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3 Nephi 12:22 and Matthew 5:22

Daniel K Judd

In its scriptural teachings about anger, the Restoration clarifies the conflict about the morality of anger. Christ declares in the Sermon on the Mount that "whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment" (KJV Matt. 5:22). In the Book of Mormon, however, Christ teaches that "whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of his judgment" (3 Ne. 12:22). "Without a cause" appears neither in the Book of Mormon sermon nor in most biblical translations, and Joseph Smith eliminated the phrase in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. Anger is generally selfish, and the Book of Mormon attributes contention to the devil. Some misunderstand Christ's emotion as he cleansed the temple, but Christ's motive is not the anger of the natural man. The Book of Mormon teaches us how the Savior can help us eliminate selfish anger from our lives, and it shows us that even "with a cause," our anger is most often destructive.

The Book of Mormon restores precious doctrines that have been lost from the Bible and clarifies others that have been distorted. An angel from the Lord taught the prophet Nephi that many parts of the gospel of Christ had been taken away as a means of deceiving the people and causing them to stumble. He said, "For behold, they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away. And all this have

they done that they might pervert the right ways of the Lord, that they might blind the eyes and harden the hearts of the children of men. Because of the many plain and precious things which have been taken out of the book [the Bible], which were plain unto the understanding of the children of men . . . an exceedingly great many do stumble, yea, insomuch that Satan hath great power over them" (1 Ne. 13:26–27, 29).

It was then revealed to Nephi that the major means of restoration of these plain and precious things would be through "other books" of scripture:

And after it [the Bible] had come forth unto them I beheld other books, which came forth by the power of the Lamb, from the Gentiles unto them, unto the convincing of the Gentiles and the remnant of the seed of my brethren, and also the Jews who were scattered upon all the face of the earth, that the records of the prophets and of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are true.

And the angel spake unto me, saying: These last records, which thou hast seen among the Gentiles, shall establish the truth of the first, which are of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, and shall make known the plain and precious things which have been taken away from them; and shall make known to all kindreds, tongues, and people, that the Lamb of God is the Son of the Eternal Father, and the Savior of the world; and that all men must come unto him, or they cannot be saved (1 Ne. 13:39–40).

While the primary purpose of the Book of Mormon is "the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ" (Title Page), its teachings also provide additional doctrinal clarity. Elder Neal A. Maxwell has stated, "In addition to the . . . confirmation of the Christocentricity of the universe, one sees numerous examples of elaboration and clarification of other basic and important truths in the Book of Mormon and the other books of scripture. . . . These precious and plain truths are not mere footnotes. Instead, they are bolstering and guiding principles that can do so much to keep us mortals walking steadily on the strait and narrow path and from stumbling needlessly."¹

The intent of this chapter is to discuss one of the clarifications provided by the Book of Mormon concerning a part of the human experience with which we are all familiar – the emotion of anger. Anger is one of humankind's most destructive and most common emotional disturbances, as well as one of the central charac-

teristics of most diagnosed emotional disorders.² The emotion of anger is at the center of many of the problems faced in marriages, families, and communities throughout the world. In the United States, for instance, since 1960 violent crime has increased 560 percent and divorce rates have quadrupled,³ which only mirrors what is happening in most countries and communities throughout the world. The expression of anger and the experience of contention, which were once condemned by society, are now becoming accepted and even encouraged by many as acceptable styles of expression and interaction. Elder Russell M. Nelson has stated:

My concern is that contention is becoming accepted as a way of life. From what we see and hear in the media, the classroom, and the workplace, all are now infected to some degree with contention. How easy it is, yet how wrong it is, to allow habits of contention to pervade matters of spiritual significance, because contention is forbidden by divine decree: "The Lord God hath commanded that men should not murder; that they should not lie; that they should not steal; that they should not take the name of the Lord their God in vain; that they should not envy; that they should not have malice; that *they should not contend one with another*" (2 Ne. 26:32; emphasis added).⁴

The Morality of an Emotion

The Book of Mormon plainly teaches that we will be judged according to the desires of our hearts and by our thoughts, words, and deeds (see Mosiah 4:30; Alma 12:14; 41:3). But the question as to whether there is a morality (right and wrong) to our specific emotions, as well as our thoughts and actions, has long been an area of controversy.

