

## SABBATH THOUGHT 2022-07-09—THE ENEMY OF AGAPE LOVE

Agape love is a very powerful motive. It is thoughts and intents of the heart<sup>1</sup> to do good unto others<sup>2</sup>. Anger, however, is a very dominating emotion that produces a desire to cause harm to others—it is lust for destruction and vengeance. But isn't there such a thing as "righteous anger"? The Bible has many examples of God's anger, so surely there must be a time and place for God's people to be angry. Take for example this scripture:

EPHESIANS 4:26 **When you become angry, do not sin.** Do not let the sun go down on your anger;

At first blush this appears to tell us how to be angry without sinning by assuaging our anger before the end of the day. Is it even possible to be angry and turn it off at the end of the day? How long does anger stay with us when someone offends us and refuses to repent or reconcile? How long is it before we put away anger when someone gossips about us? Is anger okay if it has a time limit? Notice some scriptures that address anger:

COLOSSIANS 3:8 But now, **you should also put off all these things: wrath, indignation, malice, blasphemy, and foul language from your mouth.**

PSALMS 37:8 **Cease from anger, and forsake wrath;** do not fret yourself, it leads only to evil.

GALATIANS 5:19-20 Now **the works of the flesh are** manifest, which are *these*: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, 20 Idolatry, witchcraft, **hatred**, strifes, jealousies, indignations, contentions, divisions, sects,

MATTHEW 5:22 But I say to you, **everyone who is angry with his brother without cause shall be subject to judgment.** Now *you have heard it said*, 'Whoever shall say to his brother, "Raca," shall be subject to *the judgment of the council.*' But *I say to you*, whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be subject to the fire of Gehenna.

PROVERBS 19:11 The discretion of **a man puts off his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression.**

JAMES 1:20 Because **man's wrath does not work out God's righteousness.**

ROMANS 12:19 Beloved, **do not avenge yourselves; rather, leave this to God's wrath;** for it is written, " 'Vengeance is Mine! I will recompense,' says *the Lord.*"

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 4:12.

<sup>2</sup> Galatians 6:10.

The word *leave* in Romans 12:19 is translated from two words: *give (didomi) place (topos)*. But *topos* can also mean *scabbard*. A scabbard is the place a sword is kept so that it does no harm. Figuratively, we must sheath our anger just as a sword is put into a scabbard so that it will not cause injury. We are to put away anger—only God has a right to anger and vengeance. I am not even certain what righteous anger is other than we use it to justify holding onto anger. In reality, **no scripture condones anger!**

So what was Paul talking about in Ephesians 4:26? Put it into context with the surrounding verses where Paul addressed relationships between brethren, reminding us that we were once like the gentiles—vain and alienated from God because of the hardness of our own hearts:

EPHESIANS 4:17-27, 30-32 So then, I declare and testify this in *the* Lord that you are no longer to walk even as the rest of *the* Gentiles are walking, in *the* vanity of their minds, 18 Having *their* understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their hearts. 19 They have cast off all feelings [*of love toward others*], and have given themselves up to licentiousness, to work every uncleanness with insatiable desire. 20 But you have not so learned Christ; 21 If indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, according to *the* truth in Jesus: 22 That concerning your former conduct, you **put off the old man, which is corrupt according to deceitful lusts**; 23 And that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind; 24 And that you **put on the new man**, which according to God is created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. 25 Therefore, let each one put away lies and speak the truth with his neighbor because **we are members of one another**. 26 *When* you become angry, do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger; 27 Neither give place to the devil. ... 30 And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God by which you have been sealed for *the* day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness, and indignation, and wrath, and clamor, and evil speaking be removed from you, together with all malice; 32 And be kind and tenderhearted toward one another, forgiving one another, even as God has also in Christ forgiven you.

Paul said we are to walk in “righteousness and holiness of the truth.” The truth is that there is no place for anger in the Body of Christ. We must put away anger toward our brethren because it is something from our “old man”—an unconverted mind and heart. Anger is an opening for Satan because it grieves the Holy Spirit. What does it mean to grieve the Holy Spirit? It means to cause heavy sorrow. How can we cause sorrow to the Holy Spirit, since it is the power of God? By suppressing the agape love and the fruits it produces in us. Anger prevents God’s power working in us to nurture agape love. In other words, anger is the enemy of agape love. But verse 26 above is a quote from a Psalm:

**PSALMS 4:4 Tremble [with anger], and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.** Selah.

The word tremble means to quiver with extreme emotion, especially anger. Paul quoted this scripture but said instead “be angry, and sin not”. The Psalmist said that we are to “commune with your own heart upon your bed.” Commune means to utter or declare. In essence, this says to declare the anger that is in our hearts in our prayers and put our trust in God. Anger is contrary to agape love. As we pray about our thoughts and feelings, we are to “be still”; that is, wait. Wait for what? For God. When angry, we are agitated in our minds and bodies. We must replace the anger with forbearance, peace, quiet, and calm within our hearts by trusting God to help. In doing so, we are letting God perfect His agape love in us!

