

Sermon: Anger and Grace Ephesians 4:26-27, 31-32

We are continuing our study in Ephesians 4.
And in this section Paul gets practical with us about what it looks like for us to put on the new self.

And before we read our text, I want us to notice the perspective Paul has on why Christians think and behave the way they do.

You see, in Paul's mind, our striving to be like Christ is not out of a motivation to attain some secure status with God.

Instead, we strive to be like Christ because we have a new status.

We are in Christ- united to him.

And because of this, we strive to be like Christ in the context of a secure relationship.

Our relationship with God is not conditional upon our performance.

If we have faith in Christ, we are secure.

Hear the words of Jesus in John 5:24:

John 5:24 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

You see that? It's past tense: **has passed from death to life.**

It's a done deal. A new status.

And so, as Christians we strive to be like Christ because of this new, secure status.

And because of this new status, we can now do the deep work of dealing with our sin at its roots.

We no longer have to pretend.

We can finally drop the mask and be honest with ourselves and others about our sin.

Because our status with God is secure.

And this is important because today we are going to deal with the sin of anger.

And anger is a sin not easily hidden

I want to read to you the from chapter 2 of David Powlison's book "Good and Angry."

Because the chapter is so good, I will read it in its entirety.

Chapter 2 is entitled: Do *You* Have a Serious Problem with Anger?

Yes.

That's it. That's the chapter.

Powlison makes his point in dramatic fashion: We all have a serious problem with anger.

And while we may not all struggle with anger to the same degree or in the same way, we all struggle with anger in some form or fashion on a frequent basis.

And so Paul's words to us today are for every one of us.

So let us read God's word in Ephesians 4:26-27 & 31-32.

Paul writes:

Ephesians 4:26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, **27** and give no opportunity to the devil.

31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. **32** Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

This is God's word.

The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever.

[Pray.]

All of us has a serious anger problem.

Clearly some have worse struggles with anger than others, but we all have a serious problem.

So what does your anger look like? What forms does it take?

Do you have explosive anger that is impossible to hide?

Are you violent and are people afraid of you?

Or do you express your anger through ridicule or negativity?

Do you have settled resentment and animosity that prefers to fight a cold war?

Do you withdraw and withhold praise and affection?

Or do you simply take comfort in privately destroying people in your own mind through judgment?

All of us has a serious anger problem yet our anger manifests itself in different ways.

The book of proverbs says a great deal about anger. Here are some choice selections:

14:17 A man of quick temper acts foolishly, and a man of evil devices is hated.

29:11 A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back.

14:29 Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.

17:27 Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.

29:22 A man of wrath stirs up strife, and one given to anger causes much transgression.

And a personal favorite:

15:1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

These are wise words from Proverbs.

Anger is a real life issue for us all.

We are all both **victims** and **agents** of anger.

Just the other day, I was driving with the windows down and I made a mild infraction in driving.

And instead of the other person just overlooking my mistake, they honked their horn loud and long to make sure I knew how wrong I was.

Yet just a day earlier, I was driving behind a distracted driver who kept so much distance between them and the car in front of them that we both didn't make through the traffic light.

And I just held up my hands so they could see them and asked: "Where did you learn to drive?"

Now these are relatively mild and amusing outbursts of anger.

Yet anger is no laughing matter.

Anger destroys. That is the purpose of anger. To destroy. To pulverize.

And so often our anger, which was originally designed to be a good thing, is used for evil purposes.

Most of the time, our anger is focused on people or things that upset or inconvenience us.

We get angry when we feel our little kingdoms are being attacked or threatened.

And so Paul tells us:

Ephesians 4:26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, **27** and give no opportunity to the devil.

You have a sermon outline and the first point there is:

I. Be Angry and Do Not Sin

It is quite clear from scripture that not all anger is sin. Our Lord Christ himself was angry on more than a few occasions.

In Mark 3, Jesus entered a synagogue

"**1** and a man was there with a withered hand. **2** And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. **3** And he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come here." **4** And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. **5** And he looked around at them with **anger**, grieved at their hardness of heart..."

Jesus was angry with their hardness of heart because they showed **no compassion** for this man with a withered hand.

His anger was righteous indignation.

He didn't hate the Pharisees themselves, but their hardness of heart.

And his hatred showed itself in anger.

Again in Luke 13, Jesus was teaching in a Synagogue on the Sabbath.

11 And ... there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. **12** ... Jesus saw her, ... called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your disability."

13 And he laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God.

14 But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, "There are six days in which work ought to be done. Come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day."

15 Then the Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it? **16** And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham

whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?"

These are just two occasions out of many that could be cited where our Lord himself was angry.

But God the Father also shows himself to be capable of anger.

In Exodus 22:24, The Lord tells us that his wrath will burn and he will put to death any **who mistreat sojourners, widows or fatherless children**.

The Lord hates injustice and he hates most that sort of injustice that exploits the weak.

