

Sermon #1 on Anger

I have purposed to spend a couple of Sundays talking about the Biblical subject of anger and wrath. And the reason for this is because anger is something that is a prominent experience in every one of our lives and it is also a subject of a great deal of biblical revelation. And so it is imperative for us to properly and rightly understand this issue of anger: how it is to be expressed, whether it is right or wrong, and how to manage it in our lives (and of course, in the lives of our children as well.) So what I want to do today is to begin a study on this subject, and God willing, we will continue it as the weeks unfold.

Now before we can ever talk about the issue of anger, any time I ever talk to anyone about the subject of anger, immediately the question comes up -- what about righteous anger? -- so that's where we're going to start today. So open your Bibles please to Ephesians chapter four and verse twenty-six. Now it is a fact that there is a righteous anger, and we're going to investigate that today, and perhaps the pivotal passage that deals with this subject of righteous anger is this passage in Ephesians four verse 26. And before we can proceed with the subject of sinful anger and how to deal with it, we need to talk about that form of anger that is not sinful. And this passage, probably more than any other in the Scripture, addresses that subject.

So Ephesians chapter four, verses twenty-six and twenty-seven will be the subject of our study together this morning. It says, " Be ye angry, and

sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil." Now it's important for us to understand that when God created us, He created us with an intellect, the ability to think; and He created us with a will, the ability to choose; but He also created us with emotions, we often call these our feelings. And we think of our emotions in such terms as love or anger or joy or hatred or fear or peace or jealousy or loyalty. These are all emotions, or emotional feelings, that rise up within every one of us and are common to all of us. Now sometimes we think that some of these emotions ought to be repressed or done away with -- things like fear and anger and hatred. On the other hand, we think there are other emotions that we ought to reinforce and cultivate -- like love and joy and peace. But I would suggest to you that this is a false dichotomy. One English puritan has said, "the emotions are not to be eradicated like poisonous plants, but rather they are to be cultivated like wild ones." And I want to assert right at the outset that all of our emotions that we experience are good emotions, that is, that they are intrinsically good. But they are emotions that need to be directed. Emotions are not something that we are to be fearful of or that we are to be ashamed of. God has given to us our emotions, the full spectrum of our emotions, and these emotions are not sinful in and of themselves, but anyone of them can become sinful when they are improperly handled and when they are misdirected. One man has said, "Emotions were given to man as wind to fill the sail of his soul." And so our mind is what we think with, and our will is what we choose with, but very often times it is our emotions that provide us with that drive and that motivation to do the things that we do. And so as Christians, we do not embrace the doctrine of the Stoics, which say that emotion is evil and bad and it is to be suppressed and

repressed. But rather we adopt the Biblical view, which says yes, we honor our emotions, we accept our emotions, but we also recognize that our emotions need to be controlled and they need to be directed. And so the principle that I want to bring out today is not that anger is evil but rather that anger must be properly exercised and controlled. Anger is a good emotion if it is properly directed. And that's the big if. And so what we want to do is look at our passage this morning and recognize what it has to say about the subject of anger.

So in the first place this morning let's consider together **the commandment to be angry**. Now in verse twenty-six it says, "Be ye angry." Now that is a present imperative in the original, and it means to go on being constantly angry. You would have never thought that you'd run across such a statement in the Scripture. The word here for anger is the Greek word orge and it is the word for wrath or indignation. It carries the concept of an anger that is a deep-seated sentiment. In other words, this is not a superficial or transient anger. But rather this is a deep-seated sentiment, and there is in it an element of awareness and deliberation. You see, this is not a blind flash of anger that we're being called to here. What we're being called to here is a deep-seated sentiment that has an element of awareness and deliberation attached to it, which is guided by reason, and that results in a settled habit of mind. All of those concepts are wrapped up in this word orge. It is not a flash of temper or a sudden emotional outburst. But rather it is a deep-seated reasoned anger that is a constant attitude of the mind. Now why does God command us here through the apostle Paul to be angry? People say, well isn't anger sin? For example when you look at verse thirty one of this same passage it says, "Let all bitterness, and wrath,

