

THE DEADLIEST DELUSIONS: WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT ANGER

“Is anger an emotion, a sin, or a glory?”

“Why I’m getting angry about anger!”

“Anger and other Modern Comforts.”

by Andrew Olsen

I’m a little rattled. In both my counselling and consulting work I have recently found myself confronted by the possibility that I’ve been pretty wrong about anger. Worse, I’ve even found various realms of research which show that some key aspects of what I have been taught in Psychology and in churches about the place of anger in human relationships do not hold water. I’ve found some of my new perspective difficult to swallow, and anticipate that some readers may find the same as they read below. However, I also hope that many readers will enjoy the liberty that I have discovered - almost by accident - flowing for and from people who begin to see through this peculiar, counter-intuitive lens. A steady stream of people have been telling me that they want to hate this perspective but that it has improved their marriages no end, and have badgered me to write it down, so here it is.

The mainstream modern Christian perspective and the routine secular slant are quite similar, though the latter tends to de-moralise the issue of anger much further. Typically, these approaches proceed along these lines:

“Anger is a natural human emotion that is triggered by violation, threat, distress, or frustration. It is potentially destructive to relationships, and can at times even be associated with physical and/or sexual violence. People must acknowledge and come to terms with the reality of this legitimate, normal human emotion. They must engage in ‘anger management’, finding less destructive ways to express their emotion (eg., go for a run, do some exercise, engage in sports, thump a punching bag, whatever), and so use the emotion for constructive purposes. It should be expressed to the other people involved in an assertive (not aggressive) way, and people should recognise the legitimacy of the feeling and the other feelings associated with it.”

This sounds sensible and it is hard to find a point where it can be refuted outright. However, there is significant evidence in research, reasoning, and Scripture suggesting that we just might have it all disturbingly wrong.

Research on Anger:

Research on the effects of domestic violence treatment programs based on this understanding of Anger, shows that these programs have been proven to actually directly increase the frequency of

violent attacks against the wives involved in these DV relationships. These results are similar to those emerging from education programs designed to reduce teen drinking, drug use and unsafe sex. The common ground is that they all actually produce the opposite of the intended effects, and the common thread seems to be that they are all based on profoundly naïve views of human relationships. In relation to anger, we professionals might have failed to recognise just how biochemically and psychologically gratifying, self-accelerating and addictive anger really is – not just for the body, but for the self.

Next, research into the causes of divorce have revealed a pattern so profoundly consistent that mathematicians can predict divorce from only a few minutes of video interview data of engaged couples with 94% accuracy. (This is not a typing error! For example, see www.gottman.com). In fact, the level of ‘Conflict’ and ‘Complaint’ in a marriage has no relationship to divorce or happiness, but the four dimensions of Anger/ Hostility have an absolute, direct, mathematically-predictive relationship to divorce. (These are Criticism, Contempt, Defensiveness (Tit-for-Tat) and Stonewalling/ Withdrawal). Expressions of Contempt even predict the likelihood of future illnesses of the spouse who receives this contempt! So if Anger is supposed to be a ‘natural and legitimate emotion’, it so happens that it is only so for couples who will end up divorcing...

Third, research into the effects upon children of (a) marital conflict and (b) divorce have identified that it is not the separation per se but the level of anger/ hostility between the partners that predicts the damage to children. This seems to indicate that anger is a ‘natural legitimate emotion’ most specifically in those relationships that most damage children. Is something wrong here?

Finally, the health research. For heart attacks and strokes, anger/ hostility is the strongest predictor of all – stronger than any combination of physiological measures like blood pressure, cholesterol levels, etc. 40% of stroke victims had a tantrum within 24 hours preceding their stroke. (Our blood boils!). In a study where scores of people were given identical blisters, people who measure high on anger took 4 times longer to heal. It appears that anger is a ‘natural legitimate emotion’ in those individuals most likely to have a heart attack or a stroke, or be unable to heal because they are full of their own toxic cortisol. ‘Natural’?

Perhaps something is very wrong with our conventional, politically-correct, common-sense doctrine of anger.

Anger is always a Chosen Strategy.

I have come to believe that it is profoundly counter-productive to think of anger as a natural normal human emotion. It is far more productive to think of it as an unnatural, natural-since-the-Fall, emotionally-charged, pre-emptive-strike strategy to cope with interpersonal risk when we feel one of the three deep post-Fall emotions. These universal, core feelings are sadness, fear and guilt - the emotions felt by Adam and Eve as they walk slowly away from the Garden. These three therefore lie latent in our newborn hearts, ripe for the imprinting of experience. Each of

these three renders us infinitely vulnerable and leaves us utterly in the hands of others. If I feel sad, I can't hug me. Only your comfort can warm me. If I feel afraid, I can lecture the mirror with affirmations until the proverbial cows come home, but only your presence and reassurance of a larger story can secure me. If I feel guilty, 'all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand'. Only your atoning sin-bearing forgiveness can release me.

