

## "How do you handle Your Anger?"

### Scripture for study today, Ephesians 4:22-32

<sup>22</sup>You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; <sup>23</sup>to be made new in the attitude of your minds; <sup>24</sup>and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. <sup>25</sup>Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. <sup>26</sup>"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, <sup>27</sup>and do not give the devil a foothold. <sup>28</sup>He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. <sup>29</sup>Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. <sup>30</sup>And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup>Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. <sup>32</sup>Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

### Introduction

#### -How do you handle your Anger?

**Thomas Jefferson said:** "when angry count ten before you speak; if very angry, one hundred.

**Mark Twain said:** "When angry, count four; when very angry, swear"

-What do you say about anger? You answer this question, not really with a funny one liner, but with the very way that you live. How do you live? What does the way that you live say about the way that you handle anger?

Mrs Fulton Oursler whose husband wrote the book "The Greatest Story Ever Told" (a classic book on the life of Christ). Said she used to count to ten when she got angry, but one day she thought of the first ten words of the Lord's Prayer. From then on instead of counting to ten, she slowly said these words to herself when angered; "**Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name**".

In my life I have had to learn about anger. I have had to look at the way I live because like Paul who had his own past of righteous anger and persecution of Christians, I have often struck out in anger at those who have tried to help me. Like Mrs. Oursler God has encouraged me throughout my life to turn my anger over to Him so that He can truly be 'in charge' and guide my life.

As I have sought to follow the example of my savior and the teaching of God's word, I like the church at Ephesus desire to transform the way I used to live and replace it with the way God desires for me to live. This in fact is what makes God's word vital and precious to me each day. That it seeks to help me in my journey to help me and God's church transform into the very image of Christ.

Today what I would like to do is take some time to examine how Paul's teaching to the Ephesians on the subject of handling anger can assist us today. I will bring some of my own experiences with anger and also will examine some other Biblical passages that deal with anger as well as examine how Jesus dealt with this human emotion.

I will be doing this because I believe that dealing with anger appropriately within the context of ministry and the Christian life is vital to the ongoing work of God's church.

## **I. Why is anger so serious? (It can cause you to steal from God!)**

Look with me if you will at the verse that appears in the center of our passage of study today. Ephesians 4:28,

<sup>28</sup> He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

When I was younger I would have seen this verse as many scholars do today, as a verse that singles out a thief that was stealing material possessions from the Church at Ephesus and tells him or her to cease this behavior. However, years of serving God's church and seeing the way that we work together at the task that He has given to us, this verse has taken on new meaning to me and I would like to share that with you first today. Because this is one of the most important life lessons that I have learned and I believe it lays the groundwork for us to understand why dealing with anger properly is such an important task for the individual and the church.

When we look at the context of this verse in this passage, I would suggest that we are being told here that our anger improperly utilized can cause theft from the kingdom of God. I believe we are being encouraged here to avoid our 'human' reaction to anger which is to "Take our ball and go home" or blow our tops and tell people off. Instead I believe we are told here to be hard at work doing what will benefit others, working diligently with our hands, while anger is all around us (point to the discussion both just before and just after this verse). This is an 'island' verse; I believe that we are being encouraged in this passage to swim for this island when we deal with anger in our Church, in our jobs and in our lives. Let me show you two examples from the life of Jesus of how I believe He lived on this island as anger swirled around Him and as He dealt with His own anger.

## **II. Jesus Example of Dealing with anger**

## **Matt. 21:12-15**

<sup>12</sup>Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. **He overturned the tables of the money changers** and the benches of those selling doves. <sup>13</sup>"It is written," he said to them, "'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'" <sup>14</sup>**The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them.** <sup>15</sup>But **when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw** the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David," **they were indignant.**

We often reflect on the 'anger' of our Lord as He drove out the moneychangers. We also tend to recall the reaction of righteous anger that the chief priests felt following this situation. But how often do we remember or examine verse 14 and think of the island that I believe Paul was highlighting for us. We remember the table turning at the temple, but how often do we remember the healing work Jesus did there between the anger of Jesus (v13) and the anger of the priests (v15), look in the middle at v14, there is the island! This is the part of this passage that we often forget. The anger is often all we remember of this passage.

