

Bitterness, Rage, and Anger

Opener: When have you seen kindness accomplish something anger couldn't?

Scripture: “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. ²⁸ Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:26-32

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰ because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. ²¹ Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. James 1:19-21

Discussion Questions

1. As Christians we love to label our anger as “righteous,” and rarely do we admit (or care) when we sin because we’re angry. In fact, we can nearly always justify it. After all, we’re only angry about something that’s not the way it ought to be. So when Paul says not to sin when we’re angry, what’s he saying? How can we tell if we’re sinning when we’re angry? Examples? Ephesians 4:26
2. How can being angry and staying angry give the devil a foothold? How does it give us control? Is it possible to use anger to get control without giving the devil a foothold? If so, how? Eph. 4:26-27; James 1:19-21
3. Stealing is when we take something that doesn’t belong to us. Why are we tempted to steal? How can doing something useful prevent stealing? Ephesians 4:28
4. What is “unwholesome talk?” How does it tear down rather than build up? Examples? Eph. 4:29
5. Paul warns us not to grieve the Holy Spirit. Based on what follows that warning, what grieves Him? What else could grieve Him? Ephesians 4:30-31
6. How do we get rid of all the things Paul lists in vs. 31 and replace them with kindness, compassion, and forgiveness? What’s the cost and what’s the reward when we do that? Ephesians 4:31-32

Wrap Up: Christians like to excuse their anger by quoting Ephesians 4:26. We also like to justify our anger by ascribing it to some righteous cause such as when Jesus overturned the tables in the temple, failing to understand that He’s God and we’re not. When we do this, we ignore the damage anger does to relationships and to our witness. If we are more interested in growing in Christ than we are in justifying and excusing our anger, we need to take a hard look at what Jesus really taught—things like (i) human anger does not equal godly anger; (ii) we’re not here to judge; (iii) there are better ways to express ourselves; and (iv) anger cannot coexist with forgiveness. It’s a trap to think we think we can use anger to accomplish God’s will. God’s word doesn’t hide the ball when it comes to how destructive anger is, but too often we ignore it.