and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice." People look at such passages as that and they say: anger must be sin because we're told to put it away from us. What is important for us to understand is that anger, like every other emotion, can be sinful, but it is not necessarily sinful. One of the things we know about God, is that God cannot sin, and yet the Bible tells us that God is angry and God gets angry. In fact I was stunned, as I went through this study and looked up every reference in the Scripture to anger and to wrath and to fury, that the Bible talks a lot more about the anger of God than it ever talks about the love of God. Time and time again we are told that God is angry and that God is full of fury and God is full of wrath. For example in John chapter three, and in verse thirty-six it says, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." It's this same word orge. And so God exercises anger or wrath. In Romans chapter one and verse eighteen it says, "For the wrath of God (or the anger of God) is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness." And so we see in the Scriptures that God is angry. Furthermore we see that Jesus Christ himself exhibits anger. In Mark chapter three in verse five, there was a man who had a withered man, and the Pharisees were watching Jesus to see if he'd heal on the Sabbath day or not. And he asked them, "Is it appropriate to do evil or do good on the Sabbath day?" And he could see the hardness of heart and the resistance they had towards him. And it says in Mark 3:5, "And when he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as

the other." It is the same word that is used here. And so Christ himself was angry. We read in Revelation 6: 16-17, "And (the people) said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?" Once again, the same word. So clearly God expresses anger, Christ expresses anger. And the point is this: anger is not always sin. In fact, not to be angry may be sin in some cases, because we are commanded to be angry. And if we are not angry when we're supposed to be angry, we are disobeying God and we are engaging in sin. The motive of our anger, and the object of our anger, are the crucial determinants as to whether our anger is sinful, or whether it is not. John Trapp the old commentator, had this to say. He said, "He that would be angry and not sin, let him be angry at nothing but sin." In other words, whenever you see the anger of God, it is anger at sin. God is not angry at anything else. And when we are commanded to be angry we are to be angry at the same things God is angry with. The Bible tells us in Ephesians 5:1 to be therefore imitators of God, as dear children. And if anger is one of the moral characteristics of God, then it ought to be one of ours as well. But we need to be careful that we imitate God in his anger and that our anger is directed at sin and motivated by outrage at sin and not something else.

Now what we want to do then is to look at several examples of godly, biblical anger. 2 Corinthians 7:11 Paul is talking about the repentance of the Corinthians with reference to the sins that had crept into the church. And he said with reference to these sins that these people had genuinely repented of them. And the manifestation of their repentance is recorded for is in 2 Corinthians 7:11. he says, "For behold this selfsame thing, that ye

sorrowed after a godly sort." In other words when you saw your sin, which I wrote to you about in 1 Corinthians, he said you were sorry for these sins and that sorrow was a godly sorrow, and we know it was godly sorrow, because it was marked by certain characteristics. It says, "what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation -- in other words these people were angry at the fact that they had sinned, and they were sore displeased and very upset over the fact that sin had crept into the assembly, and that they themselves had given into it. All of these emotions that were rising up in them towards their sin was a manifestation of the genuineness of their repentance, and one of the things that manifested their repentance was that they were angry at their sin and what they had done.

Another example is that of King Saul in I Samuel 11:6. What we have here is that the Ammonites had come to the people of Jabesh and said: you guys come out and let us poke out your right eyes and we won't destroy your city and you'll be our servants and captives. Sweet terms of surrender, are they not? Well, the men of Jabesh said: let's see if there's any body to deliver us, and if there's not, we'll give in because there's no way we can win against this army, and it's better to lose an eye than to lose our life. So they sent messengers to Saul. And it says in I Samuel 11:6, "And the Spirit of God (notice: the Spirit of God) came upon Saul when he heard those tidings, and his anger was kindled greatly." And the passage ascribes the anger of Saul directly to the influence of the Holy Spirit. And what was he angry about? He was angry about the fact that these Ammonites had come and that they were going to poke out the right eyes of some Israelites or kill

them because they wanted to take their city and their land, unjustly of course, and in a wicked way.

And then we see in Nehemiah 5 and verse 6 the children of Israel had fallen into difficult financial straits. They had mortgaged their lands and their houses and even their children because there was a great drought and those who were wealthy had loaned them money and had taken their possessions in repayment of the loans, and now these people were in this situation where they could not redeem their children, they had no more money for food, and Nehemiah was very angry at the taking advantage of the poor by the rich that was taking place there. And in Nehemiah 5:6 Nehemiah says, "And I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words." And so he goes on and he metes out justice against the rich who were oppressing the poor in this situation. His anger moved him to rectify the situation. We could multiply examples. There are dozens and dozens, and there's no need to do so.

