

God's Conversation with Cain

Self-Awareness in Christ about Anger as Revealed by God's Word
leading to our Full Responsibility to Regulate our Anger
by Self-Control through the Indwelling Holy Spirit.

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written exclusively for those trained
and a few select persons

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and our 100% personal responsibility for self-control by, with and in God the Holy Spirit

Cain, Control Yourself!

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time, Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. And Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering, he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

Then the LORD said to Cain, why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it. [Gen 4:4-7]

Comment

This text shows that a strong, initial feeling of anger—in and of itself—is not wrong. God does not condemn Cain for his initial anger when Cain perceives himself to be demeaned because God did not look with favor on his offering. Why is Cain angry? We know today from research—God always knew it, as God created us this way—that the moment anyone perceives to have been put down—demeaned—in anyway, there is a resulting electro-bio-chemical reaction throughout the body that we associate with anger. Cain's perception—his interpretive thought—that God had not looked with favor on his offering is—given the text—what triggered Cain's anger and the associated energy rush. So "Cain was angry".

Cain's is clearly "very angry" and yet, from the text, we gather that even being very angry is not sin, but it is a dangerously advanced state of temptation. Cain has not yet sinned; he has not let the urge to get revenge overwhelm him. He is still thinking it over. How do we know this? We know this from the text as God is still in conversation with Cain; God is still attempting to convince Cain to take another path, the right path. God knows Cain needs to calm down and that if he does not calm down, Cain will not be able to center himself in his created dignity and worth and, therefore, Cain will not be able to

master his anger. "Sin is crouching at your door." Cain is truly on the verge of sin.

God knows that we are better able to overcome temptations when we have hope for a better future. God gives Cain hope: "If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?" An alternative reading makes God's effort to give Cain hope even clearer: "If you do what is right, you will definitely be accepted." God is centered first on giving Cain hope. God is always working for a better future for us. "I alone know the plans that I have for you, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. If you keep my Son's teachings and seek me with all your heart, you shall find me and know my abundant plans and wondrous purposes for you." [Jer 29:11-19 & Mt 7:21ff.]

God also wants Cain to realize that his unfavorably view of Cain's offering has nothing to do with Cain's type of offering. It is not Abel's animal offering or Cain's grain offering that are at the heart of being acceptable to God. It is something in Cain's attitude that Cain must change for him to be pleasing to God. Scripture is rather clear about this point. God actually "mocks" both those who offer grain offerings—Cain's offering—and those who sacrifice animals—Abel's offering—to please God. "My hand made all these things, and so they are

mine,” declares the LORD. “But this is the one I look on with favor: the humble and contrite in spirit, who tremble at my word.” [Is 66:2-3] The Holy Spirit is clear in the Scriptures that the sacrifice God seeks is an inner attitude. “My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.” [Ps 51: 17] In similar fashion, God says: “I, the Lord, holy and almighty, who dwell on high, also dwell with those who are contrite and humble in spirit. And I delight in reviving their spirit—the spirit of the humble and contrite heart.” [Ps 57: 15]

In Psalm 50, the Holy Spirit gives us insight into another attitude that makes a person pleasing to God. “I am God, your God. I bring no charges against you concerning your sacrifices or concerning your burnt offerings, which are ever before me. [However], I have no need of them for the world is mine, and all that is in it.” [Instead], “offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Most High. You who bring thanksgiving as your sacrifice honor me as you do when you fulfill the vows you made to me and when you follow my ways. When you call on me in the day of trouble, I will deliver you.” “But to you who hate my instructions and cast my word behind you as if it were trash, think well on this, lest I tear you to pieces and you have no one to rescue you: ‘One honors me by offering a sacrifice of thanksgiving and, the one who follows my ways, shall taste and see my salvation.’”

