

“Be Angry, And Do Not Sin!”

Franklin Church of Christ
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PM Worship

Introduction:

Somewhere, a Christian man screams at his wife and kids. He throws things around the house and even punches holes in the wall. Yet, on Sunday he comes into the assembly as if nothing is wrong. Somewhere, a Christian woman nurses grudges against her husband, her mother-in-law, her neighbor and even the elders in the church. She speaks ill of them behind their back. She resents them and is filled with bitterness toward them. Yet, she dresses nicely for worship, sings out and listens to sermons as though she were the epitome of spiritual conduct. Somewhere, a Christian teenager storms to his room, slamming his door, backtalking and yelling at his parents. At school he will tell his friends how rotten his parents are and how much he cannot wait to get away from them. But on Wednesday night, he will be in Bible class answering questions and acting as though he is an example of Christian character. If these people were confronted with their anger, they would respond, “The Bible says I am allowed to be angry as long as I don’t sin.”

While listing the preceding scenarios, I did not have any particular individuals in mind. And yet, I imagine each of us can find times in our own lives when these scenarios accurately represent us. Amazingly enough, **Ephesians 4:26**, a verse that so clearly speaks against sin is probably used to justify more sin than any other verse in the Bible. Very few people, even among Christians, view the way they act when they are angry as sin. If they are confronted, they toss this verse out as a defense. What does this verse really teach? What kind of behavior does this verse actually justify?

Discussion:

I. The grammar and context of this verse.

A. The grammar:

1. The Greek term translated “angry” is “orgizo”. Vine’s says this word means “to provoke, to arouse to anger.” Additionally, Strong’s Enhanced Lexicon states that the verb is in the passive voice. When Paul says to us, “be angry,” he is not telling us what to do. He is telling us about something done to us. A better translation would be “Be angered” or “Be aroused to anger”. In contrast, the command to “not sin”, from the Greek “hamartano,” is in the active voice. While being angered is what somebody does to you, the sin is an action that you take. Notice some observations from this look at the grammar in this sentence.
2. We must make a distinction between the emotion of anger that can be aroused in us by others and the actions that we take based on that emotion. We often look at an action and call it anger. A man rams his fist through a wall—we call it anger. A woman maliciously slanders a neighbor—we call it anger. While other verses may use the terms “anger” or “wrath” in this manner, **Ephesians 4:26** does not. In this verse, “anger” is not an action, it is an emotion. You cannot justify any action whatsoever from the phrase “Be angry.”
3. Having made the distinction between the emotion and the action, we observe that the emotion of anger, according to Webster’s “a strong feeling of displeasure and belligerence aroused by a real or supposed wrong,” is lawful. This verse does not ask the question, “Is anger sinful?” This verse asks the question, “Do you sin when you are angry?”
4. Making note of a more general point, this verse demonstrates that our emotions should not govern our actions. No matter how we feel, we must live according to God’s standards.
5. Additionally, no matter what anyone else does to us, we have no right to sin. The defenses that “he started it” or “she did it first” or “I only get like that when they _____” are childish and unscriptural. No matter how anyone baits you, pushes your buttons, treats you unfairly or simply infuriates you, you are not allowed to sin.
6. Finally, while being aroused to anger is not sinful, we must recognize that the Christian should not be easily aroused. **James 1:19** commands us to be slow to wrath. Additionally, note the following proverbs—**Proverbs 14:17, 29; 15:18; 16:32**.

B. The context:

1. Note the immediate context of the verse. This statement is among a list of statements that are given as examples of **Ephesians 4:20-24**. Paul is giving specific examples of putting off the old man and putting on the new. The old man lies. The new man tells the truth in love (**vs. 25**). The old man steals. The new man labors and gives (**vs. 28**). The old man speaks

corruptly. The new man builds others up (**vs. 29**). In like manner, the old man allows his anger to justify sin. The new man may be angered, but will not sin (**vs. 26-27**).

2. Note two observations based on this context. First, when we become Christians, the way we behave when we are angry should change. Second, this demonstrates that the Biblical advice to those who are angry is different from the worldly advice. What we learn from the Bible will not be communicated on the couch of a secular psychiatrist. Nor will it be demonstrated by those with whom we come in contact in the world. What we learn in this verse is different from what we hear every where else. But it is right. Because it is from God.

