
Question Time — Can we have righteous anger? --- by Elder Chip Gowan

I am certain that everyone reading this article has allowed anger to build within them at some point in their life. Anger is an emotion that stems from so many areas of our human existence. Whether it is selfishness, an unfulfilled want, disappointment, frustration, injured pride, ill-prepared reactionary words, or just simple maliciousness; anger is a common occurrence in the world we live in today.

There have been times where I have caught myself in some public place pondering how a mother, with precious little kids listening intently, can completely lose her composure, lashing out with words only a sailor on his worst day might be caught saying, all because she did not get satisfaction with her request. Worse yet, there I am, so utterly shocked, and at the same time filled with pious pride, hypocritically thinking how much more righteous I am than she is. However, if you are like me, I have been guilty of letting a situation get the better of me and have lashed out with some unkind word, action, or thought that originates from the root of all these negative actions - anger.

James 1:19-20 states, "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." I believe most of us realize the harmful effects anger has on our own hearts and the destructive effects it has on those that receive the brunt of our anger.

Still, there are certainly times when our patience is pushed beyond the tolerance of even the holiest saint. Is not our anger justified then? The scriptures have 586 references to the words "anger" and "wrath." The vast majority of them refer to God's wrath or anger which stems from punishing those that are disobedient to the commandments. So that begs the question – is there not a time when we can have righteous anger?

Can we keep the holy word and respond in righteous anger similar to God? What about those occasions when we are the recipient of someone else's anger or recognize the obvious disobedience of another? Is our wrath appropriate then? I can think of several obvious sins that can stir up anger in most of us – child abuse, homosexuality, and genocide just to name a few. Is not our anger justified in response to these most obvious of sins?

After careful and prayerful consideration, I am most assured the answer is emphatically NO! There is no way for us to have righteous anger. Why do I say that? Well, first there is not a single place in the 586 scripture references that say "man's righteous anger" or come close to implying God's approval of when men (or women) have anger or wrath. This makes complete sense when we ponder it deeply. The only way for us to have righteous anger towards another person, is to be able to judge the heart of that individual. We cannot do this without God's eyes and even then we see the person with God's love, grace, and mercy; not His anger or wrath.

Righteous anger is exclusively God's. That does not mean that God will never reveal to us his judgment or request us to perform an act that is in response to his judgment of disobedience. One can cite the occasion of Jesus clearing the temple of the money changers and sellers of doves or the numerous accounts of the Nephites being led in battle against the Lamanites. However, in each instance God did not give license to the people to hold anger in their hearts or act in wrath towards their enemies.

Brothers and sisters, the next time you find yourself rationalizing your anger in an attempt to justify your actions, I ask you to consider the case of Alma and Amulek watching the innocent suffer the pains of a fiery death or the Anti-Nephi-Lehi people who allowed themselves to be slain without fighting against their Lamanite enemies. Consider the crucifixion of our Savior Jesus Christ and how his death and resurrection was meant for us all. May God bless us all as we try to quell the emotions that stir our hearts to anger. Amen.

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