

HOW TO BE GOOD...AND MAD!

Ephesians 4:26-27 • FCBC • 6/25/23

Intro: We live in a polarized world. Put a Democrat and a Republican together and you'll likely see an argument or a fight. Post anything remotely controversial on Facebook and you'll probably get called a name or have your motives impugned. Even in your car you'd better buckle up because if you go any distance with any traffic there's a better than even chance someone may anger you or you may anger them. We're fast losing civility in our civilization. And it gives all of us a great opportunity to grow and highlight the transformation God is working in us. And in fact, if anyone ought to be distinctive in their attitudes, reactions and behavior, it ought to be people who say they know the Living and gracious God. We should think differently, and see things differently, and behave differently, than if we had never put our lives and futures in Jesus' hands. Remember the [insight] about those who know God? *"You are not the person you once were, so you must no longer live as you once lived."* Salvation isn't merely adding something new to your old life, but becoming someone new, replacing an old life with a new one.

- So, precisely *what* should change in my life? Paul doesn't leave anything to the imagination: he points out five critical exchanges. Last week we were first challenged to replace all forms of lying & deception w/truth. (So how did Truth Week go? Catch yourself in any lies? I hope we all have a stronger hold on the truth as a result of Truth Week.)

- This week we're about to hear a second challenge: When God wants to expose areas that distinguish our new lives in Christ from how we once acted/reacted, He also points to our temper, and commands that we replace sinful with righteous anger: NB:

(4:26-27). **“Be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.”**

• “Wait a minute! Are you saying I can be angry? I thought Bible taught us NOT to be angry at all? Isn’t anger a sin?” This is one of the more misunderstood & mishandled areas of our lives—how we think about and deal with our anger. So:

I. [WHAT IS ANGER?]

[A. It is an internal emotion:] Webster’s: “a strong *feeling* of annoyance, displeasure or hostility.” Want a clearer picture? OT/Hebrew word for anger literally means, “to get red in the face” or “to see nostrils flare”. It’s an accurate picture because physiologically, when we become angry, adrenalin pumps into our bloodstream (we feel a *rush*); our blood pressure rises & our pulse accelerates; our pupils dilate & our muscles tense. It happens whether we like it or not/whether we want it to or not. It’s an *emotion*. We *feel* angry. How we respond may also be seen as anger:

[B. It is an external reaction] We respond in anger—and here is where we can have some control over our anger—in its expression. “But I can’t help it—when I get mad, I react.” Really? Have you ever been mad and the phone rings, and you answer it and say sweetly, “Hello?” Apparently, you do have some control.

• The OT Hebrew language doesn’t distinguish between kinds of anger—good and bad; just pictures it. But the NT Greek language is far more specific; it IDs 3 kinds of anger:

II. [WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?]

[A. There is a slow-burning anger]: (vs. 26a) (“anger”/orgh) the most common term for *anger* can be described as getting hot under collar, we set our jaw, our eyes ablaze, fuming. Interestingly, it can describe both sinful OR righteous anger. But it’s not the only kind:

[B. There is a seething anger]: (vs. 26b) (parorgismoß) This is the deep-seated, unforgiving, unrelenting resentment. It is anger that has been nursed, fueled, and coddled over a period of time. It's always sinful.

[C. There is an explosive anger]: Never used of the righteous human anger. You've known people with hair-trigger temper. Like Mt. St Helens erupting, or a bomb exploding—you blow up. If you were in terrible 2s, we'd call it temper tantrum. It's translated in vs. 31 as "wrath" (ESV) or "rage" (NIV). So:

III. [IS ANGER ALWAYS WRONG?] *Not at all.* God created you with the capacity to get mad. It's as legitimate as your capacity to laugh/cry. Need to ask yourself, "Is anger an emotion designed by God, or it is a sinful short-circuit in our emotional system?"

Check out:

[A. A Few Examples:]

[1. God does get angry] [Exodus 34:6-7/x] (repeated 9x). God doesn't anger quickly, but in time, if a matter is not resolved, his anger can be great as Moses predicts: [Deut. 29:28/x]! The Bible never blushes to portray God's anger; but his anger is not the result of his being touchy or bad tempered; it is the expression of his holiness and righteousness, and directed toward evil in his creation: [Rom. 1:18] God is angry with anyone who suppresses the truth about Himself. [God] does get angry. But what about Jesus?

[2. Jesus became angry], even though never sinned! He was angry at people who sold the right to worship [Jn 2:13-16]. Yet he was never explosive nor out of control. NB it took him a while to make the whip of cords. Not an emotional, spontaneous outburst, but a controlled, careful and determined response to a situation. He was angry at men in the synagogue [Mk 3:1, 5]: they were using a handicapped man as bait to catch Jesus! [x] And what about us?