Sure, these three post-Fall emotions of sadness, fear and guilt are universal, normal and legitimate. But who on earth wants to feel that helpless and vulnerable? No son of Adam or daughter of Eve, that's for sure!

So we hate these emotions; we deny them, bury them, tell ourselves to 'get over' them, tell ourselves not to indulge in self pity, and pretend that we shouldn't need others to have self-esteem (which is 180° wrong because our self-esteem is actually our memory of being esteemed!). We transmute and degrade sadness into depression or eating disorders, or 'drown our sorrows' in addiction; we blur fear into 'stress' or 'anxiety' and then narrow our worlds to half-cope. We project our guilt onto others and then taunt, lecture, torture or gossip about the 'cretins' that so surround us (especially how they govern and how they drive!). And then, in an ultimate act of denial, we manufacture a mask pseudo-emotion to disguise and resolve them all: Anger.

What does anger do? Anger gives us instantaneous power, righteousness, invincibility, confidence – in short, it gives us all we need. Anger is so potently addictive because it completely reverses (temporarily, at least) the pain, thorns, sweat, suffering and death of the Fall itself. Anger obliterates sadness, fear and guilt, transmitting them all onto the victim with incredible speed and efficiency. Why I am angry? Because of you! Anger places not me but you in the vulnerable position of feeling sad, afraid or guilty. Anger affects the perfect transfer of all vulnerability away from me onto you. Thus our 'natural legitimate emotion' of anger is actually an interpersonal anti-emotion strategy that obliterates the more natural, legitimate emotions of sadness, fear and guilt. (Perhaps even the neurochemistry of anger might be the opposite of the neurochemistry of real emotions – ie., of sadness, fear, guilt, joy, affection, creativity, compassion? There's a test of my theory!).

Let me say all this in reverse. It is impossible to feel anger unless you have already just felt sad, afraid or guilty. Let's say I slap you in the face and you react instantly with anger. Anger always feels instant and therefore involuntary - a 'natural emotion'. However, I would argue that this cannot be a 'natural normal reaction' because there is no direct connection between face slapping and anger. You are not angry because I slapped your face, but because of the meaning of that act in an interpersonal story. If we were doing a face-slapping scene in a movie you wouldn't react angrily unless the script required it, so there is no direct line between my face-slapping behaviour and your anger. What actually happened is that your face stung, and your brain registered pain, and you perhaps simultaneously felt two of the three post-Eden emotions: fear (that the pain might be re-administered) and sadness (that your safe trust in my physical proximity had been betrayed). You then calculated (all in a microsecond, thanks to the hard-wirings of habit and

practice) that you could afford to express anger toward me. Your calculations will have included a reading of whether I was bigger than you, who was watching, and which of various theatrical options would offer the most likely profitable pay-offs. Pain was your sensation; sadness and fear were your emotions; and anger was your calculated emotional strategy to manage the next phase of this particular interpersonal drama. If the identical drama had occurred with a 7-foot tall version of me as an angry Mafia boss, you would have sensed pain, felt sad and afraid, and... would not have reached for anger but for some other interpersonal strategy (eg., begging for mercy, squealing on a mate, bargaining, etc.) to cope. You will choose anger if it suits. Thus, anger is not merely about 'natural emotion'; it is a fallen coping strategy.

Anger, then, is not our simple, involuntary emotion (which of course, we feel we have a 'right' to) but is a piece of emotional-interpersonal-physical strategic theatre in a relationship context and story. In other words, you don't just 'feel' anger, you 'do' anger. Anger doesn't happen to me; I make it happen. It is a survival strategy that I sometimes use to get what I want and avoid what I don't want.

