

Don't Trust Your Anger

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Beautiful music that the Lord blesses us with week by week, not only in the instruments but in the words that we are able to sing that have stood the test of time as a testament to the love of the people of God for the word of God and for the Son of God and as we sing these older hymns, we are mindful of the fact that we enter in, we participate in a stream of love of God that has been passed down to us. We are part of something bigger than ourselves as we join in hymns like that and so I'm very grateful for those that make that possible. Thank you.

And as we turn to God's word now this morning, I invite you to turn to Ephesians 4:26 and 27. I want to read the text to begin our time together. Ephesians 4:26 and 27. This will be one of those messages that stick with you, that acts as a check on your mind when things progress during the week and this is a text that we desperately need to take to heart. Ephesians 4:26 and 27 says,

26 BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and do not give the devil an opportunity.

Last time, we saw that Paul as he's beginning to cultivate the spiritual attitudes that will develop unity in the body of Christ, focused on the need for truthfulness and for personal integrity as that which acts as a bind, as that which glues us together. We can grow in our love for one another in the body of Christ when we know that we can trust each other, that when I speak you know that you can believe what I say and vice versa. That there is a cementing impact of truth that operates and becomes very critical to life in the body of Christ. What we're seeing in these passages is more than simply human ethics or human morality on display, it's the way that God wants us to relate to one another in the body of Christ and what he wants us to bring forth out of the fruit of our hearts of those who have been born again. These are natural consequences of belonging to Christ and here this morning in this text, we move into another area of spiritual growth. Lies as we saw last time, disrupt unity and in like manner, anger disrupts unity in the body of Christ as well. It is a dangerous force and we need to be aware of it and to take into account what Scripture says about it.

There is no denying and there is really no competing against the idea that we live in an angry culture. We celebrate rage and hostility and violence collectively in our politics, in

our sports and in our entertainment. Sometimes some of you contribute to that angry culture when someone does something you don't like on the road as it may be. But we just need to be mindful of the fact that we live in an angry culture in addition to living in a deceitful culture as we saw last time. And so as Scripture calls us to step out and to be separate from the world, to be separate from the lies, we need to realize that the whole issue of anger is critical to this process as well. We contribute to the problem when we nurse our grievances as though we were victims of others' actions and the world packages anger and sells it to us as that which would be noble and perhaps something revolutionary and world changing in its impact, but we need to see it all from a different perspective.

We need to see it from the perspective of God's word because Scripture quite to the contrary of what our culture feeds us, Scripture tells us to be suspicious of our anger. You, when you start to feel angry, one of the first things that you do is you justify yourself and you justify the angry sentiments and the angry thoughts and the vengeful things that come to your mind and your initial impulse is to justify those because you think that you're in the right and someone else is in the wrong. What we need to do today is take a lever against that boulder in your mind and dislodge the boulder and place it someplace else. To place what you trust into a different realm because you should not trust your anger whether it is a settled resentment that you are feeling or whether it's simply that impulse that comes up in a moment's time when someone crosses you or something like that. You should not trust that angry spirit, that angry response, as being a good thing, as being a righteous thing, as being a furtherance of your Christian life. The anger that you feel, those impulses that come upon you, rather than leading you into immediate self-justification, you should instead become immediately suspicious of yourself and bring that under control in ways that we are going to see as we walk through this text here this morning.

Look over at Ecclesiastes 7:9. I want to set a little bit of biblical context for us just to get things in the right frame of mind. Ecclesiastes 7, just after the book of Proverbs. Ecclesiastes 7:9 really sets a good tone for what we need to say today. Ecclesiastes 7:9 says, "Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, For anger resides in the bosom of fools." Whereas the world tells you to strike back and get your own and all of that, Scripture says, "Don't be eager for that spirit. Don't be one who runs to anger, who is quick to take offense and quick to strike back and quick to retaliate." It says, "Don't be like that. Don't be eager to be like that." Why? Because a fool is like that and you're not to be fools when you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Turn back a few pages in your Bibles to Proverbs 22. Immediately we see from that passage in Ecclesiastes, "Don't be eager," and so immediately we step back and say, "Okay, this emotion of anger is something to be suspicious of, not something to ride the wave of and let it carry you along." That's one of the first things to see. Proverbs 22:24 and 25 says, not only the angry spirit of men but men with an angry spirit are to be the subjects of your suspicion and separation. Proverbs 22:24 and 25 says, "Do not associate with a man given to anger; Or go with a hot-tempered man, Or you will learn his ways And find a snare for yourself." Anger in others spreads like cancer or, better yet, anger is contagious. Anger is a deadly disease that spreads worse than germs of the plague do and

so when you see a man, when you come to find a man who is given over to anger, who has a short fuse, who is a man who is not to be crossed, you realize that Scripture says there is someone for you to step back and withdraw from because his anger will contaminate you. You will become the recipient of that angry spirit and when you recognize it early on, when you see that, you step back.