One of the most significant differences between the text of the Sermon on the Mount found in the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible and the similar account in the Book of Mormon concerns the Savior's teachings about anger. Note the textual differences in the following comparison:

Matt. 5:21-22 (emphasis added)

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:

But I say unto you, *That whosoever is angry with his brother WITHOUT A CAUSE shall be in danger of the judgment:* and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of hell fire.

3 Ne. 12:21-22 (emphasis added)

Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, and it is also written before you, that thou shalt not kill, and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment of God;

But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of his judgment. And whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; and whoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

From this comparison one can see that the major difference between the King James Version of the Bible and the Book of Mormon is that the latter does not contain the phrase "without a cause." The implication of this difference is significant, as the biblical translation appears to provide justification for our anger, and the Book of Mormon does not.

It is interesting to note that while the King James Version contains the phrase "without a cause," most biblical translations do not. One biblical scholar has written that while there is not a "unanimous consensus" among the early manuscripts, many of the early Christian theologians such as Jerome, Tertullian, and Origen mention that the phrase "without a cause" was not found in the oldest manuscripts familiar to them.⁵ Under inspiration, the Prophet Joseph Smith deleted the phrase "without a cause" in the Joseph Smith Translation:

Joseph Smith Translation (JST)

But I say unto you that *whosoever is angry with his brother, shall be in danger of his judgment;* and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, or Rabcha, shall be in danger of the council; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

Note the following translations of Matt. 5:22:

*Revised Standard Version (RSV)*⁶

But I say to you that every one *who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgement*; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, "You fool!" shall be liable to the hell of fire.

*New American Standard Bible (NASB)*⁷

But I say to you that *everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court*; and whoever shall say to his brother, "Raca," shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, "You fool," shall be guilty enough to go into the hell of fire.

*New International Version (NIV)*⁸

But I tell you that *anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment*. Again, anyone who says to his brother, "Raca," is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, "You fool!" will be in danger of the fire of hell.

*Revised English Bible (REB)*⁹

But what I tell you is this: *Anyone who nurses anger against his brother must be brought to justice*. Whoever calls his brother "good for nothing" deserves the sentence of the court; whoever calls him "fool" deserves hell-fire.

*New American Bible (NAB)*¹⁰

But I say to you, *whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment*, and whoever says to his brother, "Raca," will be answerable to the Sanhedrin, and whoever says, "You fool," will be liable to fiery Gehenna.

*New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)*¹¹

But I say to you that *if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment*; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, "You fool," You will be liable to the hell of fire.

Of these differing Bible translations, only the King James Version contains wording that justifies anger. Even the *Textus Receptus*, the Greek manuscript on which the KJV is based, does not have the Greek words for “without a cause.”¹² The KJV translators chose to follow a reading that is apparently a late scribal addition, not found in the earliest manuscripts or the writings of the earliest Christians.

In addition to the Savior’s counsel against anger in 3 Nephi 12:22, he also identifies the source of contention: “For verily, verily I say unto you, he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me, but is of the devil, who is the father of contention, and he stirreth up the hearts of men to contend with anger, one with another. Behold, this is not my doctrine, to stir up the hearts of men with anger, one against another; but this is my doctrine, that such things should be done away” (3 Ne. 11:29–30).

The Anger of the Lord

While it is clear that the Book of Mormon contains strong teachings against anger, how are we to understand the anger of moral men such as Moroni (Alma 59:13) or even the anger of God himself (Hel. 13:11)? One is led to ask, “Is there such an experience as righteous anger?” One might also question, “What of the incidences in the scriptures where the Savior was angry – aren’t we to follow his example?”