But wait on – why does it feel like an emotion, and why doesn't it feel like a choice? For two reasons. One: I'm never going to want to even think of it as a choice because then I'll be culpable. I know that chosen anger is not OK, because it is always in my name and at your expense. It is taking the role of judge, jury and executioner off God, who says "vengeance is mine". Two: anger happens to provide - faster than cocaine sniffing - a biochemically instantaneous fix that is highly physically addictive. One of my clients told me, unbidden, "I can't allow it - it feeds itself!". We deny it, but we are wired to physically enjoy the hormone-stimulating feelings that come with it – only guilt and civics makes us think that we don't. The choice is so fast and self-accelerating that it feels like something I can't help, something happening quite 'naturally', something that is 'caused' by you or by something outside of me. Yet my first experiences of toy thefts by my toddler peers resulted in me howling rather than hitting. Sadness is the natural reaction, not anger. I tried anger at a slightly older age, and if I got away with it I felt goooood! Instant pain relief and power endorphins! Original Sin fuel! I'll be even quicker to anger next time! If as children we learn (from our parent's reactions or by watching their anger) that we don't have to renounce anger, it becomes fully automatic, instantaneous, unconscious. Toddlers who experience some success with temper tantrums keep on having them – no – 'doing them' - in their 20s and 60s. They call it 'a natural emotion', and try to apply 'anger management' - all to little effect.

Anger is always corrosive to relationships

There is no such thing as a workable interpersonal response to anger. When you are angry, what on earth am I supposed to do with that? Here I am, believing as I've been taught that 'anger is a legitimate human emotion', and reminding myself that 'you have a right to be angry...' but I'm watching your neck and face get red, your adrenaline system is pumping, your muscles are throbbing

with blood, your voice is raised, your fist is clenching, your eyes are full of hate... What am I to do?

I could say 'sorry' and calm you down (maybe, though not reliably), but that would not be part of our development of open and intimate relationship. I might not even feel or mean 'sorry', but there is no space here for me to reflect upon the subtleties of whether I've really sinned. I'm afraid for my previously-broken nose! Saying 'sorry' is merely a retreat and self-preservation strategy. Or, I could try to understand where you are coming from and how you might have perceived things in such a way as to interpret my latest words or actions as a threat. But that is not much use if you are still winding yourself up, screaming at me and waving a clenched fist. Hey, wait on, you are behaving like drunks do! Your frontal lobe is totally shut down! You are not really asking for empathy or understanding or mutual exploration at all! You are busy 'enjoying' your 'legitimate human emotion' with all its power and impenetrable self-righteousness, while I am busy scanning the distances between you, me and the door!

This is not convincing me that there is a place for anger in relationships. There is nothing I can do except appease, distract, or threaten you, and none of these is a sane ingredient in a meaningful adult intimacy relationship. Besides all this, you have already triggered my own hard-wired, instinctive, genetically-programmed fight-flight routines with your raised voice, narrowed iris, ruddy neck, clenching fist, mocking eyes, scornful tone, and menacing movements. The fact is that all raised voices are always part of a continuum to physical violence. Ask any other mammal! Especially ask any other primate! (Yes, it is a 'natural emotion' all right – but remember, various ape species rape, beat, murder and eat each other!)

Perhaps you might try to 'control' your anger and tell me how angry you are as part of your commitment to being open and honest in our relationship. Still, what am I supposed to do with that? Thank you for not killing me? If you're angry, then I'm supposed to react in some certain way, and suddenly I am responsible for your level of anger! How did I end up having to be the adult for you?

So while both my Psychology professor and my pastor are telling me that anger is a legitimate natural non-volitional human emotion that should be acknowledged and recognised in the natural course of developing meaningful relationships, your words and face are telling me much more clearly and honestly that everything about our relationship is now at risk. Anger is actually a direct threat against our relationship. It spells the exact opposite of relationship. Anger is not a legitimate part of a relationship but is a gun at the head of our relationship. You have reached for anger as your vessel or your weapon, and we are not in the natural flow of relationship but at the battle lines of war. This is not 'open communication, this is strategic intimidation. Woe to me if I don't get your 'defuse bomb PIN number' right!

I've come to believe that anger actually functions as the Hydrogen Sulphide of human relationships. H₂S is smelled and known as 'rotten egg gas', and it is so deadly that the human nose can detect it at less than 1 part per million. Once it is there, you can continue to read your newspaper or finish your conversation but you can not

pretend that things are fundamentally OK. And yet, when there is enough of it in the air, the human nose can no longer detect it. When this concentration in our system gets high enough we no longer can smell it... and we suddenly die of poisoning. I think it is exactly like this with anger. That's exactly what the divorce research says, and over 50% of us are divorcing. For humans can learn, and when we are taught that anger is legitimate we adjust to its presence, leading us slowly to accept it as 'background' noise, and so take it for granted. Like H₂S in our systems, it will do its deadly work.

Scripture:

Human anger does not get good press in the Old Testament. Cain's anger murders Abel. Pharaoh's anger destroys his entire nation. Moses' loses his right to enter the Promised Land over a single extra striking of the rock in anger. David's anger leads him to prepare a mass murder that is only averted by a woman's wisdom and wiles. Evil Kings and Queens are famously angry at God's prophets.

