

A Series on Ephesians
Sub-Series: Gospel Driven Change
“Directing Anger”
(Ephesians 4:26-27)
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I. Introduction

Good morning! Welcome to New City!

We've been studying through Ephesians.

Last Sunday, we started a series within a series called Gospel Driven Change. The gospel is that we are more messed up than I know yet God loves us in Christ more than I can ever imagine. He loved us so much that he redeemed us, adopted us, and gave us a new life, a new identity. He told us who we are, and now that gospel drives us to change. That's the foundation of change and the motivation to change. We started to look at various areas in our lives that the gospel drives us to change. Last week, we talked about living together in truth and love. Today, we are going to talk about the issue of anger.

What makes you angry? Is it someone cutting you off on the road? Is it someone who tries to get into the grocery store express line in front of you with 20 items when it is 10 item limit? Is it just conversing with someone you love? Maybe it's your parents or sibling or spouse, and after a little while you get really angry? What do you get angry about?

I think the time that I got more angry than any other time in my life was at La Guardia Airport in NYC. Tell the story.

I think I handled my anger very badly. Let's see what the Bible teaches us about anger.

Let read Ephesians 4:26-27: ²⁶“In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold.

In the original Greek, it literally says, “Be very angry and not sin.” KJV says, “Be ye angry and sin not.”

We are going to look at (1) “be very angry”; (2) “not sin”; (3) how we do that in real life; and (4) where we get the power to direct our anger.

II. First, Be Very Angry.

Yes, that’s what it says. It doesn’t say don’t get angry. Suppress your anger. Clam up. Hold it in. A lot of us think that that’s what Bible teaches. But, that’s not true. It’s telling us to be careful when we are angry but it doesn’t say we should suppress our anger. At the time that Paul wrote this, there were two prevailing philosophies about anger.

One was Stoicism, which was the belief that anger was bad. We have to suppress it. Stoics thought all emotions were bad. We have to suppress our emotions and take control of our lives. There are a lot of people who approach anger like this. Just clam up. Just suppress it. Just suffer through it. Sure, it eats at us. But we think that’s what the Bible is calling us do. You know, a lot of us take the Bible’s teaching about emotions like this. We think it is wrong to feel a certain way—it’s wrong to feel sad, mad, depressed, lonely, or angry. So, we think becoming a Christian is about putting away all these bad emotions and suppressing them. Having these emotions demonstrates a lack of faith or something, we think. But, God does not teach that about any of these things. God is very real with us. He wants us to express our emotions. In the same way, anger is an emotion. God wants us to express our anger, not just suppress our anger.

The other prevailing philosophy at the time of Paul was Epicureanism. Epicureans sought pleasure out of life, and so they hated anything negative. They disdained anger. If you are in a situation where you get angry, get out. Have nothing to do with it. If you don’t like the food, don’t eat it. Get away from it. If your relationship doesn’t make you happy, get out. If your marriage doesn’t make you happy, get out. This view basically says anger is bad and you should do whatever it takes to get out of the circumstances that brought you anger. So, we try our best to put ourselves in the situation where we don’t feel angry anymore. “Cleanse ourselves from all influences of anger!” Our comfort becomes number one. We want peace. We avoid all relationships that produce anger or might produce pain or difficulties in our lives. As we seek this kind

of happiness, we realize we become more and more alone, self-focused, and without real passion in life.

Verse 26 says Be Very Angry. Do not suppress anger or avoid anger. Anger can be good. How do we know this? The Scripture tells us that God is angry. In one passage, it says God is angry. You all know or have at least heard about OT passages in which God is angry. Romans 1 says that God's wrath (anger) is being revealed. Literally, it says God's wrath is continuously revealed. We know Jesus was angry on a few occasions. It's not just in the temple, when he drove out the merchants in the temple courtyard. The Bible tells us that Jesus was angry when some Pharisees tried to accuse him of violating the Sabbath day for healing someone.