Because God wants to give Cain an abundant future, he knows that he must also help Cain to see that Abel had nothing to do with his own offering being rejected. Cain must stop the blame game and look into himself. In giving Cain hope, he wants Cain to embrace the hope for a brighter future and start thinking about his own attitude and to begin to realize that his acceptance is all about having a right attitude toward God and following God’s ways and is not about anyone or anything else. “If you do what is right, you too will be acceptable.”

So Abel was acceptable to God not because of his type of sacrifice but because he was humble of heart, listened attentively to God, followed in the

God-taught path and had a thankful heart toward God. If Cain was rejected, it was because Cain did not have a humble and contrite heart and did not have a grateful attitude toward God. Moreover, Cain’s heart is so hardened toward God that he refuses to follow God’s instructions. Indeed, it seems that Cain does not fear God nor does he tremble at God’s word. Instead, shortly after God explains to Cain why it is in his own best interest to regulate his anger—Cain too will be blessed—Cain disregards God’s word as though it were trash and chooses instead to let his anger master him. Under the influence of his choice—to *be dominated by unregulated anger*—Cain carries out a plot he had been hatching in his mind. He deceives his brother and invites him to go out into the field. There, away from the prying eyes of his parents, he turns on his brother and kills him. [Gen 4:8].

Some caught up in an incorrect understanding of anger might argue that Cain is not fully responsible as anger is a very powerful emotion and cannot be controlled. Granted anger is a very powerful emotion and is triggered when we perceive we have been demeaned in anyway. But, this is because when God created us in God’s image and likeness, God created us with undeniable dignity, absolute worth and incredible inner beauty, which no one may trash. If someone trashes you—demeans you—you were created to become angry so as to bristle about being demeaned, about God’s handiwork being trashed. However, you must master it before it overwhelms you.

In other words, the initial spark of being angry is good as it derives from our being created in God’s image and likeness. Consequently, just as God gets angry when His pure love, goodness and created order get trashed, so we were created to get angry when we are trashed or when we perceive an injustice is done against another or us. However, while the initial spark of anger is proper and good, it must be instantly regulated in

accordance with God's will.¹ Indeed, God commands us—through his conversation with Cain and elsewhere in Scripture—to get a grip on our anger, to master it, just as God perfectly masters his anger. In doing so, we are to be guided by God's perfect love. Consequently, just as God channels his anger to promote health and holiness in those who will listen to his word, so are we to channel our anger to promote relationship health and holiness by following God's ways.

Moreover, if God commands us to master our initial anger—"you must master it"—mastery of anger must be both possible and beneficial. Indeed, whatever our God commands must be something that is trustworthy and good for us to do, as God is pure love and pure goodness. Anger mastery is, therefore, an important virtue to acquire in Christ.

Likewise, we can be sure that God will provide us, as he willingly provided Cain, with hope and the strength to overcome the temptation. So we are without excuse. God will not allow us to be tempted beyond our strength. He gives us assurance in Christ that with Christ we will be able to overcome all temptations:

Confidently and boldly draw near to the throne of grace, Jesus, the Son of God. For, in him, you have a High Priest who understands you and has compassion for you. For although he never gave in to temptations, Jesus has shared your feelings, knows your weaknesses and your liability to the assaults of temptation. Be confident, therefore, that in turning to Jesus, God's son, you will find tender mercy and forgiveness and receive his gentle, yet powerful, help in your every moment of need. [He 4:15-16]

In ultimate analysis, whoever believes that in Christ they cannot overcome all temptations is like

¹ For more on God's word on anger, see pp. 14-15; or go to www.gettingtoknowgod.info; click on "God on Your Interpretive Thoughts," click on "Anger."

Cain. Cain rejects the truth that God loves him and is urging him out of love to change his heart so that he might live the abundant life. Cain does not believe this truth or the truth that Abel and he are created in the image and likeness of Love. They are both God's children. His rejection of these truths blinds him to his true nature as a beloved child of a loving God. He hardens his heart toward this "cruel" god who rejected his offering. He lets his anger boil over and murders the one he blames for his being rejected. Cain might even have been thinking that if he eliminates Abel, God will have to accept his offering. As anger begins to take hold it clouds all judgment.

