



October-December 2020
NEWSLETTER



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SO HELP ME GOD

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DEVOTIONAL THOUGHT

God's Word on ANGER

by CH (LTC) Steven Hokana
USA (Ret.)

If you have ever attended a graveside service, you may have heard the pastor pray the following:

“May God the Father, who created this body, may God the Son, who by his blood redeemed this body, may God the Holy Spirit, who by Baptism sanctified this body to be his temple, keep these remains to the day of the resurrection of all flesh” (*Lutheran Worship*, 90).

God knows His people. It is the Lord God who created us, sustains us and loves us. The gift of redemption by His Son on the cross saves us from our sins. The Holy Spirit creates saving faith in the water combined with His Word in Holy Baptism. All true.

But we are all creatures of a fallen humanity. We are at a loss for what to do about anger. It seems like anger is now out of control. The unhealthy expression of anger is now considered an entitlement or a badge of honor, while at the same time many are apprehensive about expressing anger due to a misun-

derstanding that anger is “wrong,” “evil” or “unchristian.” Both of these views are unhealthy and wrong-headed. The wanton destruction caused by acting out in anger leaves nothing but burnt bridges and broken lives. Unchecked anger breaks hearts and ruins relationships.

And yet many have a misunderstanding about anger. Some were told by well-meaning people that Christians are not allowed to be angry. This is untrue. We will explore this and other aspects of anger in our study. We know undisciplined and unconstrained anger leads to medical problems such

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PHOTO: AIR FORCE AIRMAN 1ST CLASS GAGE A. DANIEL



‘I have no better remedy...’

Martin Luther on the proper use of anger



An Air Force master sergeant yells at a junior ROTC cadet to simulate a basic military training environment for the cadets at Cannon Air Force Base, N.M.

Christian (Concordia Publishing House, 1959).

Luther sought to differentiate anger from hatred.

“It is like the difference between old wine and new wine. For hatefulness or hatred is an inveterate anger” (26).

Luther believed that anger is ingrained in the heart and not in one’s world or life situation.

Luther tells a story of a monk, grumpy, petulant and irascible. This friar realized after leaving the cloister because everyone was making him mad, that he alone was the source of his anger, not the monastic community (26).

Luther understood the human condition by acknowledging how difficult it is to rid ourselves of anger.

Notice how Luther sees us rationalize anger while it continues to grow and

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Martin Luther spoke and wrote about anger. He understood that God loved him even though he would get angry. We are in good company with our study. Luther was a highly disciplined man who knew Holy Scripture and the doctrines of the church. In the inspired Word of God, Luther saw God’s righteous anger expressed in the Law: Humanity stands condemned as rebellious. All are fallen creatures and therefore destined to hell for eternal punishment. At the same time, Luther understood the love of God expressed in the Gospel: the redemptive act of His Son for all humanity, our Savior, Jesus, dying on the cross.

This marvelous act of Christ alone, apart from anything we do, restores us. We are now redeemed, bought back from the grave. Luther understood the resurrected Christ, the victorious Lord of all! Luther acknowledged that we continually struggle with our humanity and thus look to the Holy Spirit who creates saving faith in our hearts through the waters of Holy Baptism. He used the phrase *simul justus et peccator*, which means “at the same time sinner and saint.” Keeping all this in mind, here are a few thoughts from Luther on anger.

The following citations are from Ewald M. Plass’s magnificent one volume work, *What Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active*

overtakes our life, health and happiness. “If the heart is inclined to anger to begin with, and, besides, now gets the notion that it is doing right and well by being angry, then devil has won the game, the grudge grows greater from day to day, and the hearts become increasingly bitter toward one another” (27).

Luther confessed that God gives authority to certain individuals and institutions to act out of anger in order to maintain order and punish evil.

From his Large Catechism, on the Fifth Commandment, he writes: “For it is proper for God and for everyone who is in a divine estate to be angry, to rebuke, and punish because of those very persons who transgress this and other commandments.”

Clearly this concept is in agreement with Luther’s understanding of the “Two Kingdoms” as this reflects Romans 13:4 (*Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions*, CPH 2006, 379.)

In his understanding of the Bible and what it says about anger, Luther believed that a disciplined person can use anger as a tool.

This is an important point. Here is what Luther says: “I have no better remedy than anger. If I want to write, pray, preach well, then I must be angry. Then my entire blood supply refreshes itself, my mind is made keen, and all temptations depart” (29).

