

Controlling Your Anger

In this chapter, the apostle Paul is describing how the believer is to be radically different from the unbelievers around him or her. In verse 25, he has taught us that we must be truth tellers. In verses 26 and 27, he explains that we must express our anger very differently from those who do not know Christ.

Ephesians 4:26–27

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

It is sad for us to acknowledge that expressions of anger in our culture are increasingly out of control. The rate of road rage has doubled in the past 8 years, and one only needs to tune in to CNN or Fox News or MSNBC to see how news reporting has become an increasingly angry profession. Here's what the apostle teaches us about our anger:

I. We are not called to eliminate our anger

The apostle says “be angry...,” not “stop being angry.” He quotes David in Psalm 4:4, reminding us that there is such a thing as “righteous indignation.” This godly anger is often useful in compelling us to lead in social justice and in resolving conflicts. Our anger is also appropriate, at times, because God Himself is described as an angry God in both the Old and New Testaments. On a few occasions in the Gospels, we see that Jesus Himself expressed anger (Matthew 21:12-13 and Mark 3:5).

II. We are called to control our anger

In imitating God (see Ephesians 5:1) we not only are angry at times, but we are especially long-suffering as is God. As James says in chapter 1, verses 19 and 20 “...let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”

A. In controlling our anger we need to be aware of its typical causes: our unmet desires or expectations, our fear of physical harm, threats to our self-esteem, or an intentional use of anger to manipulate or intimidate others. Notice that all of these common causes are about the self. Unrighteous anger is self-centered, whereas righteous anger is God-centered and helpful to other people.

B. In recent decades, we have become aware of some of the hormonal complications of anger. Our brains produce hormones when we become angry that make us less risk adverse, less likely to be reasonable, and more likely to blame and injure others. We must indeed be extremely careful with this powerful drug!

C. In controlling our anger, we can see that the apostle teaches us an important lesson, “Do not let the sun go down on your anger.” Ultimately the solution for our anger is to contemplate Calvary, where Christ absorbed all of the righteous anger of God toward us. Since we have been forgiven, we must forgive others.

III. We are called to thwart Satan

In verse 27 the apostle reminds us that uncontrolled anger gives opportunity to the evil one to destroy both us and others and, after all, he “prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” By controlling our anger we remove his opportunities to do his devious work. When Christ died on the cross and rose from the grave, He destroyed the power of the evil one. We are called to join in that work by submitting ourselves to the control of God's Holy Spirit.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe some ways in which followers of Christ need to grow in expressing their righteous anger.
2. Describe sinful anger.
3. Why do we normally become angry?
4. How can we control our anger?
5. Why is controlling our anger so important?

Going Deeper

1. In what circumstances do you most often struggle to control your anger? Why?
2. What steps can you take to control your anger in every situation?