[3. Believers should get angry!] Bible never forbids anger, just qualifies it. NB vs. 26: **“Be angry and do not sin”** — it is assuming you *will* and even *should* get angry at times. Anger not always wrong, like lying or casual sex; rather, it depends upon *why* you’re angry, & *how* you respond when you are angry. EG David: [Ps. 119:53/x] In face of blatant evil, we should be indignant rather than tolerant; angry, not apathetic. What other reaction can wickedness be expected to provoke in those who love God? [Beecher/x]

So how do I know if my anger is right or wrong?

[B. A CLOSE COMPARISON]: [Chart: Sinful vs. Righteous Anger]

- Anger is sinful when it’s [selfish]: when our desires, our needs, ambitions are frustrated; when our demands not met, our expectations not realized, our well-being threatened, our self-esteem questioned, when we’re embarrassed, inconvenienced. (e.g “you’re in my way, bothering me, hurt me...); but it’s all about *me*. That anger is sinful, defensive, full of pride, resentful of what happened to you. But righteous anger is [unselfish]: Can be angry in behalf of God: angry at unbelief, at dishonoring God, at warping the truth, or hurting others.

- Anger is sinful when it [controls us]; it causes us to say/do things to hurt another. Looking back on our anger, we realize had we been in control, we never would have said/done that! You had a bad day, kids getting wild, bills thick and wallet thin; and you explode at the person you love most/closest to. If you lose control, it’s not righteous. But righteous anger is always [controlled]; it never short-circuits a person’s thinking or blinds a person to the truth; it never makes a person do what God would never want him to do.

- Anger is sinful when it seeks [revenge], when it breeds malice, resentment. Righteous anger seeks [resolution]. Righteous

anger vanishes when a person really repents; or when justice is done. You don't make a person pay at your hands to your satisfaction. It has limits how long it lasts.

[C. A Key Insight]: (Pr. 22:24-25) [*Anger is a learned response*] Which means, however you learned to be angry, you can unlearn it. What you have seen modeled/been exposed to is probably what you've picked up. With God's help, you can learn the respond better, differently! So:

IV. [HOW CAN I HANDLE MY ANGER?] *How can I be good & mad at the same time? 2 unbiblical, unhealthy ways of dealing with our anger:*

[A. Don't:]

[1. Blow up] (Prov. 29:11/x): Slow down! Don't let loose. When you blow up, it's usually destructive. The energy of your emotions is released not toward the problem, but toward another person. The classic example is in sports—e.g. hockey fights, baseball ump's & managers. Some psychologists have advocated unrestrained expression of anger; they encourage angry person to fully ventilate the anger against a punching bag, or a pillow, or golf ball. Not wise because you're cultivating a learned response. What you may be doing is encouraging a spirit of murder in your heart; all you need now is an opportunity. Not to mention that merely expressing anger doesn't get rid of it; in fact, anger breeds anger (Pr. 29:22)—apparently not only in you, but in others around you; angry people make people angry. AND it clouds your judgment, making you less able to respond clearly, thoughtfully. You're increasingly enslaved to your own responses. (*So don't blow up. On the other hand, you don't want to just:*)

[2. Clam up]: We clam up for a couple of reasons: We may be trying to:

1) *deny our anger*. When I see anger, I point it out (“you seem angry”). Common response: “NOT angry. I’m concerned, I’m hurt, I’m upset, I’m disappointed.” Uh huh (*you’re angry!*) Even those who come to admit their anger sometimes try to do 2nd thing:

2) *we may try to suppress our anger*. We bottle it up (“keep a lid on it”) You let it simmer inside. When clam up, like a can of pop shaken up—when opened, spews out all over. People become angry, bottle it up, then go home and yell at kids, or snarl at wife, snap at others. Makes person irritable, sullen, tense, miserable, even depressed. Best way to ensure that when you do get angry, it will be a blow up.

•EG: Boy Scouts/snow camp. Tenderfoot dropped can of corn into fire. Wearing poncho, sat on log shivering, waiting for dinner. I heard “shotgun” blast, ran over to noise; found blackened pit where once was fire, kid on his back, dazed, and splattered with million niblets of corn. Toss the can of your anger on the fire, & when it blows, it won’t be pretty. *So what’s the alternative?*

B. [Do:]

[1. Face it.] (vs. 26): **“Be angry.”** Don’t deny it. Admit you’re angry and accept full responsibility for it. Not “you make me angry!” Just say, “I am feeling angry when you said/did that.” No blaming, no sarcasm or put downs; just the honest statement of fact. Me: “Honey, I’m feeling angry & touchy right now. Not even sure why. I don’t like it when I feel like this, but I am. Amazing how quickly anger is diffused when you admit it.