I believe it is imperative that we take note that amidst all of the anger of this situation that Jesus did not steal from God, He continued to heal and love in the temple which was the work that the temple courts had been created to witness.

If I haven't convinced you yet, let me share with you a second example of this dynamic at work in the life of Jesus.

## **Mark 3:1-6**

<sup>1</sup>Another time he went into the synagogue and a man with a shriveled hand was there. <sup>2</sup>Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. <sup>3</sup> Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand "Stand up in front of everyone." <sup>4</sup>Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent. <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might **kill Jesus**.

Here Jesus heals between His anger and the anger of the Pharisees. Look closely in verse 5, you will find Jesus anger, the healed hand and then the anger of the Pharisees. He does the work of God in the synagogue. Between His own anger and the anger of others we see Jesus being faithful to the task that He was called to do, in the middle of anger He did not stop loving, or healing and doing the work with His hands that His Father had provided for Him to do. He did not take His ball and go home or lash out at others with hateful words, He continued faithfully to do the work of God.

I believe we can see Ephesians 4:28 at work clearly here let me read it again.

“He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.”

Jesus did something useful with His hands amidst the anger that swirled around Him. He did not steal from God. Have you ever stolen from God? Have you ever pulled away or lashed out at others in anger?

As we look back to our main passage of study in **Ephesians 4** we read in verse 26 these words "In your anger do not sin."

One way that we can sin is through stealing from the Lord by ceasing to do the good things that He has for us to do, simply because there is anger around us, or within us.

### **III. Anger in itself IS NOT SIN!**

In each of the examples from the life and ministry of Jesus that I have brought forth we can see clearly that Jesus Himself experienced anger, but the result of His anger was not one that detracted from the ministry that God had given to Him. Unlike the Pharisees and the chief

priests Jesus did not depart and plot secretly to destroy them, nor did He seek to shame them publicly with harsh words. He instead worked quietly with His hands providing good things for the community around Him and sought to answer the content of their questions for Him.

I heard a quote once that I rather like, it was from the famous preacher Henry Ward Beecher (who was the brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe). He said

**"A man, who does not know how to be angry, does not know how to be good."**

You know I have spent times in my life hating my fiery temper and rapid anger against any perceived danger or injustice. I would however share with you something that I have found to be true. A person who sees injustice and is angered by the sinfulness of this world can be shaped in how he or she reacts, but the blind person, the one who has no stirring or zeal or passion for life cannot necessarily be woken from their sleep.

The late Martin Luther King Jr. (whose widow Coretta Scott King died this week at 79) said this about hate.

"Like an unchecked cancer, hate corrodes the personality and eats away its vital unity. Hate destroys a man's sense of values and his objectivity. It causes him to describe the beautiful as ugly and the ugly as beautiful, and to confuse the true with the false and the false with the true."

Anger is not sin; I do not believe that we should hate anger or shame ourselves for being angry. How we deal with anger can lead us to sin. As any of us that have dealt with anger realize it is more complex in the church than the little boy who asked...

"What is the difference between anger and righteous indignation?" to his friend, who responded, "I don't know, but I think it means to get real mad and not cuss."

There are many among us and many in our churches who believe anger is evil. We go so far as to utilize other terms and definitions to keep ourselves from admitting we are angry. We

live in denial, saying things like, "I am not angry, just frustrated". "I am not mad I am just disappointed".

Anger is a part of our makeup and is not sin. I believe it can provide fuel for the task at hand. It can keep us alert and mindful to people and situations that need our prayers and seek God's comfort. It can become a pressure plate that pushes us to seek God.