When we get to the New Testament, Jesus has a view of Anger that is radical to the point of incredulity. We can hardly take in what he said in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5):

"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart...

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to this divine judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to Heaven's court. Anyone who says, 'Fool!' will be in danger of the fire of Hell."

How about that: 'Lust is Adultery', and 'Anger is Murder'! In fact every New Testament (NT) reference to the place of anger in the Christian life condemns it. Every single one! Even the 'escape clause' verse that we all use, "Be angry but sin not" in Ephesians 4:26 is really a poetic introduction to a profound condemnation of anger – not an instruction that we can be angry so long as we don't sin! It is merely one of the famous ancient quotes that Paul uses to introduce some 'don'ts' in the chapter. The quote itself is actually from Psalm 4:4 which is a warning against anger. Paul then immediately says that anger is deadly if held even over a single night! Not satisfied with that, he tells us that it is in fact the very 'mighty foothold' of the Devil himself! Then, just in case we're not getting it, in v.31 he repeats his concern with a range of words for emphasis: "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, and every form of malice."

Later he tells Timothy, "I want men everywhere to pray with holy hands lifted up to God, free from sin and anger and resentment." Similarly, the Apostle James, with his characteristic frankness, directly condemns us for "fights and quarrels among you" coming from "your desires that battle within you, causing us to "kill and

covet,... quarrel and fight” because we are “adulterous people” in “friendship with the world” and “in hatred towards God.” No lenience here. Instead he explains that “your anger does not produce God’s righteousness.” Jesus, Paul, and James are all calling anger sin. No pop psychology or palatable preaching here.

Besides this fact that every single NT verse on human anger condemns it, there is also the fact that every single instance of fallen man’s anger in any NT story (excluding the exception of Paul that will prove the point in a moment) is a scene of Hell on earth. The disciples are angry with the woman anointing Jesus with perfume, or angry with children coming to him. The Pharisees are angry about just about everything that Jesus does. Herod is angry and murders scores of children. Judas is angry in several scenes. The High Priests are angry, planning murder, condemning, accusing. The mobs are angry. Teeth are gnashed as Steven is murdered. Every single scene of anger is a relationship bloodbath. Anger is murder. Only God himself can handle the ‘plutonium’ of Anger in a holy way. As Peter assures us, God did exactly this at the Great Flood and against Sodom and Gomorrah, and he promises to do it again once and for all (2 Peter 2 & 3).

(An embarrassing aside: My church history friend tells me that “right up until the modern era, anger has not been accepted as anything other than a sin in Christian circles. As far as I have researched, the acceptance of anger as OK by the global Church has only become widespread since the late 1800s. See the Massachusetts Puritan theologians for some great rejections of anger!” As usual, all my greatest ideas have been stolen by the Ancients!)

The exception that proves the rule: The Unusual Anger of the Father and the Son.

Aside from Jesus, the single explicit exception in the whole of the NT is the verse in 2 Corinthians 11 where Paul writes, “I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?”

The word ‘burn’ is clear: Paul is angry. Jesus, too, was furious on many occasions, and the text is very explicit about this. He was like his Father in this matter: “God is angry with the wicked every day” says Psalm 7v11. Yet Jesus’ anger is 1800 different from ours. Usually we find something glorious follows Jesus’ anger – another miraculous healing, or even the resurrection of Lazarus. The anger of God is itself a beautiful, prisoner-liberating, oppression-ending, Satan-crushing part of his character – even part of his tender, holy love for us. So how can I say ‘anger is a sin’ when Jesus was so angry?

In every case we see Jesus’ anger it is directed at a person who was harming another person. Jesus was never once the immediate player. He was always angry about how a third party was treating another third party. He was angry with the disciples because they were blocking the path of children who were coming to him for blessing. He was angry with the Pharisees for putting heavy loads

upon the backs of the people in the name of God. He was angry with those who would lead “one of these little ones into sin” and promised worse than a millstone necklace to such a person. He was furious over people treating God his Father with capitalist contempt, and Gentiles with exclusion from the Kingdom, by their misuse of the Court of the Gentiles in the Temple. This holy wrath is what Paul felt when he wrote, “Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?” His anger is not for himself. (In fact he sometimes sang for joy when unjustly persecuted!) His ‘righteous anger’ – a commodity far rarer than hen’s teeth - is exclusively reserved for the liberation of others from sin. It only shows up (usually beneath the surface of the text) in scenes where people are being deceived away from the gospel of liberty (eg., in Galatians) or otherwise defaming the good name of God (eg., in 1 Corinthians). Similarly, the writer Jude sounds furious at the religious deceivers who drag other souls into hell with them.