An analysis of the Bible shows that the Old Testament contains 375 instances in which God is described as being angry.¹³ The New Testament has one reference where the word anger is used in connection with Jesus Christ.

And he entered again into the synagogue; and there was a man there which had a withered hand. And they [the Pharisees] watched him, whether he would heal him on the sabbath day; that they might accuse him. And he saith unto the man which had the withered hand, Stand forth. And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace. And when he had looked round about on them with *anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts*, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other. And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him (Mark 3:1–6; emphasis added).¹⁴

From the above text, it is apparent that the Savior's anger was a selfless concern not only for the man with the withered hand but also for the hard-heartedness of the Pharisees. One of the things we can learn from this account is that the Savior's anger is fundamentally different than the anger of the natural man. Most everything the natural man does is calculated in some way to "serve the creature more than the Creator" (Rom. 1:25), while the Book of Mormon teaches us that everything the Savior does is designed for the welfare and happiness of others: "He doeth not *anything* save it be for the benefit of the world; for he loveth the world, even that he layeth down his own life that he may draw all men unto him. Wherefore, he commandeth none that they shall not partake of his salvation" (2 Ne. 26:24; emphasis added).

The Book of Mormon also teaches us that the Savior's anger is a representation of his love for us. Justice is as much a quality of God's love as mercy:

Yea, and we may see at the very time when he doth prosper his people, yea, in the increase of their fields, their flocks and their herds, and in gold, and in silver, and in all manner of precious things of every kind and art; sparing their lives, and delivering them out of the hands of their enemies; softening the hearts of their enemies that they should not declare wars against them; yea, and in fine, *doing all things for the welfare and happiness of his people*; yea, then is the time that they do harden their hearts, and do forget the Lord their God, and do trample under their feet the Holy One — yea, and this because of their ease, and their exceedingly great prosperity.

And thus we see that *except the Lord doth chasten his people* with many afflictions, yea, except he doth visit them with death and with terror, and with famine and with all manner of pestilence, they will not remember him (Hel. 12:2-3; emphasis added).

God wants nothing more than for us to remember him and keep his commandments, for in doing so we are in a covenant relationship with him and will have the blessings of heaven and earth. God's anger is much like his jealousy: both are expressions of his love as he seeks to assist us in becoming like him. God's jealousy of our worship of other gods isn't narcissistic in any way, but it is a plea that we remain free from the damning consequences of worshiping them. He declares: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under

the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: *for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments" (Ex. 20:4-6; emphasis added).

Anger is indeed a characteristic of God's perfection, but it is critical we come to a *correct* understanding of his selfless nature.

The Cleansing of the Temple

Just as some of the people described in the Book of Mormon sought "to excuse themselves in committing whoredoms, because of the things which were written" in the scriptures (see Jacob 2:23), others today use various events in the Savior's life as justification for their anger. It has been my experience, both professionally and ecclesiastically, that the most common justification Christians (including Latter-day Saints) give for their own selfish anger is the Savior's cleansing of the temple.

Most Bible scholars agree that the Savior cleansed the temple twice. The first cleansing is mentioned only by John; the second cleansing is described by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. As one reads the following accounts of the cleansings, one should notice that the words *anger* or *wrath* do not appear. Could it be possible that the Savior did what needed to be done without being angry as many typically suppose? Note the following temple cleansing accounts from the Gospels:

Matthew's Account

"And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves" (Matt. 21:12-13). Matthew then describes what the Savior did immediately following the cleansing of the temple: "And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; *and he healed them*" (Matt. 21:14; emphasis added). It is highly unlikely that the Savior could have healed the afflicted had he just been through an angry, violent experience.

