

Dear members and friends of St. John,

Is showing anger always a sin? Most Christians, I believe, would answer, "Yes, of course!" But what does God's word teach? The answer is that a public show of anger may or may not be sinful. It depends. God gets angry. Plenty angry. How do we know this? It's throughout God's word. There's God's anger over Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit; over His people at the base of Mount Sinai, worshipping a golden calf. There's God's anger when He walks into the Temple, only to find vendors selling animals and moneychangers stealing from His people, in the very place that people should have been worshipping Him (this, by the way, leads to Jesus making a whip out of cords, and driving the vendors and their animals out, and overturning the tables of the moneychangers). He's angry!

Since we've heard about God's anger, and yet we know that He never sins, **there must be a form of anger that is not sin.** Everyone who feels guilty about getting angry can relax. Or can we? **Anger can be dangerous.** The apostle Paul admonishes the Ephesians, "*In your anger do not sin; do not let the sun go down while you are still angry*" (Ephesians 4:26). And Jesus warns, "*Anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment*" (Matt 5:22). This leads us to understand that there are different kinds of anger.

Holy anger is God's kind of anger. Not only is it always justified, but when it's quenched, it also brings a condition that is better than merely being calm. It brings to us grace, mercy and forgiveness – a release from the punishment that we deserve. The cross of Jesus has quenched the Father's anger, and has brought us peace!

When we look at what makes God angry, we can begin to understand what kind of anger is just. Even more than that, what's expected of us! **First, God's anger is never hasty.** "*The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love*" (Psalm 103:8). This phrase is repeated again and again in the Old Testament. What is behind this forbearance? He wants the unrepentant sinner to receive His word of Law, and then, having the opportunity to be brought low over their sin, to return back to God through repentance and faith.

We hear this in the Sermon on the Mount. How are we to respond when an **unbeliever** strikes us on the cheek? Jesus says, "*To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either.*" (Luke 6:29). **Let the unbeliever (unrepentant) harm you without recourse.** Instead of anger, show them **kindness.** Why? God wants them to see Christ in you. They'll wonder, "Why didn't that Christian retaliate against me? Why is he still kind to me?" God wants them to see their sin, and our loving kindness, so that they may be restored to Him (see Rom. 12:19-21).

While the response is different when a brother or sister in Christ sins against us, the response is still very much metered. Matthew 18 tells us that you are to take-up this matter with your brother in private. If he repents, your brother is reconciled to, not only you, but to Christ as well. If he refuses to repent, you are to go back later, taking one or two other brothers with you. If there still is no repentance, the entire congregation is to be brought together to confront him over his sin. Notice that there is no mention of personal retribution. Finally, if the congregation can't lead him to repent, **he is to be cast out of the congregation,** and treated like an unbeliever (Matt. 18:15-18). This is not done in anger, but with deep concern over his eternal

life.

Through all of this, we see that God's anger is never carried out in haste. We are to show the same longsuffering that our Savior has shown to us.

Is there ever a case when righteous or holy anger can be displayed without sinning?

The answer is: Yes, of course. Remember Jesus' reaction to the vendors and moneychangers in the Temple, who were hurting the spiritual lives of thousands by not allowing them a place to worship? Notice Jesus' response to the Scribes and Pharisees who are attempting to discredit and destroy Jesus, so that thousands may be lost. (Matt. 15:7, 23:13-29).

The difference is in the depth of the hurt to the Body of Christ – His Church. Attacks on the Church have been on-going for thousands of years. **We are to be angry when we see people who try to publicly harm the lives of other Christians – especially Christian leaders.**

This is supposed to make us stand-up in defense of the person who was injured! But even in this righteous or holy anger, we are not to attack the person responsible, but speak out against their sinful behavior. Even as we are repulsed by their blatant willingness to follow Satan, we must love them because our Father in Heaven loves them unconditionally. **It's O.K. and even necessary to show holy anger when it is directed against this public display of sin.** A verbal attack by a church member against a pastor (see 1 Tim. 5:17-19) or other member, when done publicly with the intent of destroying their reputation, are very common today. The congregation that allows this to occur without recourse is directly sinning against God! God is hurt by this, and angry! In the face of such hurt and destruction, how can we remain unemotional and detached? **The Church over the centuries has suffered great harm as the righteous have refused to show holy anger against public injustice. In the face of public harm done to a brother or sister in Christ, how can stand by idly?** In fact Paul tells Timothy, *"As for those who persist in sin [i.e., those who refuse to repent of their sin], rebuke them in the presence of all [members], so that the rest [of the congregation] may stand in fear"* (1 Tim. 5:20). [Bracketed words by Pastor Travis].

Finally, we have an obligation as citizens of this world. **Outside our immediate congregation, we are to show holy anger toward government laws and directives that publicly oppose the Word of God, and therefore endorse sin as good or justifiable.** Abortion laws, gay and lesbian marriage laws, euthanasia and other laws that reject God's holy word are all public actions that bring harm to God's Church and must be publicly opposed by us. Notice that the government officials aren't the target of our anger here, but the unjust laws and directives that violate God's word.

Holy anger is not only allowed by God, it's expected of us! We must not hide behind meekness and claim that real Christians never show anger. Public injustice against the Church and unjust laws that violate God's word, must be met with holy anger! But be careful. It's the public sin that we strike out at, and not the individual sinner. The Christian who publicly sins must be confronted out of love, using the course established by our Lord (Matthew 18). May God leads us to holy anger, when are called stand up for His Church in acts of righteousness.

Pastor Travis