

## Our Number One Problem

Occasionally someone will ask me the question, “What problem do you deal with most often as a counselor?” I smile, because I suspect the person asking isn’t prepared for my answer. They usually anticipate a reply such as “depression,” “panic attacks,” “sexual immorality,” “rebellious children,” “wife abuse” or some other common problem. Those who are aware that half my counseling involves folks in some kind of Christian leadership or full time ministry often ask if I believe “burn out” is responsible for the greatest number of problems that are brought to our office. The answer is none of the above.

As a former Christian school administrator heavily involved in the discipline program of our school, I too wondered what problem I dealt with most when students were sent to the office. As it turns out, the problem that sent the most students to my office then is the very same problem that sends adults to my counseling office now. If you had asked me several years ago what problem I dealt with most in a school setting I most likely would have answered “disobedience,” or “disrupting class.” And like others, I would have been wrong. After examining the behavior reports that had been collected and filed over a three year period of time, I was very surprised with my own statistics.

Here are the results, based on all the offenses involving kindergarten through high school students who were dealt with in our school office during a three year period. Keep in mind that we did not use the traditional demerit system but chose rather, to counsel and deal with each student individually. Also, our school operated with a closed enrollment taking only students from our church family or outside families who were of like faith. To my own amazement, the number one offense I dealt with was anger, with 361 offenses that were sent to the office as a result of some kind of expressed anger. The number two and three offenses, disobedience and disruptive behavior, didn’t even come close! Here is the complete tally:

- 1 – Anger – 361
- 2 – Disobedience – 254
- 3 – Talking and disruptive behavior – 247
- 4 – Disrespect – 73
- 5 - Clothing violations – 67
- 6 – Lying – 60
- 7 – Cheating – 43
- 8 – Food offenses (chewing gum, eating outside lunch room) – 37
- 9 – Misl. Offenses - 38
- 10 - Vulgarity of any sort – 31
- 11 – Stealing - 21

I suppose it shouldn’t surprise us to learn that the number one problem getting students into trouble is the same number one problem getting their parents into trouble of various sorts, but it isn’t the answer we want to hear. Truly the student is no greater than his teacher (Luke 6:40). No, anger is certainly not the number one *presenting* problem that

people seek help with, but it is definitely the number one *underlying* problem that has fueled whatever difficulty is bringing them to a Biblical counselor. Not unpredictably, our children are following in our footsteps and honing the art of anger into a way of life.

Many folks would be surprised to know that anger is very often the “silent killer” that sparks and justifies adultery, spins depression out of control or enables anxiety to escalate into full blown panic attacks. It is often at the core of marriage problems, interpersonal relationship problems, church problems, parenting problems, deviant teen behavior, and a host of sinful habits that provide an outlet for the tensions of anger. No other problem permeates throughout the ranks of Christians more insidiously or destructively than anger--and we haven't even begun to list the catastrophic effects anger has on people *physically*. Not only are our mental institutions filled with people who are harboring anger that has incrementally eaten away their ability to function in normal society, but our hospitals are filled as well with folks who are genuinely ill with problems triggered by the physiological changes that occur with chronic anger.

Perhaps it is easy for you to agree that anger is a great problem among the lost or even among church members sitting in our pews, but you can't imagine it would be as great a problem among the pastors, deacons, teachers or leaders of our churches. Sadly, I believe you would be very mistaken, for no other problem leads to the failure of ministries and ministry families more often than the problem of anger and no other problem affects those in ministry more cruelly than anger expressed by fellow laborers working along side of them. Yet more disturbing of all to me as a counselor is the realization that this problem is not getting better—rather, it appears that anger and its devastation is snowballing into something of epidemic proportion. So much so, in fact, that I believe it is the number one problem threatening to destroy not only families, churches and individuals, but more importantly, the influence of Bible believing Christians among the lost.

The character qualities we see listed in Paul's graphic description of the lost in Ephesians 2:2-3 is deeply troubling if we consider how prevalent these same qualities are becoming among those who profess to know Christ. You will recall that Paul spoke of people who chased after whatever pleased them, who indulged in whatever sinful thoughts or behavior that came naturally to them, and who “*were by nature the children of wrath.*” This was not a description of believers, but unbelievers. Believers were known, not by their anger, but by their forbearing love for one another.

Perhaps anger is permeating our homes and churches because we are living in the last days in which, as our Lord has said, perilous times shall come. There have always been evil, angry, cruel men upon the earth, but I wonder if there have ever been so many evil, angry and cruel men and women who profess to be Christians living upon the earth. Those spoken of in 2 Timothy 3:1-5 are not people who hated God—just people who loved pleasures *more* than God. They aren't people who abhorred godliness—just people who denied the fact that true godliness is produced, not by our human effort, but by the Holy Spirit in those who obey and follow Christ. It is not unusual to see unbelievers who are “lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to

parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;" —but it is a great tragedy when these things describe one who calls him or herself a child of God.

And this brings us to the question, what's causing it and how can we turn the tide, starting in our own lives? These questions are answered in the book, "*Why Am I So Angry?*" (See the section on this website entitled "Resources.") This book begins with the cause and cure for anger and ends with practical Bible lessons that help us conquer, not manage, anger. In it you will discover why anger is often unrecognized and why it doesn't always manifest itself in ways we commonly associate with anger, such as yelling and slamming doors. It is a useful book to teach a class, use in family devotions, study personally, or use as a tool in counseling or mentoring others. *Why Am I So Angry* was written for all Christians, not just our counseling cases, because anger is a human problem that affects us all, not a problem isolated to only a few.