Brigham Young taught, "Do not be angry. . . . Do not get so angry you cannot pray: do not allow yourselves to become so angry that you cannot feed an enemy — even your worst enemy, if an opportunity should present itself."¹⁵

Mark's Account

"And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves; And would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple. And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves" (Mark 11:15–17). Sometimes we entangle ourselves in a false dichotomy; we believe that our choice is between angrily doing what needs to be done and passively allowing to take place what shouldn't happen. We fail to recognize that we can confront, chastize, and reprove without being contentious.

Luke's Account

Luke's account is the most concise of the four. He simply writes, "And he went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold therein, and them that bought; Saying unto them, It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves" (Luke 19:45–46).

John's Account

"And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise" (John 2:13–16).

Although the Savior may very well have used physical force to cleanse the temple, it wasn't the selfish tirade that many of us

have experienced. Compare the Savior's actions in the temple with those of an individual described by President David O. McKay: "I learned through a letter of a condition which I think, so far as members of the Church are concerned, is absolutely inexcusable. A husband and wife quarreling—the husband demeaning himself to such an extent as to curse his wife, and *in a mad fit of anger overturning a table* spread with dishes—a creature in the form of a man harboring the nature of an animal! A man in such a mental state that the anger itself does him more harm than the condition which aroused his anger, and in reality, brothers and sisters, he suffers more from the vexation than he does from the acts that aroused that vexation."¹⁶ Such is not the personality of the Savior, nor should it be of any of those who follow him.

In the Lectures on Faith we learn that we must come to a "*correct* idea of [God's] character, perfections, and attributes" if we are to be able to truly exercise faith in him.¹⁷ Selfish anger is not and never has been an attribute of God. Perhaps the reason for emphasizing the word "*correct*" in the above statement is that the adversary is the master of counterfeit and will do his best work to deceive us. Justice can easily become distorted into selfish vengeance, just as mercy can become distorted into indulgence. Elder Boyd K. Packer warned, "A virtue when pressed to the extreme may turn into a vice."¹⁸

Justice Misinterpreted

The following story illustrates how God's justice is often interpreted as anger or vengeance. Several years ago a member of a ward of which I was the bishop asked if I would interview him for a temple recommend. I was pleased when he told me that he thought it was time he got his life in order by returning to the temple after an absence of several years. He also shared with me the fact that his niece was being married in the temple in three weeks and he would like to be there with her and her family. Among the questions I asked him was a query about tithing. He responded by explaining that because of some financial problems he had not been paying tithing but had managed to give a few dollars to a local charity. As we finished the interview I told him that I wouldn't be able to give him his recommend. I then explained that while I couldn't give him his recommend, I would be

happy to do all that I could to assist him to become worthy to receive one at a later time. My heart ached for him, but I felt that issuing him a temple recommend would only contribute to his problems. He became enraged and told me that I was a terrible bishop and that I was mean and insensitive and I was too young and immature to make such judgments.

After dealing with his numerous protestations, I suggested he return home, get his financial records together, and invite his wife to come with him to visit with me about their finances. I also volunteered the services of my able counselor who was adept with numbers and budgets. After calming down, he accepted my invitation and went home to do as I had suggested. Later on that night the four of us were able to make good progress toward preparing both him and his wife to re-enter the temple. What a joyous occasion it was several months later, when I was able to issue temple recommends to him and his wife. He missed his niece's wedding, but his faith in Christ was greatly increased.

This individual had initially interpreted my judgment of him as mean, insensitive, and punishing. On the other hand, if I had succumbed to his demands and issued him a recommend inappropriately, he would have interpreted my indulgence as mercy. It is so easy to misunderstand the doctrine of Christ and accept Satan's counterfeit in its place.

Notice the similarities between my story and the counsel the prophet Lehi gives to Laman, Lemuel, and others concerning how Nephi had treated them: "And ye have murmured because he hath been plain unto you. Ye say that he hath used sharpness; ye say that he hath been angry with you; but behold, his sharpness was the sharpness of the power of the word of God, which was in him; and *that which ye call anger was the truth*, according to that which is in God, which he could not restrain, manifesting boldly concerning your iniquities" (2 Ne. 1:26; emphasis added). This verse illustrates that it is possible for us to misinterpret the selfless *justice* of God as selfish anger and vengeance. This may be one of the reasons some people perceive Jehovah to be a merciless and vengeful ruler and not a kind and loving God, for "the guilty taketh the truth to be hard, for it cutteth them to the very center" (1 Ne. 16:2). Not once had I raised my voice, nor had I even felt any feelings of animosity toward my ward member. But he was initially convinced I was an unjust judge.