In Synthesis: Given the witness of the Scriptures, the reason God does not accept Cain's sacrifice is clear. It is not about his gift, but about his attitude, about the intentions of Cain's heart that are wrong. Nevertheless, God still acts most mercifully and calls upon Cain not to blame Abel for his being rejected. To help Cain switch his focus from Abel to what is going on in his own heart, God gives Cain hope and a path to follow that will make him acceptable to God. When that fails, God turns to holy fear. He forcefully warns Cain: "Immediately regulate your anger!" "Stop the blame game!" "Give up your thoughts of revenge or they will bring you down." "Sin desires to have you"; "you must master it." God's grace is there for Cain as God commands the self-control. Therefore, Cain is 100% responsible to regulate his anger, to master it. Instead, he rejects God's word and lets his anger become unregulated. Then, the force of unregulated anger (sin) rules over Cain and he kills his brother. (Sin produces death.)

Caution: Lest we too harden our hearts to God's word, let us always be confident that in Christ's love for us, which is grounded in his humility and trusting obedience on the cross, we can overcome not only the temptation to let our rightful anger become unregulated by demeaning back, getting even or enacting revenge, but also that in Christ we can overcome all temptations and endure all trials and tribulations. Let us be assured that the Holy Spirit will always provide us with the prudence to avoid temptations and the

courage, fortitude and humility to overcome the attacks of the Evil One. “Discipline yourself, keep alert! Like a roaring lion your adversary, Satan, prowls around looking for someone to devour. Resist him steadfast in the faith.... And after you have endured for a little while, the God of all

grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To God be the power forever and ever. Amen.” [1 Pet 5:8-11]

Essential Corollary Considerations

1. The pleasure and the false sense of power in unregulated anger: The initial energy rush of *the anger arousal processes* creates physiological sensations that can be describes as falling along the pain axes. That pain however is often not recognized by the angry person. Why? The reason is because the anger arousal process also triggers an analgesic chemical flow that covers up the pain.

On the one hand, if the anger arousal process is immediately interrupted, for example, by a Stealth Timeout and REST, the person can quickly re-center in their absolute worth, undeniable dignity and inner beauty and find ways to better the situation. However, if the rightful spark of anger is not regulated immediately, the accumulation of ever more analgesic chemicals gives one a false sense of power and a sense of superiority and invincibility in that moment. In that context, unregulated anger also inhibits one from seeing the person whom they perceive has caused them to be angry as a child of God. Instead, that person is perceived as an “it,” an object, that can be trashed—trashed in thought, word and deed—without any remorse for the harm inflicted. Of course, if one repents after the unregulated anger arousal subsides, one can become remorseful, repent before God and work to repair the damage already done—to the degree that is possible.

Clearly, therefore, the longer one delays in regulating their anger, the more reactive they become and the more difficult it is for them to hear God’s word and to follow God’s ways.

Nevertheless, God tries to stay in conversation with the angry person, calling upon them to become self-aware and sort out what is going on in their self-talk, in their interpretive thoughts. “In your anger, do not sin. Become reflective; be silent; search your heart with the Spirit. Let the father of love triumph! Forgive!”² [Ps 4:4] And again God says: “In your anger, do not sin. Do not let your rightful and righteous anger become beastly and sinful anger. Let not your anger boil! Stop the replays! Let not the Father of Revenge, the Evil One, be your Lord and Master! [Ep 4:26-27]

If the person hears and follows God’s commands, they do not sin. However, if they let their anger become unregulated, they are in sin and must repent in that all reactive anger seeks to neutralize, control, harm or annihilate the one whom they blame for “getting them angry.”