#### **IV. What is anger?**

Anger is both an **emotion** and a **behavior**; in the scripture passages that I have shared we can see that while Jesus clearly had this emotion, it did not cause Him to behave in a sinful way. As James 1:19-20 states”:

“My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, **for man's anger** does not bring about the **righteous life** that God desires.”

Let's look at this verse closely, **the emotion of anger is not sin, “Man's anger”**, but it is what can come out of that anger that is a sin and this is the **behavior that prevents us from leading “the righteous life that God desires”**. Jesus was angry at times, but He led the righteous life that God desired. His anger did not negatively affect His humility before God. Jesus did not stop the work, simply because He was mad. Nor did He carry bitterness and resentment toward others with Him in His work.

Anger scientifically is not a primary emotion - underlying thoughts or feelings give rise to anger. **Some of the thoughts and feelings that give rise to anger are:**

- Hurt
- Rejection
- Being manipulated
- Ignored
- Taken advantage of
- Disrespected.
- Rights violated
- Our authority defied

- Someone or something we value is dishonored.
- Our opinions are marginalized
- Our efforts not appreciated
- Our intelligence or competence is mocked.

Jesus dealt with all of these issues, and yet, He never stole from God as I believe our key passage instructs us not to do.

## V. Two ways that we tend to deal with anger.

1) *Explosive* or 2) *Passive*

1) **Explosive anger** - the outburst, the volcano, the eruption.

2) **Passive anger** - denial based on the belief that feeling or expressing anger is wrong.

Let's consider passive anger first, as I mentioned earlier this anger is characterized by denial, shame or guilt at having anger.

### 2) Passive Anger

- Denial, "I am not angry, just frustrated". "I am not mad I am just disappointed".

-Denial leads to resentment, bitterness and hatred. Have you developed a pattern to repress your anger?

Eph 4:25-27 (**Key passage**)

“Therefore each of you must **(1)put off falsehood** and **(2)speak truthfully** to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. "In your anger do not sin": **(3)Do not let the sun go down** while you are still angry, and **(4)do not give the devil a foothold.**”

There are a few key points here that I believe the passive withholder should observe.

**1 “Put off Falsehood”** – An example of this in my own life is when my wife is not talking to me. I know this is when she is angry with me. When I ask, “are you angry?”, she says

“no” but I know that I have done something wrong or that something is going on. How often do we do this to God? We need to learn to be honest with God and ourselves concerning anger.

**2 “Speak truthfully to your neighbor”** – if you are angry with someone, do not do as the Pharisees did and plot quietly among yourselves to kill the person as the Pharisees did. And by kill I mean think bad things about the person or go behind their back.

**3 “Do not let the sun go down”** – Don’t let it linger so that bitterness, resentment and hatred can grow between you and others.

**4 “Do not give the Devil a foothold”** – By not admitting our anger with others and dealing with it properly Satan can establish a base of operations in our lives and launch strikes against us, others and God’s work from this beachhead position.

The second way we often display anger is through having,

### **1) Explosive anger**

Those that display Explosive anger frequently blame their victims for their anger or minimize the serious nature of their outbursts by saying things like "They were just blowing off steam, or "Getting something off of their chest".

Those that have Explosive anger generally regret their outbursts in times of introspection, can lead to self hatred. As I have already shared this is the type of anger that I often battle against.

Explosive anger can be seen in some of the following forms...

- Verbal attacks
- Yelling
- Cursing
- Condemning
- Name calling
- Sarcasm
- Humiliation
- Criticism

-Threats

Proverbs 29:11 “A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.”

Look with me again at our key verse Ephesians 4:29-31

<sup>29</sup>Do not let any **(1)unwholesome talk come out of your mouths**, but only what is helpful for building others up **(2)according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.** <sup>30</sup>And do not **(3)grieve the Holy Spirit of God**, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup>Get rid of all **(4)bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander**, along with every form of malice.

