when you’re mad do you feel compassion for the person who triggered your anger? If you’re like me, not very often. Yet compassion tempered the Lord’s anger--he genuinely understood and cared for the people who repeatedly disrespected and slandered him.

Anger and Faith in God

But there’s another reason Jesus maintained his cool. In 1 Peter 2:23 we read, “When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.”

Instead of threatening those who crucified and mocked him, Jesus trusted his Father to right each wrong. Too often my anger is aroused by meaningless wrongs. In those moments I want to confront the offender. Like the guy:

- Who darted into the parking spot I had been waiting for.
- Who has 15 items at the nine-item check-out line.
- Who closed the restaurant ten minutes early and wouldn't let me eat even though my family and I had driven across town to make it before ten.
- Who drive slowly in the left lane of a freeway--my lane.
- Who let their kid kick on the back of my seat while flying.

Let Your Anger Set With the Sun

All of these, and an endless list of minor offenses, are irrelevant. And even the big-time offenses we suffer could best be handled by walking away and letting God settle it. But whether we walk away or confront, we need to process our anger quickly. Paul said we shouldn't even let the sun set on it. Why? Because unprocessed anger doesn't go away. It festers and infects our mind with bitterness, rage and hatred. The devil delights in using our ill-will to accomplish his evil ends (Ephesians 4:27-28).

All of this puts us in a tight spot. Managing anger requires maturity and forethought. We may lose our cool, but not control. Here are five suggestions:

1. When you feel your temperature rising, listen and understand.
2. Figure out if the wrong was real or perceived.
3. When angry, don't act on your initial impulse.
4. Speak slowly and only after you've processed your anger and can speak constructively.
5. Finally, trust God to right the wrong.