2. Reframing one’s interpretive thoughts: We know from experience, and, today, science demonstrates that if the interpretative thoughts leading to the initial phase of anger are not quickly reframed, a person will be overwhelmed by the biological, chemical and electrical processes unleashed in their bodies and brains by their interpretive thoughts. They will enter into a state of unregulated anger. Indeed, unless immediately regulated, those processes constrict one’s reasoning abilities and the

² See *Getting to Know God*, pp. 14-15; or go to www.gettingtoknowgod.info; click on “God on Your Interpretive Thoughts,” click on “Anger.”

person with whom they are angry is no longer seen as having worth, but as a mere object to be trashed. Reactive anger causes one to focus on how to harm the person whom they blame for making them angry. An attribution of blame is always associated with all forms of unregulated anger. [Stosny]

Given this sequence, it is clear that each of us must take 100% responsibility to regulate his/her “initial phase of appropriate anger” before it dominates and dictates sin-filled thoughts, words and actions.³ We are responsible to reframe our interpretive thoughts and align them with God’s word. For example, entertaining thoughts of revenge is contrary to God’s word. It is sin and it can only perpetrate more evil in the world: “Do not take revenge! Leave room for MY wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord. Instead, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if thirsty, give her to drink. Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” [Ro 12:17-21]

3. God’s grace and regulating anger: We can regulate our initial phase of appropriate anger because God commands it and if God commands it, then God’s grace is sufficient. Since God commands self-control, God—by the very nature of being a God of pure goodness—provides sufficient strength and grace. While we are often tempted each day by the very nature of the battle between good and evil—between God and the Evil One—no one is ever allowed to be tempted beyond their ability to resist the temptation.

Indeed, either God’s grace is always sufficient to resist a temptation or no one is ultimately responsible for their thoughts and actions and sin does not exist. But if sin does not exist, then God is a liar and Christ Jesus an illusion. But God is truth and Christ Jesus is God. Therefore,

³ For details of the effects of unregulated anger on you, read pages 64-76 in your Life-Transforming Habits workbook.

whoever believes a person is not responsible to regulate their “initial phase of appropriate anger” is either under the direct influence of the father of lies, the Evil One, or has been duped about anger.

4. Creation and the initial phase of anger: In the Genesis text, God does not condemn Cain for being momentarily in this initial phase of anger. How could God possibly condemn Cain in that God has created humans in God’s own image and likeness and, therefore, with inestimable dignity, inner beauty and absolute worth. As such God has clearly designed humans to have a built in response whenever a person perceives—rightly or wrongly—that they are being demeaned or treated unfairly. I call this initial spark of anger, “appropriate anger” or “rightful anger.” Sometimes I even term it, “righteous anger”, when it aligns with what anger God. Indeed, if we did not have that bristle, that alert reaction built in by God, God’s image could be trashed without any personal awareness of the gravity of what has happened to another or us. Clearly, therefore, *the initial spark or first phase of anger* is not sin; it is rightful, appropriate and sometimes even righteous.

In fact, as already noted, God does not tell Cain that he has sinned when he initially got angry. Instead, God stays in conversation with his creation, his child, his image and likeness, Cain, and works to convince Cain that it is not in his own best interest to let his anger go unregulated—“if you do what is right, you too will be acceptable”. Of course, God must and does warn Cain that if he does not master his anger, sin is crouching within the initial phase of anger to become unregulated and lead Cain into sin—anti-human behavior and anti-gospel witness. “Sin is crouching at your door; it—Evil/Sin—desires to have you; but you must master it.” Notwithstanding this warning, we must conclude that the initial phase of anger is appropriate and good and is not sin; it becomes sinful only when it becomes unregulated.

