
Righteous and Unrighteous Anger

Ephesians 4:25-32⁶

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“You wouldn't like me when I'm angry”. Most of us will recognize that quote. It's the Hulk! You know the guy that turns green and grows into a large monster like human being when he's mad. Do you also remember that for Dr. Bruce Banner his rage was something he didn't want. It was a force, inflicted upon him, from the outside, and try as he might he could not stop it when someone, or something, pushed the wrong buttons. He is helpless against such a powerful emotion. Is that the way you think of anger?

How about the road rage incidents we see in the news. One soulless vehicle cuts off another soulless vehicle and the souls encased in the vehicles get very upset with one another to the point that the seemingly insignificant slight of cutting someone off to get in line, or switching lanes without “enough” room has become reason enough to jump out of the car with fists flying, or worse yet, some sort of weapon. Here we see anger from the inside. Yes, they are affected by the circumstances of life, but circumstances have merely revealed what was already in their hearts. Sinful anger rises up from a heart that doesn't see the world God's way. Is that how you look at anger?

How about the man who wakes at three in the morning to the sound of breaking of glass in the basement. His wife and children are asleep. As he comes down the stairs in his favorite sports teams robe he sees a dark figure walk across the room and he freezes. Just then the figure notices him and instead of running back the way it came in it makes a charge for the steps...and the rooms the mans family sleeps in. He is instantly angry and without thought runs toward the intruder to stop him from getting to the rest of the family. Here we see anger again from the inside, it's not sinful, but a response given by God to protect. Is that the way you see anger?

Well today we want to look at two versions of anger from our text here in Ephesians. We want to see what righteous anger looks like and we want to see what unrighteous anger looks like. My hope is that as well delve into this often misunderstood emotion we will realign our thoughts with what God says in his word. You never know, you might find out that you should like me when I'm angry.

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Look down with me at verse twenty-five of Ephesians four. God's Word says this...

25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

Just briefly, remember, we are talking about these commands in Ephesians, yes, as they directly deal with our hearts and our lives, but we mustn't forget that we are dealing with these commands as they effect us together as a family. We are, after all, "members one of another". Let's move now to one of our main sections for this morning.

A look at Righteous Anger

We want to start our discussion today with three things you should know about righteous anger. Please look down with me at verses twenty-six and twenty-seven. God's Word says this...

26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, **27** and give no opportunity to the devil.

It's commanded

"Be angry and do not sin"

First, it's commanded. Did you hear that? Let me read it to you one more time. He said, "Be angry and do not sin". That is a command. Does that surprise you? God just commanded you to be angry. Many times we read this verse and we only see the "do not sin" as a command. But there is something about having the Holy Spirit residing in your body that requires you to be angry; commands you to be angry without sinning. That's certainly not what our culture portrays Christ like. I dare say that the long haired, smiling, milk toast, effeminate, Jesus that we see in most popular representations of our Savior would not even be able to conjure up a little irritation much less anger. But here we see that he has commanded us to be so. And in case you're thinking that just means the men sitting around the room, you are mistaken. There are things in the world that should make us angry - interesting that he doesn't give us a list of them. Let's try to make this as practical as we can and just think about a few things.

- Are you angry that we in this country have allowed abortion to go on to the tune of 50 million murdered little babies since the year I was born?
- Are you angry that the so called church in the United States has largely given up its mandate to care for widows and orphans to the state?
- Are you angry that people who hate God use His name to gain favor with others?
- Are you angry that our children are abused by the very people God put over them to protect them and love them?
- Are you angry that TV preachers preach a hopeless false gospel to millions every day that slowly rocks them into a comfortable hellbound sleep?

You, should be angry and yet, not sin. Your anger should be right in line with what God is angry about. If your anger isn't in line with what he says, you're disobeying the second part of the verse by sinning. I know most of you that have been here at Clearcreek long enough have learned that you should never say "always and never" as it relates to another person. And I'm tempted to do it right now, so I'll just say it this way. If your anger has been aroused and you can't point to specific scripture that supports God's anger for the same thing... you're nearly always sinning.

It's Short-lived

The second thing we see about anger in these verses is that it's short-lived. We read at the end of twenty-six...

"do not let the sun go down on your anger"

Now listen, I know we hear this verse often when it comes to our own sinful anger and we give ourselves a few hours before bed to get things right before God and whoever we have sinned against, but let's remember the context we're in here. God is giving us a look at what righteous anger is, not a "how-to" on your sinful anger. The point of the verse is not to say that you have until dark. The point is to say that you shouldn't let it drag on and on. Righteous anger does not dwell, but trusts. Let me give you an example.

Remember when Jesus entered the temple and flipped the tables? Let me read it to you. Matthew 21:12ff

¹²And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. ¹³He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."

¹⁴And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them.

Side note: Whatever it was that they thought when Jesus was overturning tables, what it did not do to those around him was drive them away. His anger actually brought people to Him! How crazy is that. Does yours do that?

Notice though what we don't see. We don't see Jesus ensconce himself at the door of the temple, just waiting for the people to get back to what they were doing, only to flip their tables again. He doesn't even assign a disciple to door duty. He presumably, after healing some folks, just leaves. How can this be? We don't usually see Jesus get angry like this, surely there is more to be done. Well, no, actually, there is not. Jesus turns the entire situation over to his father. We don't see him speaking poorly about the people in the temple at a later time in the book. We don't see him going back over the situation in his head in order to work out the perfect way he should have flipped over the table or rearranging the words he used in his head for maximum impact should something like that ever come up again. He does none of these things. Why, because he trusts that his father really is sovereign over all the earth and he doesn't have to dwell on it. Anger is powerful and explosive. It cannot be maintained over a long period of time or it will

turn from being righteous to unrighteous. We'll see what that looks like when we get to verse 31.