In contrast to these scenes of righteous liberating anger, we discover that Jesus himself showed not the slightest sign of anger when unjustly struck, misquoted, mocked, betrayed, misjudged, slandered, condemned and crucified! He even forgave them and prayed for those who were unjustly bashing him onto a cross! Why wasn’t he angry? Surely he would have been justified? The Apostle Peter explains:

“Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. ‘He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.’ 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.”

What is going on here? He is angry for others, but never for himself. He burns for others to be treated well, but himself he simply entrusts to God for protection and justice. He did not consider himself. He emptied himself. His self-preservation, like justice, was God’s responsibility. “Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.” Jesus trusted that the Father would pay out all judgement justly in the end. We can too. Anger is his business, not ours.

So what are we supposed to do with Anger?

When Cain was angry, God asked him a question: “Why are you angry?” When Jonah was angry, God asked a question: “Is it right for you to be angry?” It seems that God asks us to question our anger, using it as a mirror to show what our souls are really like in comparison to the crucified one. Interestingly, God did not ask Cain to understand or manage his anger. With raw, Jesus-like language he called it ‘SIN’ and commanded him to ‘MASTER’ it.

This is not anger management but total conquest. If we are busy trying to control it, channel it, suppress it, manage it, harness it, suck it in – it is probably because we still haven't named it for the savoury sin that it is and spewed it out. I have refused to believe Jesus when he promised that my anger deserves judgement by the heavenly court and the fires of Hell (Matt 5:21-23).

We simply must drop all our excuses and blame-shifting – even our cleverer manoeuvres like, “I know I shouldn't be angry because it is a sin but I'm only angry because you...” The only cure for anger is to thoroughly renounce it, confess it, reject it, and repent. We have to spot it ourselves, cut off our hand, spit out every form of it. “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, and every form of malice” (Eph 4:31). That includes every expression of the Criticism, Contempt, Defensiveness (Tit-for-Tat) and Stonewalling/ Withdrawal/ Silence strategies that we use as clever covers for our anger. (Divorce research shows that counts of these four behaviours in engaged couples mathematically predicts their odds of divorce with 94% accuracy! See www.gottman.com).

“But what do I do with all that feeling – when I'm in it?” Well, for a start, when we find ourselves enthroned on our high horse, why not rant: “I'm NOT having a tantrum! MY anger is MY self-serving and self-deifying response to the fact that MY Kingdom is not working! My Anger is MY strategy to control MY agenda in MY world, and it is MY claiming of MY divine right to be judge, jury and executioner of you, MY victim! I've used MY victimhood as an excuse to make you MY fresh victim, to perpetuate the devil's vortex of violence! It is for radical, arrogant sin like this that Christ had to die for me! In fact, anger like mine was both literally and figuratively the very 'natural legitimate emotion' that nailed him there on that black day!”

Or, you could dare to acknowledge and express the real emotions that are powering it from just below the surface: sadness, fear and guilt. They are very easy to tap when we're angry – just dare to try out the phrase “I feel sad/ frightened/ guilty,” and, as quick as a flash, you will know with incredible clarity which it is. (An interesting thing to say to an angry person is, “You're angry because you're just too proud to admit that you are feeling very afraid and very sad right now!” What can they say?!)

When these vulnerable emotions are shared there is opportunity for either (a) the other person to take advantage of our weakness and trash us, or (b) the other person to identify with us and engage in wonderfully deeper and more meaningful intimacy. If the first happens, we actually participate directly in filling up the sufferings of Christ. (2 Cor 1v5; Phil 1v29, 3v10; Col 1v24; 1 Peter 2v19). If the latter happens, we actually participate directly in the very life of divinity (1 John 4v12). In other words, having trusted God on the anger issue, we get to know Him more deeply either way it turns - from the inside.

If we are in a setting that makes it unwise to share these three under-feelings out loud, we can turn them into psalms of prayer to God. The Psalms themselves are full of all the hot and cold emotions – righteous anger, sadness, fear and guilt. That's largely what they are for!

When our anger is felt on behalf of others (which accounts for approximately .01% of human anger!), we might at times be called to act on it as an agent of God. When we watch cruelty being inflicted upon a victim we should sometimes rise and strike, but only for liberty, never for revenge. Anger should only ever be used to stop sin. God's purposes will almost always be better served if we put our very rare thoughts of 'righteous anger' back into the hands of the God of Righteous Vengeance. When our anger is in fact righteous, it is highly likely that our enemy is supernatural, and that we are not the main players: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” Our Ephesians 6 weapons are to be truth, righteousness, gospel, salvation, faith and Word. And prayer: “even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, “The Lord rebuke you!” The battle is the Lord's. Very occasionally we might be called upon to express it, but we will likely be full of tears and empty of ourselves as we do it.