5. An exercise in repentance:⁴ Lest we become self-righteous because we did not murder someone when we let our anger go, let us remember God's word on unregulated anger. Jesus vigorously extended the boundaries and the truth about the devastating sinfulness of all forms of unregulated anger. "You have heard it said, 'You shall not murder' and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.' But I say, whoever so much as speaks under the influence of unregulated anger shall be liable to judgment. Indeed, if you demean another by word, gesture, facial expression or tonality of voice, you will be guilty enough to be thrown into the eternal fires of hell." [Mt 5:21-24]

Therefore, review and redo the guided exercise on unregulated anger in *Getting to Know God*, p. 14: **Write down all your Attitudes, Bitterness, Coldness, Cruelness, Cynicism, Hatreds, Hostilities, Meanness, Nit-Picking, Rage, Ranting, Resentments, Revenge, Sarcasm, Stonewalling, Unregulated Feelings of Aggravation / Frustration / Irritation and Vengeance. Then, humbly repent and give them to God.**⁵

6. Thwarted anger and energy loss: The text states, *Cain was very angry*. But then it immediately says, *and his face was downcast*. A *downcast face* denotes a form of energy loss. [Ekman] It might seem rather contradictory to hear "very angry"—explosion of energy—and "downcast"—loss of energy—in the same sentence describing the same person. However, in the twenty years of processing people when they are angry, I have observed

⁴ To gain greater insight into these processes and God's grace, read or reread the interview of Mary Park at www.gettingtoknowgod.info. Click on "FAQ"; click on "Radically Transformed by GTKG: The Process."

⁵ When you did this exercise by faith, you experienced God's healing power that freed you from anti-gospel behaviors and thought patterns that had been destroying your relationships and hindering God from using you to build up God's kingdom of love on earth as it is in heaven.

this "up/down energy" in some of them. Upon investigation of their interpretive thoughts, I found that when a person believes they have been demeaned in any way, they get rightfully angry and have a spike of energy. However, if not quickly regulated, they have a powerful rush of energy that overwhelms their ability to think and act in their own best interest. Their energy is off the charts. However, if they then begin to think that indeed the person was right about them and their opinions, for example, or worthless, they lose almost all their energy and their faces become downcast and their shoulder slump. In observing such persons I have seen that in a matter of seconds they can go from extreme energy gain (reactive anger) to extreme energy loss (thwarted anger) and back again. The swing depends on their interpretive thoughts at that given moment.⁶

I have called the latter form of energy loss, *thwarted anger*, in that a core function of anger is to bristle with energy and alertness when one's intrinsic worth as a child of God is being demeaned. The energy loss is caused by an interpretive thought about one's self in which one believes one's self to have little or no intrinsic worth or inner beauty as a human being. That interpretive thought creates an electro-bio-chemical cascade in one's body and brain that cause one to lose energy, have a downcast face and slumping shoulders and often the mind goes dark or blank. This false belief leaves a person open to the attack of the Evil One, who is especially intent on tempting the person to give up, to despair of a better future, of salvation, of grace, of forgiveness, of the indwelling work of love of the Holy Spirit, of God being a God of love and pure goodness.

A Christian antidote to thwarted anger, to this false belief, is to mediate on the fact that God loves you as his child so much and your loss

⁶ You experienced this in the training, which was designed to increase your self-awareness of the effects of your Interpretive Thoughts upon your physical brain and body.

would be so great to God that God the Father sent his only begotten son to give up his life for you. Moreover, Christ Jesus, God the Word Incarnate, willing left all his power and glory to be like you in all things except sin and to give his life as a ransom for you. His incarnation confirms the truth of your intrinsic worth and inner beauty. It is also often confirmed in the Scriptures. Hear the Spirit assure you in the Gospel of John: “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” [Jn 3:16]

The Spirit also speaks to us about the new life effects on a Christian who believes this as truth and as a basis for life: “I crucified—regulated—all my unbridled, impulses including thwarted anger, in Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” [Ga 2:19-21]

We can also gain hope and confidence by mediating on God’s character in whose image and likeness we are created. Consequently, we should see our true inner beauty and intrinsic worth as having been created in the image and likeness of Love. And as Love is eternal so are we and therefore of eternal value and worth. Therefore, knowing our great worth and whose we are, let us “follow God’s ways as God’s dearly loved children, and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” [Eph 5:1-2] “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” [Col 3:12]

Review, Overview and Charge

God loves Cain. Being a God of pure goodness and Cain's Creator, God's love for Cain, his child, moves him to rebuke and correct Cain.