[2. Evaluate it.] **“...do not sin.”** Idea isn’t to count to ten before getting angry; if you have to do that, probably already *are angry!* Now you’re simply deciding if and how you’ll express it! Instead, *think*. Are you certain you know the facts? Some people get angry over a perceived but unreal situation (Prov. 18:17/x). Getting the whole story might change your feelings. Then, consider your

motives. Righteous anger rarely spontaneous: requires you to examine the cause before choosing to express it. What has set you off? Is it selfish or is it something that hurts you because it hurts God? Make certain anger isn't from injured pride, malice, revenge, resentment, self-righteousness. Need to know if it's right or wrong so you can deal appropriately with it. May help to take time out or do something physical. Anger releases all kinds of adrenalin in bloodstream, so good walk may be effective in reducing the initial tension of anger. Yet if problem isn't dealt with, only temporary. More you think about it, it may increase the churning inside. But whatever you do, ponder, & evaluate before speak! James' advice is very good: [James 1:19-20] Anger may be short-circuiting your ability to hear what God is telling you; and even if you are angry over something legitimate, you still have to ponder your response, because simply being angry isn't enough. Just being angry won't accomplish what God desires. Have to do something more. {Then]

[3. Deal with it]: vs. 27: **“Do not let the sun go down on your anger.”** Don't let it fester. Don't nurse it. It's never safe to let it smolder. No anger (righteous or otherwise) must be allowed to continue. Deal with it, ASAP. The limit is one day. Terminal point is bedtime. The same day you get angry is the day you deal with it. The sun which rises to mark a new day must not be a witness to yesterday's outburst. Left-over anger sours in a person. (*So I should deal with my anger. Precisely how do you suggest I do that?*)

- [You can overlook the offense] (Pr. 12:16, 19:11/x) Just drop the matter. Not man's glory to *win*, but to *overlook* an offense!

- [You can short-circuit the anger:] [Pr. 15:1, 18/x] You short-circuit anger through a gentle answer or through patiently trying to understand. The other person may be well-intentioned, or

spoke/acted out of mood, or was completely oblivious to the fact he hurt you.

- At the theater, we were watching a particularly tense movie, when the guy in front of me turned around and said, "If you touch the back of my chair again, I'll take you out and kick your behind." (But he didn't say, "behind.") Shocked, my immediate response was...*like to see you try it, bub*. Instead, I took a breath, realized I might in fact have been kicking his chair (& who likes that?); so I leaned over to his side and whispered, "I'm really sorry. I didn't even know I was doing it. I'll be more careful." After the movie we all stood, he turned to me, apologized, embarrassed, and told me he had had a very bad day. Then he asked me, "*What do you do for a living?*" (*!)

- [You can confess it to another.] One of the very dark memories I can't forget is when my daughter was trying to help her frustrated father with his computer, and he got angry, snapped and said something brutally unkind to her. She quietly left, teary. Somebody once pointed out, "Temper is what gets us into trouble; Pride is what keeps us there." I instantly knew I had stepped in it, and knew what I needed to do. I went down to her room. I felt like I had lead feet & a swollen tongue, but when I began to apologize, the anger evaporated. God says there is one way you can be sure to always have the last word when you're angry: Just say, "I'm sorry. I was wrong. Will you forgive me?"

- [You can confront the underlying problem.] (Prov. 24:26/x) Express your wishes openly. What do I want? Do I want to be treated right? Or shown respect? or loved? Or to be listened to? Say it plainly. "Sweetheart, I would like you to turn the TV off and talk with me about your day...throw your own clothes into the dirty hamper...kiss me and take a few minutes for me as soon as you get

home... (*Many wives furiously writing...*) Jimmy, when you use my coffee cup for your earthworm collection, I really have tough time drinking out of it. How about if we get a jar for you to use?" You may be tired, troubled, or worried; need to pray.

•(*Wait! What if I can't resolve everything quickly? What if the person isn't sorry, or won't reconcile, or situation is beyond my reach? Do I have to forgive and forget before sundown? No. Life isn't a half-hour sitcom that resolves neatly from episode to episode. But God forbids your angers to continue...So—*)

[4. Let go of it]: **"...give no opportunity to the devil."** (4:27)

•Negatively: Anger can give Satan **an opportunity** — lit. a *foothold* in your life. Don't help him by staying angry. If we follow these instructions, Satan would have no room to maneuver, no way to leverage our anger against us. Satan knows there is a fine line between righteous & unrighteous anger. Knows we have difficulty finding that line, and do poor job of responsibly handling anger for very long. What might start off as righteous anger may quickly degenerate into unrighteous resentment, or self-righteous pride. (*If I keep it, Satan uses it; but how do I let it go, to whom?*)

•Positively: [Rom. 12:18-19/x] Entrust to God your hurt. Let Him be the Judge. He's a whole lot smarter, wiser, righteous. *What if you don't?* Cherish and coddle your anger and it will someday consume you [Buechner].

Concl: 2300 years ago, Aristotle rightly observed, [quote/x] But the Master clearly points the way (4:26-27).

"Be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil."

Pray