Anger is not all bad. Anger is an emotional response provoked by the presence of evil or injustice. It's an emotional response that God put in us. But, this energy is acute. It's destructive. It's a destructive energy in defense of something or to attack something.

Evil, injustice, racism, hate, violence, abuse, arrogance, spiritual pride, judgmentalism... All of these things make God angry. And it should make us angry. The passage says, BE VERY ANGRY! We are not called to be people who are without any passion and anger against the evil in this world. We are not called to be people who avoid all evil, injustice, violence, abuse because it doesn't affect us directly, because we created a bubble to live in. God is not like that. That's why he is angry. That's why His wrath is being revealed. We are not called to be people who suppress all anger against evil. We are called to be VERY ANGRY!

I think one of the problems we have is essentially to be Epicureans (avoid anger) or Stoics (suppress all anger). No. That's not what Jesus was like.

III. But, Second, it says SIN NOT. Be angry and sin not.

Anger is a powerful emotion. It's like fire. It's powerful but it's destructive. Fire in and of itself is good, but if it's out of control, it can burn everything in its path. Anger is like nuclear energy. If we harness the power, it can light a city, but if there is a meltdown, it can destroy a whole city.

Anger is so powerful that the devil can use it to destroy relationships in your life through your anger. That's what verse 27 says. So, beware.

How do we distinguish between this good anger and sinful anger?

(1) First, anger becomes sinful when it's not provoked to defend justice and good, but to defend our ego, our pride, our reputation, our comfort, our agenda, OUR IDOLS.

Often times, we think we are defending fairness and justice, but we are actually defending our ego or pride.

We get angry when we think people are looking down at us. It hurts our ego. What do they think I am? I used to have a few run-ins with Sprint Mobile. We had some issues come up over time. They charged me for things I never used but they refused to remove the charges, they made some promises to keep me as a customer but didn't live up to the promises, and they accused me of lying to them. They made me so angry almost every time I talked to them on the phone. A part of the anger was this sense of injustice, but I think I got angry and in some occasions, blew up, because I knew my rights; I knew the law (having practiced law for about 12 years) and so, I had this thought: no one screws with me legally! Who do they think they are dealing with? I am going to sue them! I'll teach them a lesson. I got so furious because of a few dollars in mistaken billing that it made me want to spend countless hours suing them. I think it's because they've messed with my ego, my pride.

We get angry when we think others are saying things about us that hurt our reputation. "I don't want people to think that about me." Our identity is so tied with what people are saying about us or people's approval in general that when someone destroys that, we can blow up pretty quickly.

We get angry when people disturb our comfort. We feel like we have the right to comfort, and if someone does something to distract that, we get angry.

When our anger is in response to a selfish motive, our anger is sinful.

(2) But, that's not all. The second way to determine if our anger is sinful is if our anger is directed to people instead of the evil. Martin Luther King Jr. said, we should aggressively attack the evil not the people.

That's exactly how God is.

In Mark 3, there is a story of a time when Jesus was angry. The religious leaders were looking for ways to accuse Jesus and they were watching him carefully to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. Jesus knowing what was in their heart told the sick man to

stand up in front of everyone. Then Jesus asked the religious leaders: “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they remained silent. Then, Mark tells us in verse 5: “He looked around at them in anger and deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. Jesus was angry, but his response to the anger was directed to the evil: the stubbornness of their heart and the illness. He channeled his anger into healing the sick man.

God is angry at evil, but he wills no ill for any of us. He gets angry at all of the things that destroy the beauty of who have been created to be. He is definitely angry at evil, but he came down in the person of Jesus Christ, and gave himself the wrath that we deserved. That’s what love is. Love makes him so angry at evil that he is willing to sacrifice himself for us so that we might be saved from the evil that is destroying us. He did not direct his anger at us.