Whoever I love, I rebuke and discipline. Be earnest, therefore, and repent. Listen, I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and eat with you, and you with me. [Rev 3:19-20]

In correcting Cain, God basically says: "Cain, you must master your anger; you must calm down and hear my voice. Otherwise, untamed, your anger will grow—spring forth—and drive you to act upon the evil temptations that are filling your mind; stop the reply! Abel is not the cause! Change your attitude! Now! Or, sin will have you!"

But Cain rejects God's correction. He refuses to change his attitude and align it according to God's word. He will not let go of revenge. Instead, he lets his anger go, embraces revenge and a false pleasurable sense of power grows. The desire for revenge coupled with the pleasure derived from just thinking about revenge couples and the false sense of power of reactive anger cuts Cain off from his higher human abilities to truly hear and thoughtfully process God's word to him. In this state, Cain is unable to be like Christ. Instead, Cain chooses pleasure and the false sense of power. They are now his "Lord and Master."

His choice causes his limbic system to over heat; it then overrides his unique human abilities (1) to be a flexible and critical thinker and to decide things in his own best interest and (2) to control himself and impose his own best choice on himself—self-control. Having chosen not to control his anger when he could, Cain is now under its force and drives forward as an enraged animal defending its territory. The only thing that

still separates him from an enraged animal is that, while his critical thinking is limited in scope, he can still employ it. However, he can only use it to focus on devising plans or hatching plots to harm the one he blames for making him angry. Cain devises a plan on how and where to murder his brother and carries it out with the energy associated with reactive anger. The first murder had its origin in the refusal to regulate one's anger as commanded by God.

Ultimately, Cain rejected that God was a God of pure goodness, who had his welfare at heart. Therefore, Cain rejected his responsibility to control himself as commanded by God. He stopped believing that God would bless him as he did Abel. He did this even after God had told him that if he acted rightly, he too would become acceptable. God therefore holds Cain 100% responsible for choosing to let reactive anger become his "god." God holds Cain responsible for murdering Abel because Cain chose not to regulate his anger. Since he chose not to master anger when he could, he is also responsible for all that he does under the influence of unregulated anger.⁷

Charge to those seeking to have the mind of Christ 24/7: Those of us who seek to have the mind of Christ 24/7 must immediately regulate our anger. In Christ, we have no excuse for any lack of self-control in any area of life because it is a tenet of Christian faith that Christ, at a great price to himself, has won for us and has sent us the Holy Spirit to indwell us and to both remind us of his teachings as well as to strengthen us to overcome all temptations. As the Spirit reminds us of Jesus' gospel teachings and empowers us to fulfill them with loving hearts, we therefore have no excuse.

⁷ Review our training on the self-time out as an anti-dote habit to develop with the Holy Spirit through daily practice. Rejoice each time you call a self-timeout.

However, since we often do not fulfill the gospel teachings, let us not self-justify ourselves—“anger made me do it”—but instead humble ourselves and acknowledge our sins and repent. The Holy Spirit will help us humble ourselves and convict us of our sins. If we follow the Spirit’s promptings, we will be showered with an abundance of grace and we will discover ourselves self-controlled and on the narrow path that Jesus instructs us to take. And soon we shall see the fruit of the Spirit blossom in our daily lives: love, joy, peace, patience, generosity, kindness, gentleness, purity, faithfulness, and self-control, and we shall produce the works of love.

And so that we do not deceive ourselves and therefore never repent of our relationship destroying behaviors when under the influence of unregulated anger, let us remember what the work of love looks like: “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.” [1 Cor 13:4-8]