But the point is this: anger is both proper and necessary in the face of sin. One man has said this, "there is no sadder token of an utterly destitute moral condition than not being able to be angry with sin and with sinners." In other words, if a person cannot get angry about sin, what does that say about their moral state? It says that they're morally bankrupt. Sin has become a matter of indifference to them. And if they're not angry at sin, it is a manifestation of their destitute moral condition.

Now it is important for us to notice that in every situation where it says that God became angry or that Jesus became angry or that people became angry with reference to sin, that they took action with reference to attempting to resolve and deal with that sin. And it is a mark of righteous

anger that it is never static. It always issues forth an action. In every case, these people who had righteous anger did something as a result of their anger, and what they did was that they made an effort to resolve and to put away the sin that was the cause of the anger. And this is going to be an important principle that we're going to deal with, as we go on in dealing with anger, is that true biblical anger always attacks, not innocent people, but it always attacks the sin and deals sin of the problem. And so often times our anger is directed at people instead of at the problem. And it is imperative for us to use our anger and channel our anger in such a way that the source and the cause of the anger is legitimately and biblically dealt with.

And that brings us to our second major point. Having considered together the command to be angry, in the second place we want to consider **the caution concerning anger**. Now our text says, "Be ye angry" -- that's the command. Here's the caution, "and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil" -- that's the caution. Now righteous anger has its place, as we have seen, and it is even something that is required of us. It is a duty. But, and here's the caution, righteous anger may easily pass over into sinful anger. This is because all of our emotions and all of our drives are subject to excesses and to overindulgence and to perversions. Righteous wrath can easily become polluted with sinful elements of carnal anger. This is what must be avoided. It is fine to have righteous anger towards crime in your community. But it is not right then for that anger to move you over into vigilante action where you take your gun and you go out and you clean up the crooks. You see, a righteous anger towards crime can easily bleed over into a sinful anger of vengeance. There

are many times when people provoke us to anger by their sin and we have righteous anger, but it can easily fall over into sinful anger when we retaliate with a physical attack. Righteous anger towards someone who has sinned against us is appropriate, but it must not bleed over into a vicious verbal attack upon that person. And you see, time and time again we may start out with righteous anger, but because of our lack of a godly management that anger and control of that anger, we wind up falling into sin with reference to that anger.

Now there are several biblical illustrations of this; I'll just allude to them. The first is in Numbers 20:1-13. This is the classic story about Moses striking the rock in which people had an attitude of unbelief towards God and murmuring against God. Moses was angry about that, and rightly so. It was a just anger, but what did he do? You remember, he smote the rock with the rod when God had told him to speak to it. And here's an example where he was angry, but because of his righteous anger, he fell into a sinful act, he struck the rock.

And then we have Jonah. Here's a man who is angry and rightly so at the wickedness of the Ninevites. But you remember that when God forgave them, what happened? He was angry, and God said to him, "Jonah, doest thou well to be angry with me forgiving these people?" And you see Jonah's righteous anger at their wickedness then became a sinful anger in his unhappiness at God forgiving them because he wanted to see God's justice pass upon them, and not his mercy and grace.

And then there's the story of the elder son in the story of the Prodigal Son. The prodigal son goes out and wastes his father's living, consumes it in excesses and in harlotry and in wickedness. Should the elder son be

angry about that? Sure. The younger son did wickedly. But then when the younger son came back and the father killed the fatted calf for him, it says of the elder son that he was angry and wouldn't come in. He says, "I've been faithful to you and you've never thrown a party for me. This wretch comes home and you throw a party for him." And you see, here's an example of a righteous rejection of his brother's lifestyle, that bled over into an unrighteous anger over his brother's restoration.