But Can't Parents Be Angry?

Yes! We should express God's anger when our children are either cruel or rebellious. Left unchecked, such behaviours grow up into adult violence and harmful stupidity. Unpunished anger will spread destruction to others, poison their own souls, and earn them the eternal fires of Hell. God is deadly serious about sin, and they need to learn the dread Fear of God from convincing human models. But they should never see us angry over their mistakes, misunderstandings or underperformance. This would be our sin. This fits the model of Jesus: our anger is for them against their sin rather than against them for ourselves. We are called to represent God to them, and to even hurt them (eg., physically) in God's name (see Hebrews 12), but never to harm them (ie., their hearts) in the slightest, and never with personal gratification or violence. (Note – there is a world of difference between hurt and harm. God scourges his children (Heb 12) but never lets a hair on their head be harmed.) They should become very afraid of the price of their sin, not of the price of our anger. They should describe our anger as something closely associated with our tears for them, as Jesus showed in relation to his declaration of the final judgement of Jerusalem (see Luke 13:34 & 19:41). They should see it as warfare against the cancerous toxicity of sin in their hearts. (Incidentally, the research on the effects of smacking/ spanking children is completely and overwhelmingly positive, despite popular media reports to the contrary that were based on studies that did not distinguish between spanking and bashing.)

Conclusion

Anger is the 'plutonium' of human relationships, but Psychology (and not just pop psychology) has perpetuated a delusional perspective on human anger, casting it as somehow legitimate. The church has swallowed the same. Our conventional view of

anger not only does not have the power to restrain violence, it actually perpetuates violence. The conventional view allows anger a legitimate place in human relations. Once this is granted – once intimacy is required to tolerate soul violence - all hope is lost. The inevitable results are that (i) a certain level of violence is tolerated and sanctioned, (ii) victims of anger often have no defence against violence (but are in fact blamed for ‘causing’ it and required to do something brilliant to stop it), and (iii) the natural conflict in relationships is coped with by avoidant circling behaviours rather than by the negotiation and resolution of difference. Nobody can negotiate with anger – ‘negotiation’ actually occurs only with the rational, non-angry, frontal lobe part of the player involved. Appeasement is what happens with anger, but this invariably reinforces anger as a legitimate and effective strategy, further perpetuating the spread of the radiation. In total contrast to the other-centred anger of Jesus and of the Apostles after Pentecost, every verse about human anger in the NT condemns anger and every example of anger in the NT is a scene of Hell. If I am angry for my own sake, anger is always murder. ‘Anger Management’ is an oxymoron and a lie. God and Jesus are always only angry for the sake of love and truth. The only place for anger is to stop sin. Only God can handle the plutonium of anger in a holy way.

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For research reference sources, search the www for combinations of the word ‘research’ with words like hostility/ anger/ predicts/ criticism/ contempt/ heart attack/ divorce/ effects children/ domestic violence/ etc. for thousands of hits.

For books based upon this perspective, consider the bestsellers 'Leadership and Self Deception' and 'The Anatomy of Peace' by the Arbing Institute.

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"Indulge not thyself in the passion of anger; it is whetting a sword to wound thine own breast, or murder thy friend." - Akhenaton

"Of the Seven Deadly Sins, anger is probably the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontation still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back – in many ways it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you." - Fredrick Buechner

DO YOUR OWN ANGER RESEARCH:

Here are the Anger verses in the NT:

**Matt 5: 22 But I promise you that if you are angry with someone, you will have to stand trial. If you call someone a fool, you will be taken to court. And if you say that someone is worthless, you will be in danger of the fires of hell. 23 So if you are about to place your gift on the altar and remember that someone is angry with you,

Matt 18:34 Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers until he should pay back the whole debt.

Matt 26:8 But when his disciples saw this, they became angry and complained, "Why such a waste?"

Mark 3:5 And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other.

Mark 10:14 When Jesus saw this, he became angry and said, "Let the children come to me! Don't try to stop them. People who are like these little children belong to the kingdom of God.

Mark 14:4 But some were there who said to one another in anger, "Why was the ointment wasted in this way?"

Luke 4:28 When the people in the meeting place heard Jesus say this, they became so angry 29 that they got up and threw him out of town. They dragged him to the edge of the cliff on which the town was built, because they wanted to throw him down from there.