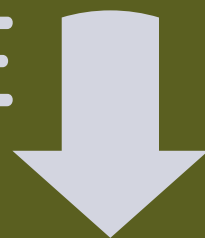
The clarity Luther brings to the topic of anger indicates the following:

- ▶ Anger is a neutral, yet powerful feeling.
- ▶ Anger can be useful when applied in a mature, measured approach.
- ▶ It is important to know what is anger and what is not anger (anger versus hatred).
- ▶ Anger is not the issue in many cases. Rather, it is how we respond to anger that makes all the difference.
- ▶ When we become angry, in order to process it, channel it and use it for the mission of Christ, we have to “own it, discipline it and acknowledge it.”



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

THE DOWNSIDE OF ANGER



- ❶ Angry people are less likely to have healthy supportive relationships.
- ❷ Angry people tend to have fewer friends. They are more likely to be depressed, and they are more likely to become verbally and/or physically abusive toward others.
- ❸ Anger reduces intimacy in personal relationships; husbands and wives and other family members are more guarded and less able to relax in their interactions with hostile people.
- ❹ Angry people have pessimistic and negative attitudes toward others and are unable to recognize or utilize support when it is available.
- ❺ Angry people don’t realize the impact their behavior has on others. They don’t realize that they are pushing people away when they refuse or ridicule genuine attempts at helpfulness.
- ❻ Angry people also tend to drink, smoke and eat more than their less angry counterparts.
- ❼ Anger’s physiological response evolved to help people handle physical threats. However, there are not very many places where physical aggression is an appropriate response.
- ❽ Uncontrolled anger can result in loss of employment, loss of one’s family and even incarceration.

❓ What else would you add to this list of the negative effects of anger?

🌐 For more on the downside of anger, please see “Social Costs Of Anger” at thelc.ms/gpw-anger-social-costs.



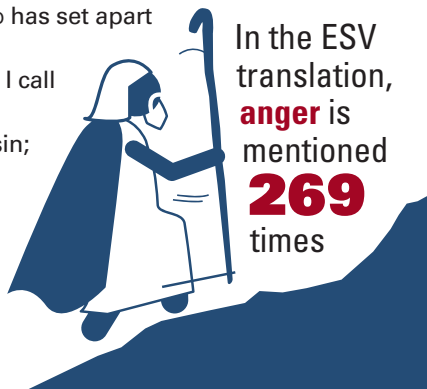
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as ulcers, insomnia and addictions. Anger is a cause of serious behavioral health conditions, including depression, anxiety, suicide and homicide. Most importantly, if not expressed appropriately, anger can lead to physical death and eternal separation from God.

But anger, in and of itself, is not a failure or a flaw. In Psalm 4 we read:

But know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself;
 the LORD hears when I call to him.
 Be angry, and do not sin;
 ponder in your own hearts on your beds,
 and be silent.
 Offer right sacrifices,
 and put your trust in the LORD.



Scripture speaks clearly about anger. So, what are we to do with our anger? God gets angry, we get angry. Jesus gets angry, we get angry. Thus, there is even a redemptive quality to anger if used appropriately.

God’s Word, Holy Scripture, references anger frequently. In the ESV translation, “anger” is mentioned 269 times! In the Old Testament, the Hebrew root word for anger, אָנַף (anaph), literally means “breath” or “snort.” Often we can tell if people are getting angry — we often

hear the phrase “flaring one’s nostrils.” In the New Testament, the Greek word for anger, ὀργή (orgé), means “to teem, to swell.” In the New Testament, anger is often described as “boiling over.” I knew a person who referred to his anger as the turning over of an old car engine on a cold morning. As he turned the key and the engine attempted to turn over, it got closer and closer to “firing

up.” After about three attempts, the engine would “turn over and come to life.” His fury would build until it exploded.

Anger is mentioned first in the book of Genesis, where we recall the hostility of Cain against Abel

(GEN. 4:6–8). And anger is mentioned in the last book of the Bible, the Revelation of Jesus Christ to St. John (REV. 14:9–10).

The book of the Bible which references anger the most is Jeremiah, with “anger” cited 34 times. The great prophet Jeremiah speaks concerning God’s anger at His people. In the ESV translation, anger is mentioned three times in the Gospels (Matt. 5:21, 18:34; and Mark 3:5). However, in the Greek Bible, “anger,” (ὀργή, orgé), is mentioned in Matt. 3:7, Mark 3:5, Luke 3:7, Luke 21:23 and John 3:36.

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So Help Me God may be reprinted with acknowledgment given to The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.