And we could once again multiply examples. You see that it is so easy for us to have a righteous anger, and then fall over into and have attached to it sinful excesses. That's what we've got to guard against. Now the passage goes on to say, "Let not the sun go down on your wrath." Now the word here for wrath is an altogether different word than the word for anger. It is the word *parorgismos*. It is a different word than is used in the first part of the verse and it is speaking of a different kind of anger. The word means to exasperate, to irritate, and to provoke to sudden violent anger. This word speaks of an angry outburst of which threatens to become lasting bitterness. This kind of anger breeds resentment, a grudge, an angry mood, an animosity. It is the kind of anger that very often occurs between a husband and a wife in their arguments. It is the kind of anger that produces personal attacks against people, where you begin to viciously tear upon them, calling the names and what not. It's the kind of anger that arises when there's a discourtesy in traffic and suddenly you're going to get 'em. That's the wrath that's spoken of here. This kind of wrath is not to be tolerated or allowed to carry on. It is the wrath that must be resolved that very same day that it occurs. Righteous anger ought to endure as long as the condition provoking it endures. It says be ye angry, it's a present imperative, be ye

continuously angry, as long as the cause of the anger exists. But flares of temper and angry outbursts, those need to be resolved as soon as possible. You should certainly never let a day conclude without resolving that. Once again, Paul is calling us here to recognize the distinction between righteous anger and sinful anger. Righteous anger is a rational, deep-seated sentiment that is a result of awareness and deliberation born out of right motives, and directed towards a proper object. But sinful anger is an irrational flair of emotion that is an unthinking reaction to an irritating circumstance which if allowed to persist results in bitterness and animosity. And that's what he's talking about when he's talking about wrath. Let not the sun go down upon that. And so the phrase, "Let not the sun go down on your wrath" is not telling us that the anger that we are commanded to have may only last a day. The phrase, "let not the sun go down upon your wrath," does not even refer to that kind of anger. It is referring to this other kind of anger, the irrational flare of emotion, that is the unthinking reaction to an irritating situation. When it says let not the sun go down upon your wrath it is saying that if righteous anger becomes corrupted with a spirit of evil rage then we must put away that corrupting evil rage that is attached to the righteous anger that day. So what he is saying is this: Be ye angry, yet in this anger of yours, allow no sinful element to enter in and to mingle with it. There is that which may cleave to a righteous anger, the irritation, the exasperation, and the embitterment, which must be dismissed that day, so that the righteous anger may go on without this impure element clinging to it. He is not to let righteous anger only last until sundown. Unless that which has provoked righteous anger has changed, our anger has no business changing or put away at sundown. Our righteous anger must go on as long as the cause of

the anger goes on. What I must put away by sundown is any ungodly or unrighteous elements in that anger such as verbal abuse, physical violence, bitterness, or a spirit of revenge. So we must have a strong fixed ongoing displeasure against sin and an antagonism towards sin that is rational and deliberate. We must not allow ourselves to become so bitterly provoked by it and so exasperated by it that we develop a spirit of animosity or revenge or alienation towards sinful people or a physical violence towards them. The reason is stated in the next verse where it says, "neither give place to the devil." The devil has no originality of his own. He must take that which belongs to God, righteous anger, and pervert it into sinful anger. That's how you give place to the devil with reference to anger. It is when you allow your righteous anger to then have attached to it these elements of sinful anger. The Devil will take elements of godly anger and pervert it into a sinful expression. And if we do not guard against the perversion of that which is good, then we are giving the devil room to operate. You see the Devil has no original ideas. Anger was God's idea. The devil has to take anger, like he has to take sexual desire, like he has to take the desire for food and the desire for material possessions, and he's got to pervert it. And so there are no evil emotions. There are only good emotions that are twisted to become evil, which we have to guard against. But this righteous anger you see is a controlled, deliberate, intelligent, understood, rational anger. It is not something that brings forth yelling and outbursts, and violence, and animosity, and revenge and alienation. It is an anger that seeks to resolve the sin, not destroy the sinner.

Now I have some closing counsel regarding this issue of anger. What I want to do is answer two questions. The first question is this: How do I

know if I have sinful anger mixed in with my righteous anger? What are some of the signs of that? How do I know if I have sinful anger mixed with righteous anger? Well the answer is this: basically when I lose compassion towards those who are in sin. You see, when I am angry at sin and then I strike out at sinners with words or actions, seeking to destroy them or to push them out of my life or to get revenge against them, rather than using the anger as a motive to pursue a godly solution, bring them to repentance, and draw them closer to me, then I know that I have sinful anger mixed in with my righteous anger. When I cannot like Christ weep over Jerusalem, then I no longer have righteous anger towards the sins of Jerusalem. When I become self-righteous with those that I'm angry at and start to feel superior to them, then I know that sinful elements are mixed in. When I desire their judgment more than their salvation, then I know that sinful anger has entered in. When I have no heart to pray for them, then I know that sinful anger has entered in. When I refuse to forgive them after they repent, then I know that sinful anger has entered in. And it is this kind of sinful anger that Ephesians 4:31 is talking about when it says, " Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and yelling, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." So how do I know when sinful elements are mixed in with righteous anger? By the way in which I deal with the problem. When I'm dealing with the problem in such a way as to bring a resolution to the sin, and when I'm dealing with it in such a way as to restore the relationship, then I know that I'm dealing in righteous anger. But when I'm dealing in such a way as to desire these people's harm and work towards these people's destruction with my words, verbally