Is there a timetable for being angry? Yes, but it is not what most think. Ephesians 4:26 does not expect us to entirely eliminate anger by “sundown.” Instead, we are to begin dealing with it as soon as possible in prayer to God. When we have feelings of anger, commune with God and ask for His help and peace to replace the anger. Prayer is a sacrifice<sup>3</sup> on the altar before God’s throne; therefore, pray that “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts” (Philippians 4:7). Anger that festers long will lead to hatred and hatred leads to a root of bitterness<sup>4</sup>.

God doesn’t want our hearts filled with anger but, rather, with His peace. He promises that peace will rule in our hearts<sup>5</sup> if we resist the anger that is the enemy of agape love. Jesus Christ dealt with the anger and hatred that the world threw at Him in His prayer: “**Father, forgive them**, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34). Mankind laid upon Him the worst of their angry hearts—and He forgave them. How was it even possible for Jesus Christ to forgive the entire world? He did not allow anger to limit the Holy Spirit in Him. God’s agape love and forgiveness produces a peace that the world does not comprehend—and He promises to give us that same peace:

JOHN 14:27 Peace I leave with you; **My peace I give to you**; not as the world gives do I give *it* to you. **Let not your heart be troubled**, nor let it fear.

Putting aside anger is challenging; it requires time in prayer with God. But there is more to it than that. We must also “**pursue** righteousness, faith, love *and* peace with those who are calling on the Lord out of a pure heart.” (Timothy 2:22). *Pursue* is the Greek word *dioko* and it is a very strange word. It means to *pursue* after something good or to *persecute* others for destruction. We have a choice: persecute others in our angry thoughts or pursue agape love with others to their good. Either way, we are *dioko*-ing.

The fact is that God forbears and suffers long with **us**: “Or do **you** despise the riches of His [God’s] kindness and forbearance and long-suffering, not knowing that the graciousness of God leads you to repentance?” The reality is that none of us have any

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<sup>3</sup> Psalms 141:2; Hebrews 13:15.

<sup>4</sup> Hebrews 12:15.

<sup>5</sup> Colossians 3:15.

**right** to be angry with **anyone** (“righteous anger”). The only one who does is Jesus Christ but He is so full of agape love that He asked His Father to forgive the whole world—including us. If we continue in anger in this life, do we expect it to just disappear when we are in the Kingdom? If we are angry with one of the brethren, how will we be able to agape-love them for ALL ETERNITY? Does anyone actually believe we can put off reconciling until Christ returns? There is a warning for anyone who believes as such:

1 JOHN 3:15 **Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life dwelling within him.**

Do we hate someone and refuse to reconcile? Have we been angry with someone for years? If we fail to reconcile in this life, then there is only “a terrifying expectation of inevitable judgment and of fierce fire, which will devour the adversaries of God.” (Hebrews 10:27). Anger is like the sword in a scabbard we wear on our belt. Even though we are sometimes tempted to draw that sword, we must pursue agape love to keep it sheathed and refrain from using it. Anger is something that we should not have toward God’s people or the world. We must put away anger. Always. The whole of Colossians chapter 3 is a message of dealing with anger but notice these verses in particular:

COLOSSIANS 3:13-14 **Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another** if anyone has a complaint against another; even **as Christ forgave you, so also you should forgive.** 14 And **above all these things put on love,** which is *the* bond of perfection.

The phrase at the end of Colossians 3:13 is worded very similarly to the new commandment pronounced by Jesus Christ: “in the same way that I have loved you, that *is how* you are to love one another” (John 13:34). We are commanded to follow the example of Jesus Christ in both agape love, forgiving others, and putting away anger.

Everyone gets angry on occasion. The “sons of thunder” (James and John) knew anger. They once wanted to call down fire on a city<sup>6</sup>. In response, Jesus said “the Son of man did not come to destroy men’s lives, **but to save them**”<sup>7</sup>. Just as Christ forgave us for our own salvation, putting away anger toward others allows God to work to save them—AND us. In the kingdom of God, there will only be those in the fullness of agape love.

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

Steven Greene

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<sup>6</sup> Luke 9:51-56.

<sup>7</sup> Luke 9:56.