How do we distinguish between attacking the person vs. attacking the evil, particularly when the evil is done by the person? You can attack the evil that person has done, but not attack that person. I know this is really hard to do, but I think we have to make that distinction. If my children lie, I am going to be angry at their behavior, but I am not going to attack them. My goal is to rid them of the evil of lying: I think we have to be angry at that. We are stern with them and must discipline them. But, we shouldn’t use words like “you are a blankedly-blank. You won’t amount to anything, etc., etc.” The goal is to focus on anger on the problem, not on the person.

When we focus our anger on people instead of the evil, we often end up doing one of these two things:

IV. Third, How Do We Do That in Real Life?

If you don’t get angry, I want to ask you why. Do things that anger the heart of God anger you? Do the evil, the violence, hatred, abuse, hunger, poverty, people lost without a hope for eternity—do these things that anger God anger us?

When you are angry, ask yourself three questions:

(1) Am I blowing up or clamming up? We need to examine what we are doing with our anger.

(2) What am I defending with my anger?

(3) Who am I attacking?

(4) How am I attacking?

Let's look at this step by step.

Am I blowing up or clamming up?

(a) We blow up and seek vengeance. Give them a taste of what they gave you. Make them angry too. We lower our threshold for saying hurtful things. We start destroying. This escalates. Scientists actually tell us that when we get really really angry, the part of the brain that is rational turns off and the animal part of the brain gets really active. You are only going to hurt people at this point. You need to have a cool-off period. I know the passage tells us to not to let the sun go down in your anger. So, sometimes, we think this means we can't take the time to cool off before we continue to discuss the issue again. This just means we need to resolve our anger as soon as possible. But, one way to resolve the anger is through cooling things off and then talking about it. I know people have different cooling-off periods. Grace has a longer cooling off period than I do. We need to honor the person whose cool-off period is longer. But, you need to get back to the issue so that you can target the problem, and not the person.

(b) Sometimes, we end up just clamming up. Just suppressing our anger at a person. When we do that, we don't have the opportunity to address the evil. If you are angry because your friend says insensitive things, you can't just suppress your anger. You end up with bitterness in your heart. We are going to talk about bitterness a lot more next Sunday, but suffice it to say now that if we internalize this bitterness against a person, it's going to grow and over a period of time, it is going to explode. Some minor issue is going to trigger the whole bomb because bitterness is a time bomb. The crazy thing is that people think this is the Christian way to respond to anger. No, it is not. We've failed to distinguish between attacking the person and the problem. Holding back is attacking the person with a time bomb. Expressing your anger towards the evil in that person's life is an important thing to do. Sometimes, this looks like a fight, but it's a fair

fight. We need that in our lives. We can't be afraid of it. (but, remember to do it with truth and love).

What am I defending? I need to learn to examine the motives of my heart. Am I defending my ego or is there a true issue of justice involved? If you notice that they are not proportional (if you see yourself blowing up really quickly, there is probably something else that is causing the anger and you are taking it out on this person). Then, you need to repent. Ask God for forgiveness. Turn away from the selfishness.

Who am I attacking? Am I attacking the person or am I attacking the problem? Am I just suppressing the anger but keeping it towards the people or am I seeking to address the problem?

How am I talking to them? Truth with love. Refer to last week's sermon.

V. Where do we get the power to do this?

I know this is really hard to do. It's a process. Sometimes, you have to think about your anger after it happens because there is no time to examine it. You are going to make a lot of mistakes, but as you put on your new self, your new position in Christ, as you experience an intimate relationship with God, as we worship God with all of our hearts, we will learn to be consistent in our character to who we love more than anything else: Jesus. Remember, the way we can change our old habits of sinful anger is to experience God's anger and his grace for us. The power to change comes from the gospel.

I've noticed a tree in our old house in which the old leaves even after they turned brown didn't fall off during the winter. The tree just looked like a dead tree, but when spring came, new fresh green leaves grew in and that took off the old leaves. As you experience the new life in Christ, that will give us the power to change our old habits of anger, and learn to direct our anger.