

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Agape love is a very powerful motive. It is thoughts and intents of the heart<sup>1</sup> to do good works unto others<sup>2</sup>. Anger, however, is also a very dominating emotion but it produces a desire to cause harm to others—it is lust for destruction and vengeance. But is there not 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 “**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. 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 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 [evil]*.

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 [*Jesus Christ*] 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 for **the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.**

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

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

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

The word *give place* in Romans 12:19 is translated from *didomi* and *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 many claim 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. He reminds 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 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 blindness of their heart; 19 who, being past feeling [*of love toward others*], 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, 27 nor give place to the devil. ... 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

Paul said we are to walk in “true righteousness and holiness.” The truth is that there is no place for anger in the Body of Christ. We must put away anger toward 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? 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 is a quote from a Psalm:

[KJV] 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 do not sin.” 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

through 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, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 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<sup>6</sup> 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 do.” (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 sins of the 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 [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.

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, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” (2 Tim. 2:22). *Pursue* is the Greek word *dioko* and it is a very strange word. It means to *pursue* after something OR to *persecute* others for destruction. We have a choice: persecute others through our angry thoughts or pursue agape love toward others for 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] goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” (Rom. 2:4). The reality is that none of us have any right to be angry with anyone (“righteous anger”). The only one who does is Jesus Christ because He gave His life for sin. But He is so full of agape love that He asked

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<sup>3</sup> Ps. 141:2; Heb. 13:15.

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

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

<sup>6</sup> Jas. 4:7.

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 our 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 such:

**1 JOHN 3:15 Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in 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 certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries [*of God*].” (Heb. 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, pursue agape love by keeping it sheathed and refraining 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 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.**

The phrase at the end of Colossians 3:13 is worded very similarly to the new commandment pronounced by Jesus Christ: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” (John 13:34). We are commanded to follow the example of Jesus Christ in 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>7</sup>. In response, Jesus said “**the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them.**” (Luke 9:56). 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 made into the fullness of agape love.

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

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<sup>7</sup> Luke 9:51-56.