But the anger of the Lord burns hottest against the rebellion and idolatrous worship that we all are naturally guilty of.

This is clear from many passages in the Old Testament and also in the New.

In Romans 1:18, Paul writes:

Romans 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

Our God has many attributes and one of them is anger. He hates sin because sin is everything that is opposed to his character.

So, if God the Father and God the Son have anger against sin, then it is clear that it is possible for us to experience righteous indignation as well.

But before we give ourselves a pass on our anger, we have to keep in mind that our anger is righteous only inasmuch as it aligns with God's heart and holiness.

The more holy we become, the angrier we will be with sin.

And this anger with sin must begin with the sin we see in ourselves.

We should not be more passionate about removing the speck that is in our brothers eye than we are about removing the log that is in our own.

By nature we are all given to having judgmental spirits.

And so we ought to be incredibly careful with what we consider to be righteous indignation in ourselves.

And yet we are called to hate sin.

And there is a time for anger.

God gave us the capacity for anger for redemptive purposes.

Consider if you were in a situation where another adult was threatening to violently mistreat your child.

Wouldn't your anger be aroused?

Wouldn't you spring into action like a lion and put an end to it?

God gave us the capacity for anger to be used for righteous ends.

And this is why in verse 26, Paul does not prohibit anger.

He only confines it to right motives and ends.

So, in v. 26 he says: Be angry and do not sin.

So, let me ask you: do you hate sin?
Do you hate the sin in yourself?
And do you hate the sins in the world that are destroying people, defacing the image of God and leading to misery?

You should.

Every Christian should hate materialism, divorce, war, child abuse, addiction, racism, prejudice, abortion, kidnapping, sex-trafficking, environmental destruction, governmental corruption, exploitation of the poor and apathy against injustice.

All of these sins ought to make us angry when we see them. They ought to grieve us.

Yet most of the time, our hatred for these sins is selective.

Some of these sins anger us, but not others.

Yet the closer we come to the holiness of God the more we will hate all sin, beginning with the sin we see in ourselves.

Is this true of you?

Paul tells us the be angry and do not sin.

But then he goes on to tell us...

II. Do Not Let the Sun Go Down on Your Anger

And this is the second point in our outline.

When Paul tells us not to "let the sun go down on our anger," he is commanding us not to let our anger settle. He wants us to deal with it in ourselves.

We have to sort it out.

We cannot carry any anger from the previous day into the next.

And the reason for this is because a Christian is not supposed to be motivated by anger.

Our attitudes we are to be characterized by is set out in the fruit of the spirit:

Love, Joy Peace, Patience, Kindness,
Goodness, Faithfulness, Self-Controlled, Gentleness.
An angry spirit is not to dominate us or characterize us.
And so we must all quickly deal with our anger.

Now keep in mind, most of our anger stems from some sort of personal inconvenience or feeling slighted or disrespected.

And in these cases we really should not be angry at all. Yet when we find ourselves sinfully rising into an attitude of anger, we must deal with it quickly.

Don't let your anger fester.

Don't let it transform into a settled resentment.

Deal with it. Rid yourself of it.

Because an angry Christian is a terrible recommendation for the truth of the Gospel.

So, do you deal directly with your anger?

Or do you let it cool into a hard form of bitterness?

Do you have settled resentment in your heart that you are carrying around from days before- or even from years before?

Resentment is just another form of anger and that too needs to be dealt with before the sun sets.

Now the reason Paul wants us to deal straightaway with our anger is because an angry person is a prime target for the work of the devil.

And this leads us to our next point:

III. Give No Opportunity to the Devil

Whenever we are angry, and particularly in an unrighteous manner, we are prime targets for the devil. I imagine it being sort of like an alarm bell going off in a fire station.

Yet instead of a fire station, it is an alarm bell for demonic influence.

Our anger alerts the devil that it is his time to act.

And this is because when we are enraged or incited to anger, we lose control of ourselves.

And in those moments, the devil is all too willing to steer us into hateful words and actions.

The devil is like a vulture capitalist loaded with cash.

He waiting for an economic downturn – in the form of our rage - so that he can invest and further his kingdom.

Our outbursts of anger or even our settled bitterness gives him a chance to invest.

He will not miss his opportunity to capitalize on our lack of self-control.

And we need to be aware that he is prowling around to do just that.

Peter tells us in 1 Peter 5:8:

8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Our anger, be it large or small gives him a place to work.

The word here translated **opportunity** literally means place and it refers to a physical space.

And so the picture here is like that of setting up a **small workstation for the devil** in the home of your heart.

It's not big.

It doesn't dominate your heart- not yet at least.

Yet from that workstation, satan wants to rule the entire home of your heart.

And Paul is explicit: **give no place to the devil.**

Rid yourself of your anger.

Be ruthless about it.

For if you don't, the devil will have room to work and he only wants to expand his kingdom and destroy you and those around you.

So, do you have unresolved anger or resentment?