**1 “Unwholesome talk”** – Explosive anger seems to be characterized by this type of behavior. Stop it.

**2 “According to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen”** – How is what you are saying or doing benefiting the Kingdom of God? What would God say about your words if He was right there with you, this leads us to...

**3 “Grieve the Holy Spirit”** - Do not rationalize or justify your outbursts in saying “they got what they deserved”, driving someone into the ground is not a benefit to them. When we divide the body of Christ we grieve the Holy Spirit.

**4 “Bitterness, rage, anger, brawling and slander”** – This is a laundry list of what we see in those that become activated by Explosive anger and from which Satan attacks God’s people from the base of malice that he tries to establish in our lives.

## **VI. What type of "Anger" is appropriate?**

Eph 4:25-27 **Passive no good**

Eph 4:29-31 **Explosive no Good**

**Eph. 4:32 Key passage ends,**

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

There are I believe two elements to anger that this verse displays.

**-First** is the content or '*what we are mad about*' – we cannot forgive, unless we know what we are angry about. (Passive anger often denies us this, Paul tells us to talk truthfully to each other and confront problems). Likewise God takes our sin seriously and required the sacrifice of Christ to serve as payment for our sins.

**-Next** is the relationship or '*who we are mad at*', kindness and compassion must be the way we bring our concerns to others. (Explosive anger denies us this; Paul tells us how to care for others as we address problems in this passage as well). Christ forgave us to bring us into a close relationship with the Father. We must value others as God values us.

### **What does kind, compassionate and forgiving anger look like?**

#### **1) Peruses a resolution of the content issue**

\*Passive - before the sun goes down.

\*Explosive - with kind and gentle words.

#### **2) Seeks to preserve and rebuild a bridge for the relation ship**

\*Passive - by bringing people together in truth and talking about the issue

\*Explosive – by valuing others through kind and gentle actions in discussions

As we look at this passage where I believe passive anger and explosive anger are dealt with, what lies in the middle? What lies at the midpoint? The encouragement that we must not steal from the work of God amidst our anger is what we find. His work must move ahead, it must be done, we must be faithful. There is too much to do to let our squabbles and anger tie us down and keep us from being faithful in our service to our King. We must swim for the island of

V 28 when we are caught up in the billowing winds of anger. We must be about the work of God!

Let me give you two more quotes from the late Martin Luther King Jr, that I believe are appropriate to our discussion.

**“Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into friend.”**

And

**“Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'What are you doing for others?'"**

As I close today can I ask you if Jesus anger was displayed for us as He hung on the cross?

### **Luke 23:34-43**

“Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And **(1)they cast lots to divide his clothing.** And the people stood by, watching; but the **(2)leaders scoffed at him,** saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" **(3)The soldiers also mocked him,** coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" **(4)There was also an inscription over him,** "This is the King of the Jews." **(5)One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him** and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And **we indeed have been condemned justly,** for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." **He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."**

There among all the insults that were being hurled at Him Jesus hung dying.

- 1) Casting lots for His clothing, before He even had died!
- 2) Leaders Scoffing
- 3) Soldiers Mocking
- 4) A blasphemous inscription
- 5) A criminal deriding Him

He was not too angry to forgive, to die, and to save.

“Jesus does not give us what we deserve; He gives us what we need.” –anon

Jesus does not pull away from our sin in denial nor does He attack us for it. The cross was unfair, it was unjust, and it was something to be angry about. Yet Jesus chose to forgive and even as he hung there he continued to share the gospel to the man who hung next to him.

Jesus in the midst of all that was unfair swam for the island of Eph. 4:28, look at this verse as I superimpose Christ work on the cross over its words.

“He did something useful with His own hands that day on the cross and shared His very blood with those in need!”

What pain are you in today? What suffering are you facing unjustly? What are you angry about? Please bring it to the Lord so that you can truly forgive and then you can be about the Lord’s work and steal from Him no longer in your anger.

Because we all must be working quietly with our hands to have something to share with others in need.

**I ask you today, how do you handle your anger?**