Another segment of scripture that is often taken out of context to serve as justification for anger is found in the Doctrine and Covenants wherein the Lord describes that at times leadership requires “reproving betimes with sharpness” (D&C 121:43). Note the verses which precede this portion of scripture: “No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by *persuasion*, by *long-suffering*, by *gentleness* and *meekness*, and by *love unfeigned*; by *kindness*, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile” (D&C 121:41–42; emphasis added). We are instructed to reprove another only “when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproved, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy” (D&C 121:43). The only context and grounding from which appropriate reproof can come is the genuine love and gentleness that these verses describe.¹⁹

In the New Testament, we read the Savior’s invitation to “come follow me” (Luke 18:22). If following the Savior means that we follow his example, shouldn’t we also seek to develop God-like anger? The answer to this question is both yes and no. *Yes*, because there is such a quality as selfless, righteous anger; and *no*, because anger can turn selfless to selfish in an instant and is incredibly easy to distort.

Philosophies of the World

The majority of psychotherapeutic philosophies concerning anger can be divided into two distinct camps — those who believe that anger is inevitable but in need of rational control and those who believe that anger should be experienced and expressed (vented). It is interesting to note that these two competing philosophies have a scriptural connection. When the apostle Paul was first in the city of Athens, awaiting the arrival of his missionary companions, he encountered two different groups of philosophers — the stoics and the epicureans (see Acts 17:18). The stoics believed that happiness came through the control of passion and indifference to external events; the epicureans believed that happiness was to be found in the experience of passion and sensation. The gospel of Jesus Christ has some things in common with these two philosophies — “Bridle all your passions, that ye may be filled

with love" (Alma 38:12) and "men are, that they might have joy" (2 Ne. 2:25)—but there are ever-present counterfeits of self-righteousness and lustful expression or consumption (see Morm. 9:28). C. Terry Warner, professor of philosophy at Brigham Young University, illustrates the first of these counterfeit philosophies in a story about a man he calls Phillip:

I [Phillip] was riding home on the train from work this one night, and I read a magazine article about being a loving parent. It inspired me. I made a resolution. After an orderly dinner, with no squabbling and no stern looks from me, I would gather our two little children around the fireplace and read them a story. I had gone too many years preoccupied with my work without tucking them in and kissing them and telling them I loved them. . . .

When I finally got home, I gathered up the paper on our doorstep and went through the door determined to be cheerful and kind. But dinner wasn't on the table. Marsha wasn't even getting it ready. . . . I should have known better than to expect she'd have things under control.

For a moment I felt I ought to help her out; I felt she must be in need of me. But then I just got bitter, thinking how many times she had done this to me. And here, on the night when I wanted things to be right, she did it again.

I felt like letting out a bellow. How could I ever be the kind of father I'm supposed to be when we were behind schedule and disorderly besides? It wasn't fair, and, most important, it wasn't right, either.

But I didn't let out a bellow. I never do. I did what I always do. I hung up my coat (so there would be at least one thing put away in the house) and went to work cleaning up the mess. First, I put the children in the tub—an extra touch that Marsha obviously hadn't thought about—and got them properly cleaned. Then I did the dishes and put away clothes and vacuumed everywhere.

Marsha said, "Please, stop, will you?" I'm sure she felt humiliated to have someone else go to work when she had obviously been wasting time. People who don't act responsibly are going to feel humiliated by people who do. That's a problem they create for themselves.