If you do, you can be sure that the devil is working in your life.

You've given him a place.

Take away his workstation. Rid yourself of your anger and resentment.

Do this immediately.

In verse 31, Paul gives us a short list of actions and attitudes that we are to rid ourselves of so that the devil will have no space to work.

And this leads us to our next point which is:

IV. Attitudes and Action to Put Away

Paul writes:

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

All of the sins on this list relate to hate and anger directed at people.

And Paul commands us to be done with them entirely.

Bitterness is resentment that grows up in us due to envy or having been slighted by someone.

It's an attitude of the heart where **we just don't like a person** and so we have a spiteful disposition towards them.

And Paul tells us that this is never something that a Christian should feel about another person.

The second and third sins are **wrath** and **anger**.

Now certainly these words are related- they are often used as synonyms and it's hard to find a real distinction between the two.

They both refer to **that internal fury** that boils below the surface.

They both are the motivation for violent actions and words.

The next sin is **clamor** and this refers to violent yelling, screaming and raising the voice.

It's the tone of voice people use when they are in a heated verbal battle or when they want to just shut someone down.

And Paul is telling us that we should not be a yelling and screaming sort of people.

We should never fly into a rage or flip out.

There is never a reason, never an excuse for a Christian to act in such a way.

We have to know that the bible does not condone the yelling that goes on in many of our families.

Parents yell at one another.

Children yell at one another.

Parents yell at children to stop yelling.

Children yell at their parents in exasperation and rebellion.

And all of it is illegitimate.

The anger that underlies it is illegitimate.

And so we are to put it away.

Notice that Paul does tell us to work on it.

He doesn't tell us to pray about it.

He tells us to simply be done with it. To be done with the yelling.

To put it away- to throw it away really, like a piece of useless old clothing.

The fifth sin on the list is **slander** and this refers to denigrating, defamatory, insulting and abusive speech.

This is the type of speech we use when we sinfully want to make a person pay.

And none of it is legitimate.

There's no legitimacy to the statement: "I'm just venting. I just needed to blow off some steam."

If we really saw things from God's perspective, and were submitted to him, we would not feel that way.

Because think of the relationships and situations that spur you on to such abusive language.

These are the relationship and situations that God in his sovereignty has put you in.

And consider Jesus.

Certainly he was in situations that were oppressive and abusive but he did not retaliate.

He never ventured into name calling.

He often was in verbal exchanges where the people he spoke with wanted him dead and were actively plotting his murder.

Yet he never sunk to the level of ad hominem abusive speech.

Every word he spoke was focused on rescuing people and warning people of the dangers of sin.

So all name calling, every cut-down, every barbed word aimed at inflicting damage on another's soul- all of it is illegitimate and all is to be put away without question.

So let me challenge you to have an honest talk with one another in your homes about the language you use with one another.

Homes are supposed to be shelters where we grow and are nurtured but often these are the most violent places to be when it comes to speech.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:21

Matthew 5:21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' **22** But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.

Jesus tells us that verbal abuse is form of murder and deserving of hell.

And therefore we are to put it away.

The final sin that Paul mentions in verse 31 is malice. And this refers to an attitude that intends harm- that rejoices in the hurt of another.

A malicious person hopes and works for the pain and hurt of another.

Malice is a mean spirit.

And God's people should never be mean spirited.

Now, having looked at this brief catalogue of evils we are to put away, Paul leads us to the attitudes and actions we are to put on.

And this brings us to our final point...

V. Attitudes and Actions to Put On

In verse 32 Paul writes:

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

Quite simply, we are to treat one another as God has treated us in Christ Jesus.

Consider all of the ways in which we have offended God.

We've rebelled and followed our own desires.
We've been lazy and failed to do what he wanted us to do.
We've been insensitive and ignorant of his desires.

In all of these ways we have sinned times without number.

If the lord were to add them up, they would be as sand on the seashore.

And yet still he is kind to us, tenderhearted and forgiving.

Perhaps the most amazing truth of the gospel is not the death or resurrection of Jesus but rather God's attitude toward us that motivated Christ in Saving us.

He loved us while we were yet sinners.

And because of this He...

6 raised us up with [Christ] and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

Why?

7 so that in the coming ages **he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness** toward us in Christ Jesus.

The gospel is the proclamation of God's love for sinners who have **offended** him, **disregarded** him and **rebelled** against him.

Yet, Psalm 103 says:

10 He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.

11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

12 as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

13 As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.

And because of God's compassion and kindness toward us, so we are to be compassionate and kind with one another.

So if we ever find it hard to be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving to one another, Paul's advice is that we look to Christ.

We have sinned against God far more grievously and numerously than anyone has ever sinned against us. Yet he is kind, tenderhearted and forgiving toward us.

And we are to be like our father in heaven.

So consider the resentments that you have towards others.

Where have you not forgiven and forgotten?

Confess this to God.

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

Amen.