**Luke 9:5 "If the people of a town won't listen to you when you enter it, turn around and leave, demonstrating God's anger against it by shaking its dust from your feet as you go."

Luke 13:14 The man in charge of the meeting place was angry because Jesus had healed someone on the Sabbath. So he said to the people, "Each week has six days when we can work. Come and be healed on one of those days, but not on the Sabbath."

**Luke 14:21 The servant told his master what happened, and the master became so angry that he said, "Go as fast as you can to every street and alley in town! Bring in everyone who is poor or crippled or blind or lame."

Luke 15:28 The older brother got so angry that he would not even go into the house. His father came out and begged him to go in.

John 3:36 Those who believe in the Son have eternal life, but those who do not obey the Son will never have life. God's anger stays on them."

John 11:37-38 But some said, "This fellow healed a blind man-why couldn't he keep Lazarus from dying?" And again Jesus was moved with deep anger. Then they came to the tomb. It was a cave with a heavy stone rolled across its door.

Acts 14:2 But the Jews who did not have faith in him made the other Gentiles angry and turned them against the Lord's followers.

**Acts 15:10 Now why are you trying to make God angry by placing a heavy burden on these followers? This burden was too heavy for us or our ancestors.

Acts 19: 28 At this their anger boiled and they began shouting, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

Rom 1: 18 But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, evil men who push away the truth from them.

Rom 1: 19 God shows his anger because some knowledge of him has been made clear to them. Yes, God has shown himself to them.

Rom 2: 5 But you are stubborn and refuse to change, so you are making your own punishment even greater on the day he shows his anger. On that day everyone will see God's right judgments.

Rom 2:8 But he will terribly punish those who fight against the truth of God and walk in evil ways-God's anger will be poured out upon them.

Rom 3: 25 For God sent Christ Jesus to take the punishment for our sins and to end all God's anger against us. He used Christ's blood and our faith as the means of saving us from his wrath. In this way he was being entirely fair, even though he did not punish those who sinned in former times. For he was looking forward to the time when Christ would come and take away those sins.

**Rom 4: 15 But the fact of the matter is this: when we try to gain God's blessing and salvation by keeping his laws we always end up under his anger, for we always fail to keep them. The only way we can keep from breaking laws is not to have any to break!

Rom 5:9 But there is more! Now that God has accepted us because Christ sacrificed his life's blood, we will also be kept safe from God's anger.

Rom 9: 22 God wanted to show his anger and reveal his power against everyone who deserved to be destroyed. But instead, he patiently put up with them.

Rom 10: 19 But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you.

****Rom 12: 19** My friends, do not try to punish others when they wrong you, but wait for God to punish them with his anger. It is written: "I will punish those who do wrong; I will repay them," says the Lord.

Rom 13: 5 But you should obey the rulers because you know it is the right thing to do, and not just because of God's anger.

1 Cor 10: 22 Or are we provoking the Lord to jealous anger? Are we stronger than he?

2 Cor 11: 29 Who is weak without my feeling that weakness? Who is led astray, and I do not burn with anger?

2 Cor 12: 20 I am afraid that when I come, you will not be what I want you to be, and I will not be what you want me to be. I am afraid that among you there may be arguing, jealousy, anger, selfish fighting, evil talk, gossip, pride, and confusion.

****Gal 5: 20** idolatry, spiritism (that is, encouraging the activity of demons), hatred and fighting, jealousy and anger, constant effort to get the best for yourself, complaints and criticisms, the feeling that everyone else is wrong except those in your own little group- and there will be wrong doctrine,

Eph 2: 3 All of us used to be just as they are, our lives expressing the evil within us, doing every wicked thing that our passions or our evil thoughts might lead us into. We started out bad, being born with evil natures, and were under God's anger just like everyone else.

****Eph 2: 16** As parts of the same body, our anger against each other has disappeared, for both of us have been reconciled to God. And so the feud ended at last at the cross.

****Eph 4: 26** And "don't sin by letting anger gain control over you." Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 for anger gives a mighty foothold to the Devil.

****Eph 4: 31** Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

Eph 5: 6 Do not let anyone fool you by telling you things that are not true, because these things will bring God's anger on those who do not obey him.

****Eph 6: 4** Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up with the training and instruction of the Lord.

Col 3: 6 God's terrible anger is upon those who do such things. 7 You used to do them when your life was still part of this world;

****Col 3: 8** But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.

****Col 3: 21** Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.

1 Thes 1: 10 They also tell how you are waiting for his Son Jesus to come from heaven. God raised him from death, and on the day of judgment Jesus will save us from God's anger.