But I didn't say anything back. Maybe I should have given her "what for?" or not helped at all. But I wasn't going to stoop to her level. The dinner needed fixing and the house had to get cleaned up, and so I just kept working away. And I tried not to have an angry

expression or anything, even though it was hard. I'd like to think I'm above pouting and tantrums and that sort of thing.

It took till ten o'clock. When we went to bed, Marsha was still upset. After all these years I know her well enough to say no matter how hard I had worked, she still wouldn't have appreciated it. I didn't know she was going to be like that when I married her.²⁰

For the most part, Phillip was "doing" all the right things; he was in complete "control" of his anger. But as is evident from reading the story, Phillip's problems were not with his outward behavior. The Savior described individuals whose attitudes were similar to Phillip's: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed *appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness*. Even so ye also *outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity*" (Matt. 23:27-28; emphasis added). Phillip had deceived himself into believing that his actions were virtuous examples of righteousness, but nothing could be farther from the truth. It has been my experience that such self-righteous "control" of anger is one of the great deceptions of our day. Self-righteous Latter-day Saints are no better than the Pharisees of old; in fact, they have the greater condemnation because they know better (see D&C 82:3).

On the other hand, there are those who believe that the best way to deal with anger is to express or vent it. These individuals, whether they know it or not, are coming from a perspective initiated by the adversary and made famous by Sigmund Freud.²¹ The words of popular author and lecturer John Bradshaw are representative of this perspective: "The reason we have so much abuse in our families is that we do not allow anger in our families. If rage can come out, it can spend itself and be done with. . . . It's not the hatred expressed that's the problem; it's the hatred swallowed."²²

Bradshaw and others coming from this Freudian perspective would have "Phillip," the fellow in Professor Warner's story, give up the stoic notion of "control" and adopt a more epicurean perspective and express, or vent, his anger. Individuals who vent their anger in this way often express the idea that they are being honest about their feelings. The trouble with this justification is that it is possible to be honest about a lie. In other words, our "honesty" may be real but not genuine, like a counterfeit coin.

John the Revelator taught us that “if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves” (1 John 1:8). Our deception may be that we have come to believe our own lie, that our anger is justified and that it is actually caused by someone or something outside of our control. The Book of Mormon counters this philosophy by teaching that men and women are moral agents and are free “to act for themselves and *not to be acted upon*” by their environment (2 Ne. 2:26; emphasis added).

If neither the control nor expression of anger is the answer, what are we to do? Again, the Book of Mormon provides some meaningful answers. In 4 Nephi we read, “And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, *because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people*” (4 Ne. 1:15; emphasis added). From this verse we learn that it is the love of God that supplants selfish anger. But two questions quickly follow: What is “perfect love,” and how do we obtain it? The prophet Mormon, using the word *charity*, described love: “And charity *suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things*” (Moro. 7:45; emphasis added). From this description it appears that the love of God is more than an act or an emotion; it is a state of being. We can do loving things and even feel loving feelings and yet not be a loving person. However, we cannot be a loving person without doing loving things. Perhaps this is what Mormon was describing when he wrote, “For behold, a bitter fountain cannot bring forth good water; neither can a good fountain bring forth bitter water” (Moro. 7:11).

Phillip, in the example related earlier, was doing a lot of “loving” things like cleaning up the house and bathing the kids, but his heart wasn’t right, and his wife sensed it. He was a bitter fountain bringing forth bitter water. While there were things Phillip could have done that evening to correct what was happening, what he really needed was a power much greater than his own. C. S. Lewis wrote:

When I come to my evening prayers and try to reckon up the sins of the day, nine times out of ten the most obvious one is some sin against charity; I have sulked or snapped or sneered or snubbed or

stormed. And the excuse that immediately springs to my mind is that the provocation was so sudden and unexpected: I was caught off my guard, I had not time to collect myself. . . . Surely what a man does when he is taken off his guard is the best evidence for what sort of man he is. Surely what pops out before the man has time to put on a disguise is the truth. If there are rats in the cellar you are most likely to see them if you go in very suddenly. But the suddenness does not create the rats: it only prevents them from hiding. In the same way the suddenness of the provocation does not make me an ill-tempered man: it only shows me what an ill-tempered man I am. . . . Now that cellar is out of reach of my conscious will. I can to some extent control my acts: I have no direct control over my temperament. And if (as I said before) what we are matters even more than what we do—if, indeed, what we do matters chiefly as evidence of what we are—then it follows that the change which I most need to undergo is a change that my own direct, voluntary efforts cannot bring about. And this applies to my good actions too. How many of them were done for the right motive? . . . But I cannot, by direct moral effort, give myself new motives. After the first few steps in the Christian life we realise that everything which really needs to be done in our souls can be done only by God.²³

Even though there is much that we can do (and not do) to eliminate selfish anger from our lives, if we don't look to the Savior and his Atonement, we will fail. On the other hand, if we will have faith in Christ, repent of our sins, keep our covenants, and follow the promptings of the Holy Ghost, we will have a change of heart and be filled with the gift of love. Mormon wrote: "And the remission of sins bringeth meekness, and lowliness of heart; and because of meekness and lowliness of heart cometh the visitation of the Holy Ghost, which Comforter filleth with hope and perfect love, which love endureth by diligence unto prayer, until the end shall come, when all the saints shall dwell with God" (Moro. 8:26). Mormon also invites us to "pray unto the Father with all the energy of heart, that ye may be filled with this love, which he hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ" (Moro. 7:48).

The Lord asks us to repent of unrighteous feelings as well as ungodly thoughts and actions, and by doing so we are "born of God" (Mosiah 27:28). The prophet Nephi taught us of his experiences with anger in the following verses:

And why should I yield to sin, because of my flesh? Yea, why should I give way to temptations, that the evil one have place in my heart to destroy my peace and afflict my soul? Why am I *angry because of mine enemy*? Awake, my soul! No longer droop in sin. Rejoice, O my heart, and give place no more for the enemy of my soul. *Do not anger again because of mine enemies*. . . O Lord, *wilt thou redeem my soul*? Wilt thou deliver me out of the hands of mine enemies? Wilt thou make me that I may shake at the appearance of sin? . . . O Lord, I have trusted in thee, and *I will trust in thee forever. I will not put my trust in the arm of flesh* (2 Ne. 4:27–29, 31, 34; emphasis added).

Nephi came to understand that he could no longer use the sins of others as justification for his own. He also recognized that he couldn't be free of his own sins by trusting in himself nor in the theories of man, but that he must seek to have his anger replaced by love through the Atonement of Christ. Recently, a friend shared his story with me:

I had grown up in the Church, served a successful mission, and believed in the gospel. But somehow I never felt the happiness I had always sought. I married but soon found my unhappiness to go in cycles as I would make the effort to pray and be obedient but then would quit seeking divine help. Too many times I tried to rely on my own strength and knowledge to work out life's problems. I found myself during these times becoming intolerant of the mistakes of others and angry when my agenda was not met. At times I would attempt to control my family by silence and withholding affection. Eventually this pattern of living and contention led to physical confrontations with my wife. Sometimes I would become angry without warning to insignificant provocations. I would then feel awful and go through the repentance process and resolve to do better. But why did it not stick? Gradually the same patterns came back. My wife and I went to many counselors, seeking help with our marriage relationship. We were taught to communicate more effectively, we found out why we behaved in certain ways because of our gender, and we learned skills to cope with stress and outside influences. "Change your behavior," I was told time after time. But nothing seemed to change; our relationship became worse and ended in divorce. The pain was immense. I didn't understand what to do, or how to change.