abusing them, or with my body, physically abusing them, or with my attitudes, mentally inwardly abusing them in my mind (though it might not come out of my mouth), then I know that my righteous anger has become sin and I must repent of those sinful elements and separate them out from the righteous indignation which is just and directed towards sin.

The second question I want to answer is this: How do I know if I do not have righteous anger? Now the Bible says be ye angry, and if you don't have it you're in sin, because it's a command of God and when we don't obey commands of God we're sinning. How do I know when I don't have righteous anger? Well, when I cease to be offended at sin, I know that I do not have righteous anger. When I tolerate sin in my life and the lives of others, when I stop fighting against sin, when I stop trying to do anything to stop it, when I just shrug my shoulders and have an "oh well" type of mentality towards the sins in my own life and the lives of others and the life of the culture. What happens is that we're exposed to sin so much that eventually we get callused towards it and eventually we stop caring about it. And that's why we're commanded here to be angry. Don't stop being offended at sin. In Jeremiah 6:13-15 it says, "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the LORD." It was a mark of the spiritual bankruptcy of Israel that not only could they not be angry at sin, they couldn't even be embarrassed by it. In Psalm 97:10 it says, "Ye that love the LORD, hate evil." In other words if you love the Lord, then you'd better be hating the things God hates, and God hates evil, and we'd better be hating it too. The point is, you cannot hate something and be

complacent towards it at the same time. It says of the Gentiles in Ephesians 4:19 that they were past feeling. That is, they no longer had any sensitivity or capacity for emotional reaction against the grossest excesses of sin.

Everything was just taken in stride. And you see the trouble is that in our media, and across our news, and in our newspapers we get so much murder and adultery and fornication and theft and garbage that eventually it's just one more sin and we become callused to the evil of sin. And I fear that in our day and age Christians are not angry enough. Frankie Schaeffer wrote a book several years ago entitled *A Time for Anger*. And I really believe that if we lose our anger for sin, it's not going to be very long before we start embracing it and justifying it. People who are morally indifferent, who cannot feel any sense of indignation and horror against sin, are people who have failed to maintain righteous anger against sin. Christ was angry when he observed manifestations of sins, and what measures our likeness to him is that we manifest the same reaction as He does when confronted by the same things. He was angry at the hardness of their hearts, and we need to be angry at the hardness of our own hearts most of all. And then, we need to be angry at the sins of our culture. That anger should not move us then to viciously lash out against our culture, but rather to try to resolve those things that are the causes. We need to bring the Gospel to bear upon people's hearts, we need to work for the restraint of evil in God honoring and legitimate fashions. Not taking our machine guns down to the gay pride parade and mowing them down. You see, that's where righteous anger descends into sinful anger.

Well, may the Lord help us then to understand these perspectives. God willing, week after next we'll deal further with this subject of anger, and its resolution when it becomes sinful. Let us pray.

Father we thank you that you are a God that is angry with the wicked every day. For Father if you were not, you would not be a holy God, and would be a wicked God yourself. Father what a terror that would be to us. Father we pray that we would have that sober, considered, thoughtful, rational, godly anger -- that offense at that which offends you. Lord I pray that we might never allow it to be contaminated with evil expressions of anger, with those flashes of wrath and irrational violence, with an ungodly response to troubling situations. Lord one of the fruits of the Spirit is self-control, and we pray Father that you would grant to us that particular fruit with reference to this particular issue. Help us to have self-control in our anger, that it might be the anger that glorifies you and honors you. Father I pray that you might give us grace then to respond angrily in a biblical fashion to things that deserve to be objects of anger. Preserve us Father from our own excesses, you know how easily we fall into them and how the wrath of man never work the righteousness of God, though the wrath of God does work the righteousness of God. Help us to put away all human anger. May we have only and exclusively that divine anger that reflects your blessed holiness and spotless purity. We ask it in Jesus name. Amen