

DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

ANGER AND ZEAL

by the Rt. Rev. Brian W. Keith

Probably everyone knows what it is to be really angry with someone else. It is a very common emotion. Most everyone feels it at one time or another. You might wonder why a person becomes enraged. Well, the Writings tell us quite a bit about being angry. And when a person is angry, chances are that the feeling comes from hell. It comes from hatred for other people. Because when a person hates others, he or she is always angry with them no matter what they do.

Think of where hatred comes from. It doesn't stem from any good love. It comes because a person loves self. People who think badly of everyone else in the world don't like other people. And they're angry with others whenever they get in the way. So those who love themselves are always on the lookout to put down other people. If anyone crosses their path—if anyone prevents them from doing what they want to do—then they are angry.

You know what anger is like. It is like a fire burning inside. It keeps burning and growing until that raging person would like to kill others. The Writings say that if one is angry with someone else, one might not do anything violent in this world for fear of being punished. But once in the other world, if one person hates another, he or she will actually try to commit murder, even though it is impossible. That is the nature of anger. It comes from hell, and it results in people being mad, people hating one another.

When the Lord was coming into Jerusalem, right before He was crucified, He walked into the temple, and saw people who were selling and buying. People were buying the sacrificial animals that would be offered on the altar. And He saw people at tables exchanging money. Now this seemed to make a lot of sense. People would come from miles away to make their sacrifices in the temple of Jerusalem. Some came from different countries, so they had foreign currency—different kinds of money. They had to get it exchanged so that they could buy animals. Nobody wants to go long distances carrying animals with them. It made sense for them to buy them there. So it seemed that the money-changers and the people who bought and sold were not doing a bad thing at all. Yet what did the Lord do? He threw out those who were buying and selling. He went to the tables of the money-changers and threw them up into the air, spreading the money all over the court. The Lord seemed to be very angry at those people for what they were doing.

We know the reason the Lord acted that way. These people, although they were doing what was useful, were doing it in the temple. The temple was supposed to be special and holy, where nothing worldly would ever take place. So the Lord wanted them outside of the temple. And that is why He removed them as He did. Yet it seemed like He was angry, that He was in a fit of rage. This is where important teachings from the doctrines come in.

Even though He seemed angry, you know anger comes from hell. The Lord could never feel anger for anyone. He could never hate anyone. When someone does what is wrong, the Lord is

not mad. He feels sad. What seemed like anger to the people around the Lord was zeal. It is a word that the Writings make a great deal of: z-e-a-l. It looks like anger, but it is entirely different. Anger is hatred. Zeal is a love of protecting what is good. That is what the Lord was doing. He wasn't angry at those people. But He was concerned that the temple be used properly. And that is why He threw them out. It appeared to be anger. But it wasn't. They might have been able to tell that; because as soon as they were out, the Lord did not go after them. He did not try to hurt them. Anger would have done so, because anger can never stop. It wants to harm others. Did the Lord harm anyone? No, not really. That is the nature of zeal. It fires up, it looks like anger, and it wants to protect what is good. But as soon as the threat is over, it calms down.

You probably have felt zeal. You might even have thought it was anger, something from hell. But it wasn't. Imagine if you had a friend and somebody was picking on that friend, being very cruel. Well, you would protect your friend, wouldn't you? You might even get into a struggle with that other person who was causing the trouble. Is that because of hate? No, not at all. It is because you want to protect your friend. You want that friend to be able to live in peace. And you know it is zeal instead of anger because as soon as that person leaves your friend alone, you don't go after the troublemaker. You are content just to make sure your friend isn't hurt.

It might also occur with you. If someone is unkind to you, you might seem to be angry. But you are really trying to protect yourself, protect a good love. And there is nothing wrong with that. However, there is a danger we ought to be aware of. What begins as zeal may become anger. This is because there is a hellish delight in hurting other people. Most everyone feels it at times. A person might start defending a friend, then feel excitement in the struggle. The zeal keeps going and going. It turns into anger. From something good, it becomes something evil. That is the danger.

If you ever wonder whether you are acting in anger from hell, or zeal from heaven, ask yourself this question: "Why am I upset?" If you're upset because somebody is not letting you do what you want to do, chances are you are feeling anger from hell. But if you are upset because a person is hurting someone else, hurting something good—then that is zeal.

If you want to be certain that you do not fall into anger after starting with zeal, remember one thing. Anger pursues after others and wants to hurt them. Zeal does not. So if you are ever furious at other people, and you think it may be anger from hell, stop. Don't go after them. Don't try to hurt them. If you can control yourself, you probably are acting from zeal, from heaven. Anger and zeal may seem alike, but they are entirely different. And we should make sure that whenever we feel rage, it should be controlled as zeal. We should not let it become vengeful anger, an ugly emotion from hell.

Text: Matthew 21:12-13; John 2:13-25