Lucky for me, a loving bishop took me under his wing. I truly felt his love for me, which softened my heart to his counsel. He pointed me to the Atonement and helped me understand that only Jesus Christ could bring about the change I searched for. I believed

his words and began searching and learning about the Atonement. Most of my adult life I had believed in Christ, but I never believed that his promises were for me. As I began understanding what the Atonement was all about, my heart changed. I no longer had desires to choose evil but to choose good in my life. I found myself pouring out my soul to my God in prayer many times throughout the day, asking that my faith in Christ would increase and that my heart would be filled with love. I found that the more I sought after him, the more I could feel his love and assurance.

Day by day my faith increases. I have hope in those wonderful promises that I see all through the scriptures. I have found great peace because of the love I feel for my Father in Heaven. The best part of all of this is the desires I have to love those around me. There is peace in my home. My relationship with my children has reached new levels, and I look for opportunities to serve and help others.

Summary

Angry feelings are most often evidence of our inability to keep the greatest of all the commandments—to love God and to love our fellowman (see Matt. 22:36–40). Angry feelings also place us in jeopardy of the judgment of man as well as of God. While the Bible seemingly provides justification for angry feelings, the Book of Mormon does not. The Book of Mormon teaches us that selfish feelings of anger and acts of contention are tools of the adversary.

Selfless anger is an attribute of God's personality and is an expression of his love. But selfish anger is a characteristic of the natural man and an expression of his selfishness. The Book of Mormon teaches us the only way we can appropriately address our anger is through the Atonement of Christ. King Benjamin taught: "For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father" (Mosiah 3:19).

How very blessed we are to have the Book of Mormon to clarify and support the Bible in "the confounding of false doc-

trines and laying down of contentions, and establishing peace" (2 Ne. 3:12).

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Notes

1. Neal A. Maxwell, *Plain and Precious Things* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1983), 40.
2. Burton C. Kelly, "Let All . . . Anger . . . Be Put Away from You: The Case against Anger" (paper presented at the meeting of the Association of Mormon Counselors and Psychotherapists, in Salt Lake City, Utah, 28 September 1978).
3. William J. Bennett, "Quantifying America's Decline," *Wall Street Journal*, 15 March 1993.
4. Russell M. Nelson, "The Canker of Contention," *Ensign*, May 1989, 68.
5. John W. Welch, *The Sermon at The Temple and the Sermon on The Mount* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1990), 162.
6. *Revised Standard Version*.
7. *New American Standard Bible*, Lockman Foundation, 1960.
8. *New International Version*, International Bible Society, 1973.
9. *Revised English Version*, Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press, 1989.
10. *The New American Bible*, the Catholic Biblical Association of America, New York, 1970.
11. *The New Revised Standard Version Bible*, National Council of the Churches of Christ, 1989.
12. Richard D. Draper, Brigham Young University, a personal communication.

13. A computer search of the Old Testament revealed that the Hebrew word for anger ('*ap*') appears 455 times, out of which 375 times it refers to the anger of the Lord. There are 42 instances of the Lord's anger in the Book of Mormon (150 total instances of a form of the word "anger").
14. The Greek word for anger in this text is *orgē*, which indicates a more settled or abiding condition of mind. The other most common Greek word for anger is *thumós*, which indicates a more agitated condition or outburst. *Thumós* is generally translated in English as "wrath."
15. Brigham Young, sermon given September 13, 1857. *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1854-86), 5:228.
16. David O. McKay, *Conference Report*, April 1958, 5; emphasis added.
17. *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 3.4.
18. Boyd K. Packer, "Covenants," *Ensign*, November 1990, 85.
19. Note the definition of the word sharpness: "keen edge or fine point." Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: S. Converse, 1828). Instead of an angry outburst, perhaps sharpness could mean to be specific concerning the communication of our differences.
20. C. Terry Warner, "Bonds of Anguish, Bonds of Love," unpublished manuscript, 1992, 3:1-2.
21. See Moses 5:18-38; and Carol Tavris, *Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion* (New York: Simon and Schuster), 38-42, 128-60.
22. John Bradshaw, "Our Families, Ourselves," *Lear's Magazine*, November-December 1988, 75-76.
23. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 164-65.