1 Thes 2: 16 trying to keep us from preaching to the Gentiles for fear some might be saved; and so their sins continue to grow. But the anger of God has caught up with them at last.

1 Thes 5: 9 For God has not chosen to pour out his anger upon us but to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ;

1 Tim 2: 8 So I want men everywhere to pray with holy hands lifted up to God, free from sin and anger and resentment.

1 Tim 6: 4 Anyone who says anything different is both proud and stupid. He is quibbling over the meaning of Christ's words and stirring up arguments ending in jealousy and anger, which only lead to name-calling, accusations, and evil suspicions.

Heb 3: 10 So I was angry with them, and I said, 'Their hearts always turn away from me. They refuse to do what I tell them.' So in my anger I made a vow: 'They will never enter my place of rest.'

Heb 4: 3 For only we who believe can enter his place of rest. As for those who didn't believe, God said, "In my anger I made a vow: 'They will never enter my place of rest,' even though his place of rest has been ready since he made the world.

Heb 11: 27 Because of his faith, Moses left Egypt. Moses had seen the invisible God and wasn't afraid of the king's anger.

I Jn 4:20 If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.

Jas 1: 19 You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; 20 for your anger does not produce God's righteousness.

Rev 6: 16 Then they shouted to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us! Hide us from the one who sits on the throne and from the anger of the Lamb. 17 That terrible day has come! God and the Lamb will show their anger, and who can face it?"

Rev 11: 18 The people of the world were angry, but your anger has come. The time has come to judge the dead and to reward your servants the prophets and your holy people, all who respect you, great and small. The time has come to destroy those who destroy the earth!"

Rev 12: 12 So rejoice, you heavens and all who live there! But it will be terrible for the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you! He is filled with anger, because he knows he does not have much time."

Rev 14: 8 Then the second angel followed the first angel and said, "Ruined, ruined is the great city of Babylon! She made all the nations drink the wine of the anger of her adultery."

Rev 14: 10 You will have to drink the wine that God gives to everyone who makes him angry. You will feel his mighty anger, and you will be tortured with fire and burning sulfur, while the holy angels and the Lamb look on.

Rev 14: 19 The angel swung his sickle on earth and cut off its grapes. He threw them into a pit where they were trampled on as a sign of God's anger.

Rev 15:1 Then I saw another wonder in heaven that was great and amazing. There were seven angels bringing seven disasters. These are the last disasters, because after them, God's anger is finished.

Rev 15: 7 One of the four living creatures gave each of the seven angels a bowl made of gold. These bowls were filled with the anger of God who lives forever and ever.

Rev 16.1 From the temple I heard a voice shout to the seven angels, "Go and empty the seven bowls of God's anger on the earth."

ANGER (an'-ger): In the Old Testament, the translation of several Hebrew words, especially of 'aph (lit. "nostril," "countenance"), which is used some 45 times of human, 177 times of Divine, anger (Brown-Drive-Briggs' Oxford Hebrew Lexicon). The word occurs rarely in the New Testament <Mk 3:5; Eph 4:31; Col 3:8; Rev 14:10>, its place being taken by the word "wrath" (see WRATH). As a translation of words denoting God's "anger," the English word is unfortunate so far as it may seem to imply selfish, malicious or vindictive personal feeling. The anger of God is the response of His holiness to outbreking sin. Particularly when it culminates in action is it rightly called His "wrath." The Old Testament doctrine of God's anger is contained in many passages in the Pentateuch, Psalms and the Prophets. In Proverbs men are dissuaded from anger <Prov 15:1; 27:4>, and the "slow to anger" is commended <15:18; 16:32; 19:11>. Christians are enjoined to put away the feeling of self-regarding, vindictive anger <Eph 4:31; Col 3:8>, and to cherish no desire of personal revenge <Eph 4:26>.

F. K. FARR (from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia)

"God's anger is righteous. "In this connection, it is interesting to note the word usually used by the Greek New Testament when speaking of God's wrath. Except for the book of Revelation, the New Testament generally avoids the word meaning 'rage' (from the root "to rush along fiercely", to be in a heat of violence," "to breathe violently"). Rather, it favours a word stemming from the root "to grow ripe". The idea is that God's wrath slowly builds over a long period of time. It stems from perfect reasoning and consideration. It is "not so much a flaring up of passion which is soon over, as a strong and settled opposition to all that is evil arising out of God's very nature". The relevant point for us is that God's anger is not a knee-jerk reaction as ours often is – it flows from a holy, studied wisdom"

p247, "When God Weeps," Joni Eareckson Tada & Steve Estes. (see also footnotes with further info re aspects of NT Greek)