It's Protective

“and give no opportunity to the devil”

Lastly we see the result of righteous anger. It protects. Read over the end of the verse again with me. “and give no opportunity to the devil” Who is it protecting? Hmm. This verse is not just about you as an individual. It is about us a community of God living together in Christ. Who will righteous anger be protecting? It will be protecting us! It will be protecting your brothers and sister in Christ. Your righteous anger will not allow the Devil a foothold in this community because it is not his.

Have you ever watched a show on the military Special Forces? When they go in to a building or some close quarters structure, they typically have one guy walking backwards. The guy in front of him faces forward and holds onto his collar and pulls him along while he watches whatever might be coming up from behind. Looking for whatever might have opportunity to sneak up behind them. That guy walking backwards is you! At any given moment our anger should be protecting one another from the Devil. Is your anger protecting your brothers and sisters that they might grow in grace as they live out their life in Christ here at Clearcreek Chapel? Righteous does just that.

So the next time you feel the heat coming from your toes to your forehead and you think to yourself, “I’m about to explode!” ask yourself these things.

1. Is what I am about to say and/or do free of sin?
2. Is this something that has been stirring in my heart for a long time?
3. Who or what will this protect?

If you cannot answer these questions, or the answers to these questions show that your heart is full of unrighteous anger, stop. Repent of your sin and trust God for what he is doing in the situation.

God's word goes on in verses twenty-eight and nine...

28 Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

We've commented on these in past weeks and I would encourage you to look up those sermons on sermon audio.com. Let's move on to our next set of verses that deal with unrighteous anger. Verse thirty says this...

A Look at Unrighteous Anger

30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

We are told here not to grieve the Holy Spirit. When our anger is unrighteous it not only affects our relationship with the community of God here on earth, but it affects our relationship with God himself. And look at what he says next, remember what we have been saying again and again as we go through Ephesians, we should be about turning who we are, into how we live, Look! God is reminding you who you are! He flat says, don't grieve the spirit "by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." You are not beholden to every strong emotion that comes over you, you are sealed in Christ! There is coming a day when you will finally and forever be redeemed from all that corrupts! This is great news. Now what should that cause you to do. Verse thirty-one is going to tell us.

Let's look at it. God's word says this...

31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

So how do we not grieve the Holy Spirit, here in verse thirty-one we have a list of sinful behaviors that should be "put away". They all relate in one way or another to anger. Let's take a closer look at what we must put away.

1. Bitterness; This is the opposite of what we learned about righteous anger when we said it was short-lived. This is the type of anger that sits in your heart over a long period of time and simmers. Ever have one of those people with whom you just don't ever seem to get along with and when your mind takes a rest it floats back to this person and rehearses all of the hurts they have inflicted upon you. This is bitterness. It's the slow burn, or simmering anger that lasts and lasts and lasts. Put it away!
2. Wrath; We've all seen the person who refuses to control their anger. They are like The Hulk we talked about earlier, only not as entertaining. And they tend to turn red in the face, not green. They yell and scream thinking they have made their point and surely gotten their way in whatever the situation may be. When in fact they are like a city without walls. Always feeling safe in their rage, not knowing they are exposed. Put it away!
3. Anger; Here we have regular old anger. Anger that could have been used for the glory of God, but was instead used to glorify self. Full of sin, long lasting, unprotecting anger. Just the opposite of righteous anger. Put it away!
4. Clamor; When we see clamor in scripture it is used to show a lot of noise, activity and dissatisfaction. These are the squeaky wheels of the angry. These are the folks who in their dissatisfactions with the present situation stir up trouble; always seeking to bring others into the fray. Put it away!

5. Slander; Here we have anger that is focused making others look bad through your words. It's anger with lying. This is the person who will stop at nothing to get back at someone else for a perceived wrong. Drag their name through the mud to make a point or win a contest. How full is the internet of people doing just this? Do you read and soak it in, or do you turn it off and go elsewhere in order to stop the flow of slander that is ever oozing out of people who are too cowardly to talk to others face to face. Put it away!
6. Malice; These are the people who set their hearts to destroy others. It is not enough to go after them with their words, they will now go after them physically. This is not just your run of the mill anger this is a heart full of hatred for others. Let me warn you, if this is you and you sit in church and call yourself a Christian you have every reason to question whether you are. Put it away!

Is this you? Do these things characterize your life? Are these us? Do they, God forbid, characterize our church? Put these away, church. Put away bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice for they have no place amongst the people of God. Put them away because they give the devil opportunity in our community and in your own life. Put 'em away because they grieve the Holy Spirit. Put them away!

And put on verse thirty-two...

32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

As you strive to put away all that we saw above remember your savior. He has been the ultimate example of a kind, tender, forgiving heart; absent all of the unrighteous anger you and I struggle with and full of love for His Father and His people.

Reflect and Respond

If you are here today and you do not know Christ as your Savior. You have never bowed you heart to the King of the Universe. I would say to you today that you currently stand under the awful wrath and righteous anger of the very God we have talked about today. You stand on the side of his enemies and no nothing of his kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness. However, no one but he knows if today is the day that he has turned the gaze of his heart upon you. I ask you to come and repent of your unrighteous anger before God and believe in the work of the Savior on the cross. Believe that he has come as the innocent son of God to pay for your sin on the cross. Believe that he was buried and raised from the grave three days later to defeat death and hell. Believe that because of those things, you will never taste the righteous anger of almighty God, but only and always his kindness, tenderness, and forgiveness now and throughout eternity.

Be angry and do not sin. Put away your unrighteous anger, that we might turn who we are into how we live.