II. Sins that are not justified even though you have been aroused to anger.

- A. While our secular world may make allowances for “crimes of passion,” I trust that we recognize murder and physical abuse are not allowed despite a person’s anger [**Matthew 5:21ff**]. But I would like us to note several behaviors even Christians sometimes try to justify by referring to **Ephesians 4:26**. By no means should this list be considered exhaustive. But it is a beginning and represents some of the more common behaviors we commit when we are angry.
- B. Explosive fits of rage: **Ephesians 4:31** condemns wrath. In that verse, “wrath” translates the Greek word “thumos”, which carries with it the concept of a short lived explosive anger. It is like the pot of water that hits a certain temperature and suddenly erupts in a boil. But once the heat is removed, the eruption stops. Demonstrating your anger by throwing things or hitting things is condemned. The hollering and yelling of such a fit is also condemned by this verse when Paul demonstrates that Christians are not allowed to “clamor”.
- C. “Venting”: This is similar to the explosive fits of rage. Instead of exploding at a person, some are counseled to go punch a punching bag or a pillow to vent their feelings. Some are told to go into a locked room and scream and holler in order to let off some steam. The Bible condemns such action and instead commands that you control your behavior instead of venting your feelings. **Proverbs 29:11** states, “A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise man holds them back “(NKJV).
- D. Holding grudges: **Ephesians 4:26** itself demonstrates that anger is to be dealt with quickly. Though we may be aroused, we are to behave in such a way that our anger subsides. We are not allowed to hold onto our anger. We are not allowed to nurse our anger. We are not allowed to seethe and simmer in anger for hours, days, weeks, months and years. If we are aroused to anger, then we are to deal with it that day. Do not let the sun go down on your anger.
- E. Vengeance: **Romans 12:17-21** teaches that only God has the authority to take vengeance on anyone. We are to live by the “Golden Rule,” even when we are angry, treating others not in the fashion that they have treated us, but rather in the way we want to be treated (**Matthew 7:12**).
- F. Separation and isolation: God condemns avoiding the source of our anger. He commands us to go to them (**Matthew 18:15**). Instead of isolation, He commands reconciliation (**Matthew 5:24**).
- G. Bitterness: Paul said in **Ephesians 4:31** that we are to put away all bitterness. The biting sarcasm, the cold looks and cold shoulders, the constant feeling of irritation and annoyance, the attitude of mere tolerance that go along with bitterness are all condemned and are not allowed.
- H. Slander and gossip: In **II Timothy 3:3**, slander (malicious gossip) is listed as one of the sins of those who love themselves and pleasure, instead of loving God.
- I. Malice: Paul condemned malice, evil desires and intentions, in **Ephesians 4:31**. When you are angry, you are not even allowed to desire that something bad happen to someone else.
- J. Corrupt speech: In **Ephesians 4:29**, Paul condemned corrupt speech, contrasting it with speech which builds others up. When someone has angered you, you are not allowed to cut them down or speak meanly to them.
- K. Forsaking responsibilities: According to **James 4:17**, when you know what you are supposed to do and do not do it, you are sinning. However, some use anger as an excuse not to do what God has commanded of them. No matter what your husband or wife has done ... No matter what you children or parents have done ... No matter what your employer or employees have done to anger you, you must fulfill your responsibilities and roles in those relationships.

III. How are we allowed to act when angry?

- A. When we are angered, we are allowed to love whoever has wronged us. This will provide our first defense against sin, because the more we grow in love, the slower our wrath will become.

According to **I Corinthians 13:5**, love is not provoked. Additionally, love will help us properly approach a brother or sister who has wronged us, because it will put us in the correct frame of reference. We want to address the sin, not out of some sense of vengeance or punishment, but out of a sincere desire to help our brother or sister go to heaven.

- B. When we are angry, we are allowed to pray. **Ephesians 4:27** claimed that anger can give opportunity to the devil. As demonstrated in the model prayer of **Matthew 6:13**, we should pray to be delivered from the evil one. So prayer is always needed when you have been angered. Additionally, we should pray for whoever has done wrong, that they will repent, following the example of Jesus on the cross (**Luke 23:34**) and Stephen while being stoned (**Acts 7:60**).
- C. When we are angry, we are allowed to remove planks from our own eyes first (**Matthew 7:3-5**). That is, we must look at ourselves and make sure there is nothing hindering our own perception of the problem. Perhaps our own sins are in the way. Perhaps arrogance hinders us from seeing the true problem. Perhaps immaturity keeps us from understanding what is right and what is wrong. Many times we become angry because of our own sins and misperceptions. I know that the times I have had the biggest problems with anger have been when the plank of personal defensiveness was sticking out of my own eye.
- D. When we are angry, we are allowed to grieve over the wrong that has aroused us, just as Jesus did in **Mark 3:5**. When He questioned the Pharisees about healing on the Sabbath and witnessed their hardness of heart, He was not only aroused to anger, but at the same time grieved over their sin. We will only behave properly when, out of a spirit of love, we are motivated to mourn over the sin, even when it has angered us (cf. **I Corinthians 5:2**).
- E. You are allowed to do good to whoever has wronged you. **Romans 12:14** says to bless even those who persecute you. In **Romans 12:17-21**, Paul teaches us to do what is good to those who have done evil to us. In so doing, we will overcome the evil.
- F. You are allowed to speak gently to those who have angered you. **Proverbs 15:1** demonstrates that a soft answer will turn away wrath. Anger will be defused when we speak gently to one another. **Galatians 6:1** says we are to restore a brother in a spirit of gentleness. And in **Ephesians 4:29** our speech is to build others up and give grace to them, even when angry.
- G. When we are angry, we are allowed to rebuke the one who sinned, gently admonishing them to repent and be restored to Christ (**Matthew 18:15; Luke 17:3; Galatians 6:1**). If they refuse to repent, we are allowed to take one or two others with us to rebuke, admonish and testify to the sin. If they still refuse to repent, then the church is allowed to mark and withdraw from them (**Matthew 18:16-17**). But, even at that point, we are not allowed to regard the one who has sinned as an enemy, but to warn him as we would a brother (**II Thessalonians 3:14-15**).
- H. When we are angry, we are allowed to strive for reconciliation. **Matthew 5:23-24** demonstrates that when problems separate brethren, they should reconcile with one another, even before they go to worship God. **Romans 12:18** claims we are to live peaceably with all men. We are allowed to pursue peace between us and those who have wronged us. As part of this, we are allowed to forgive the one who has caused our anger when he repents (**Luke 17:3-4**).
- I. When we are angry, we are allowed to be quick about pursuing these positive behaviors. As **Ephesians 4:26** says, you must not allow the sun to go down on your anger. You are not allowed to simply stay angry.

Conclusion:

Do you know what is the number one problem regarding anger whether in homes, companies, schools or churches? Too many times, even we, as Christians, have granted ourselves permission to sin when we are angry. Instead of controlling ourselves, we too often set at naught God's pattern and do what we want to do. Do not pursue the course dictated by your feelings. Follow the course dictated by God's Word, even when you are angered.