

Reaching the offended

It is not your fault when someone is angry with you. Does this surprise you? It should. Our culture assumes when someone is angry with you, it is your fault—that you somehow “created” those feelings of anger within that other person. Nonsense. You do not have the ability to reach inside the soul of another person and stir up his emotions. The one who is angry is angry because he chose to be angry.

Now granted, the anger is in response to something he perceives you did or didn’t do. But still, his anger is a freely chosen (habitually trained) response to something about you. By the time we become middle-aged adults, we are the kind of person we chose to become. Our emotional responses have been cultivated over the years, so that they tend now to be “automatic.” But automatic does not mean beyond our control.

If you have done something wrong, then you should admit it, apologize and make restitution. That is your appropriate response. But you should never apologize for someone else’s anger. Their anger is their responsibility. The truth is that some people love their anger. They have learned to control their world with anger. They are used to others knuckling-under in the presence of their anger. Christian people are particularly vulnerable to this form of manipulation. As people who are generally pursuing peace, it is easy for us to assume that when someone is angry with us, that “proves” we did something wrong. It ain’t necessarily so. Think about Jesus Christ. People were always angry with Jesus—in fact, the more religious they were, the more furious they became with Him. But had He done anything wrong? No way. Jesus Himself invited His accusers to point out any sin He may have committed. (Jn 8:46)

Keep in mind why people get angry. People get angry because their will is thwarted. You cannot be an obedient disciple of Jesus and not end up thwarting the will of other people by your non-cooperation with the evil they wish you to participate in. “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” (2 Ti 3:12) The disciple of Jesus must squarely face the fact that simply abiding in the peaceful, honest presence of Jesus will cause offense to some. “For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life.” (2 Co 2:15)

“I can’t believe you won’t help me out with this!” your co-worker rages. “All I’m asking is that you agree we talked about business over



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lunch so I can expense it off.” You refuse. He hotly continues, “You think you are such a good Christian? Aren’t you supposed to help people out? Just go away!”

So you think to yourself, “Sounds good to me!” And in fact that is what many of us do in the presence of anger—we go away. Yes, we may argue for a while, but a usual recourse is to leave them alone—for good, if necessary. It is true that some people will not listen to reason. Some people prefer to nurse their offense. We can bow, scrape, and curry favor forever, but they will still hold their offense over our head. Sad, but true. The Bible acknowledges that it may not always be possible to be reconciled: “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” (Ro 12:18) Still, disciples of Jesus decide that as far as the conflict goes, we will live at peace. We will not remain “the offended party.”

As you might guess, Jesus takes it one step further. Having taught His disciples that anger and contempt has no place in His kingdom, He then pointed out the angry one to His disciples’ attention: “If therefore thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.” (Mt 5:23-24)

The heart being made tender by the kingdom of God will increasingly turn loose of anger and contempt. That same tender heart will also yearn for those angry with him to find peace. This is not blaming yourself for someone else’s anger. No, it is instead a God-given, heart-felt concern for the state of soul of someone else whose anger is making them a candidate for the “hell of fire.” This concern for the offended one’s welfare is strong enough that even something as important as worship would be temporarily set-aside, if

going to the offended party might help him find peace.

However, one must be strong in faith to stand, not taking their anger upon yourself, before you can go in love for the sake of the other’s peace of heart. It is my opinion that sometimes Christians believe we are being “peacemakers,” when in actual fact we are appealing—a form of cowardice. We submit to injustice because we are afraid of the other person’s anger. Remember, it is concern for the angry person’s spiritual welfare that is at stake. Caving-in to anger, thereby rewarding that response on his part, is worse than not going at all. Assuming that you can stand firm though, a meek and humble approach, in which you make yourself vulnerable and willing to understand, may in fact win the day.

Suppose you are the offended one. The person you are angry with comes to you for reconciliation. Jesus Christ has some very firm words to you, the offended party: “Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art with him in the way; lest haply the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou have paid the last farthing.” (Mt 5:25) In other words, Jesus says be quick to let go of your anger and offense. Like in a legal dispute that could land you in jail if you don’t get it straightened out, you have no time to waste staying offended. Drop the case quickly!

Each one of us will give an account of himself to God. Disciples of Jesus are confident in the Lord that it is OK to go the extra mile. It is OK to turn the other cheek. It is OK to let a matter drop. In fact, the pervasive sense of well-being of life in God’s kingdom insists on it. Who really wants the inner pain of holding on to fear, or anger, or bitterness, or guilt when we can live free? Who would not want the sublime satisfaction of helping an opponent find his own peace with God?

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