

RIGHTEOUS ANGER

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 4:26 “**Be angry**, and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on **your wrath**,

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 that tell us how to deal with anger:

COLOSSIANS 3:8 But now you yourselves are to **put off all these: anger, wrath, malice**, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.

PSALMS 37:8 **Cease from anger, and forsake wrath**; Do not fret—*it only causes harm*.

GALATIANS 5:19-20 Now the **works of the flesh are** evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, **hatred**, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of **wrath**, selfish ambitions, **dissensions**, heresies,

MATTHEW 5:22 “But I say to you that **whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment**. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.

PROVERBS 19:11 The discretion of a man makes him **slow to anger**, and his glory is to **overlook a transgression**.

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

ROMANS 12:19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* **give place [literally = a scabbard] to wrath**; for it is written, “Vengeance *is* Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.

The word *place* 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 allowing 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 Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 **for the [perfecting] of the saints** for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ... 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, **causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.** 17 This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, **because of the [hardness] of their heart;** 19 who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. 20 But you have not so learned Christ, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: 22 **that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man** which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, 23 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and that you **put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.** 25 Therefore, putting away lying, “*Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,*” for we are members of one another. 26 **“Be angry, and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath,**

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 “members 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 do not sin.** Meditate within your heart on 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 **“Be angry, and do not sin”**. The Psalmist said that we are to “meditate within your heart on your bed.” Here, *meditate* 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**, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7). This is why Paul said:

EPHESIANS 4:31 **Let all bitterness, wrath, anger**, clamor, and evil speaking **be put away from you, [along] with all malice.**

Moreover, when Paul said “do not let the sun go down on **your wrath**,” 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 Christ*] leave with you, **My peace I give to you**; not as the world gives do I give to you. **Let not your heart be troubled**, neither let it be afraid.

We are not only to put aside anger toward our brethren, but we are to “**pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call 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 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also [must do.] 14 But 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 also you were called in 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] goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering**, not knowing that the goodness 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 observe this very thing, that **you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication!** In all *things* you proved yourselves to be clear in this 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 no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward **it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness** to those who have been trained 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.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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