

RIGHTEOUS ANGER

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Love is a very powerful emotion. It produces thoughts and desires to do good to others. However, anger is also a very dominating emotion and can likewise motivate what we think and do. The difference is agape love focuses outward, seeking the wellbeing of others whereas anger yields a desire to hurt others. Anger is the foundation for revenge and destruction. Anger is selfish, only wanting to satisfy the lust for position, power, wealth, gain, and advantage.

But what about righteous anger? The Bible has many examples of God's anger so surely there is a time and place for God's people to show proper anger. Take for example this scripture:

EPHESIANS 4:2 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. But is that what the scripture means? What about situations that stir up anger and cannot be resolved in a day? There are many circumstances that can plague us for much more than a day. If someone maligns our reputation at work or robs our home, the impact can continue for a long time. So how does the above scripture apply in those situations? Take a look at some scriptures dealing with 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**: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil.

GALATIANS 5:19-20 Now the **works of the flesh are** manifest, which are *these*: ... **hatred**, strifes, jealousies, **indignations**, contentions ...

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 deferreth 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 [literally = a scabbard] to God's wrath;** for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine! I will recompense,' says *the* Lord.

The word *leave* in Romans 12:19 literally means a *scabbard*. A scabbard is the place a sword is kept so that it does no harm. Figuratively, we are to sheath our anger just as a sword is put into a scabbard so that it will not cause injury to others. All of the above scriptures tell us to eliminate anger. They say nothing about so-called "righteous anger". In fact, that phrase is nowhere to be found in the Bible.

So what was Paul talking about? Let us put Ephesians 4:26 into context with the preceding 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 4:11-12, 15-26 And He gave some as apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers **12 For the perfecting of the saints,** for *the* work of *the* ministry, for *the* edifying of the body of Christ; ... 15 But holding the truth in love, may in all things grow up into Him Who is the Head, *even* Christ 16 From Whom all the body, fitly framed and compacted together by *that which* every joint supplies, according to *its* inner working in *the* measure of each individual part, is **making the increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.** 17 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, *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;**

Paul said we are to put off the "old man" and walk in righteousness and holiness. We are all of the body of Christ and "member of one another" and should not be angry with **one another.** Paul is saying that we must put away anger toward our brethren because anger toward one of God's elect is from an unconverted mind and heart. His conclusion in verse 26 was a quote from Psalm 4:4:

PSALMS 4:4-5 **[Tremble], and sin not: commune with your own heart** upon your bed, and be still. Selah. 5 **Offer the sacrifices of righteousness,** and put your trust in the LORD.

The word *tremble* means "to quiver with extreme emotion, especially anger or fear". Paul quoted this scripture but said "**when you become angry**, do not sin". The Psalmist said that we are to "commune with your own heart upon your bed". Here, *commune* means to *utter* or *declare*. He is, in essence, saying to "declare the anger (or fear) that is in your hearts through the sacrifices of prayer, putting your trust in God". Anger produces adrenaline, which affects our heart and mind, resulting in emotions contrary to agape love. As we pray about our thoughts and feelings, we are to "be still"; that is, to wait. What for what? For God. When angry, we are agitated in our minds and bodies. We must take hold of the anger and establish forbearance, peace, quiet, and calm within our hearts, trusting in God to protect and help us. In doing so, we are letting God perfect His agape love in us!

Ephesians 4:26 and Psalms 4:4 both are telling us that when we have feelings of anger, commune with God and ask for peace and comfort to replace the anger. Prayer is a sacrifice (Psalms 141:2; Hebrews 13:15); therefore, pray that "**the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,** shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7). This is why, just 5 verses later, Paul said:

EPHESIANS 4:31 **Let all bitterness, and indignation, and wrath,** and clamor, and evil speaking **be removed from you,** together **with all malice.**

Moreover, when Paul said "do not let the sun go down on your anger," Paul was telling us to deal with our anger in a timely fashion so it does not fester day after day and lead to a root of bitterness. Paul was a man who dealt with the anger of his earlier years and scripture shows that he later learned to replace anger with agape love.

God doesn't want our hearts filled with anger but, rather, to have His peace in us. He promises that peace will rule in our hearts if we allow God's agape love to work in us. Jesus Christ overcame all of the hatred and lies that the world threw at Him. He experienced far worse than any of us ever has. Even so, He promised to leave us with **His** peace:

JOHN 14:27 Peace I [*Jesus*] 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.

We are not only to put aside anger toward our brethren, but we are to "**pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace with those who are calling on the Lord out of a pure heart.**" (Timothy 2:22). God's children are precious to Him—how, then, can we justify being angry toward any of our brethren?

The whole of chapter 3 of Colossians is a beautiful and encouraging message of putting away anger. All anger leads to unrighteousness because it is a selfish and destructive emotion. Instead, God wants us to have His peace in the depths of our hearts and minds.

COLOSSIANS 3:13-15 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*. 15 And **let the peace of God rule in your hearts**, to which you were called into one body, and be thankful.

There is no question that everyone feels angry on occasion. Of all people, Paul knew anger at times as did the “sons of thunder” (James and John) who wanted to call down fire on a city because an entire town rejected Jesus (Luke 9:51-56). In response, Jesus said “the Son of man did not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save *them*” (v. 56). This, too, is an example that we should also put aside anger toward the people of this world. The world has been blinded because it is not yet time for God to call them. Many of this world are truly angry with God. Others claim there is no God and so despise the very idea that they literally hate any and all believers. Still, God’s people must not respond in kind.

The fact is that God forbears with us and suffers long with us. In Romans 2:4 it says, “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?” So why would we be angry at others if they offend us? Tribulation is coming upon this world and our vision should be to look beyond the trials of this life to the Kingdom of God. There was a time when God’s wrath was upon us but He has shown us great mercy because we are now His children. In the Kingdom, the saints will help point many to God and eternal life because God loves the whole world and desires that all come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

In fact, there is only one case in which anger is justified—when we find sin in ourselves! Being angry at our own sins **should** produce anger within us because we have failed to obey and please God!

2 CORINTHIANS 7:11 For see how this very thing—**your personal sorrow** before God—brought about such earnestness in you! And, **what a defense, and what indignation, and fear, and vehement desire, and zeal, and vengeance!** In every way you have proved yourselves to be pure in the matter.

Repentance is the result of our disappointment and even anger at our sins but it also reestablishes peace from God. Like the aftermath of a trial, repentance restores peace in our minds. Notice: “Now truly, no chastisement for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterwards **it yields the peaceable fruits of righteousness** to those who have been exercised by it.” (Hebrews 12:11).

Anger is like sword that is kept in a scabbard worn on our belt. Even though we sometimes are tempted to draw that sword, we must have the self-control 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 strive to put away anger and we do that by sheathing or covering our anger with God's Spirit of agape love and peace.