I remember one of the first friendships that I had that actually kind of transcended or...all I'm trying to say is this: I was a friend with a guy before I became a Christian and I was a friend afterwards. I don't know why that required such a difficult turn of phrase. But he was an angry man. He was involved in politics at fairly significant levels given what he did. He was an angry man and I remember as a very young Christian just a few weeks old coming to this passage and realizing, "Oh, there is something more important than just friendship and relationship. You actually have to assess relationships and assess people and when you see this dominating characteristic of a quick-tempered man, you go and you find your friends in other places."

Look over at Proverbs 30:33. We've seen it as a general principle. We've seen how anger in others requires our caution and separation. Now it becomes internal and personalized. It becomes a matter of the way that you control your own spirit. Proverbs 30:33 says, "The churning of milk produces butter," over and over again and butter comes out when you're churning raw milk. "And pressing the nose brings forth blood; So," in like manner, in other words, "so the churning of anger produces strife." Scripture is telling you, warning you that when you start rehearsing the wrongs and meditating and rolling over on your tongue and in your mind the wrongs that people have done to you and, "I lost money on this deal and this person said that to me and never did apologize. Do you realize that?" That when you start to see that going on in your heart, realize that the more you feed that, inevitably conflict will come out of that as surely as the dawn follows the night or better stated, as surely as the night follows the dawn. Understand that you do not have the capacity to cherish and turn over anger again and again in your mind without it ultimately spilling over and becoming a conflict later on and so Scripture says just recognize what anger does to you. Recognize the inevitable outcome of it and deal with it now. That's the point. You intervene, as it were, on yourself and say, "Okay, I've got to separate from this angry man and I have to separate from my own bitter thoughts so that, lest that, it would become a matter of strife and spill over." You're kidding yourself, beloved. You are absolutely fooling yourself if you think that you can cherish those anger, bitter feelings and go over them and rehearse them again and again in your mind without there being relational consequences later on. It does not work that way. Anger begins to control you and it spills out in the most unlikely of times and when you see an angry outburst, you can realize that there was anger percolating inside somewhere prior to that.

Well, that makes our text in Ephesians all the more critical for us as we turn back to Ephesians 4:26 and 27. This text here today is given to you by the inspiration of God for your protection. It is given to you for your sanctification. It is given to help you understand how it is that you deal with anger and how you are to control it and we're going to see 3 different principles here today from this text that will give you the ability

to respond to anger in a constructive way and to know that you're dealing with it rightly. And what you have to do as you deal with anger, what you have to do is, first of all, as we said at the beginning, you have to be suspicious of yourself rather than quick to justify yourself and you also have to be willing to take this under control and realize, "There are things for me to do. Now that I have felt this impulse of anger," now you're going to understand by the time we're done today that there is a response for you to take. This is a response that is not optional. These are written as imperatives. These are commands from God. The Lord Jesus Christ speaks to you today in an authoritative way and through his word says, "This is how you as my disciple are to respond to your anger." So we come before this, again, with humility, with a teachable, humble spirit that says, "Lord, I'm prone to anger. I'm prone to this kind of vitriolic response. I need your help. And Lord, as I come to your word, it's my commitment that I'm going to respond with whatever you say."

Now, what can we see from Ephesians 4 in these 2 brief verses? Well, first of all, for our first principle for today is that when the realm of anger, the first thing that you need to do first of all is to keep it blameless. Keep it blameless. This verse opens with a positive and a negative command. Look at verse 26 with me there. It says, "Be angry, and yet do not sin." Be angry. There is a command in the original text about being angry and that gives us a sense that not all anger is sinful. There were times in the ministry of our Lord where he was angry at hard hearts.

Look over at Mark 3 for a moment. Mark 3, and almost all the commentators marked this in the life of our Lord lest we misunderstand what is being said, that there is a place for righteous anger. There is a place for indignation that Scripture makes and as we see in the life of our Lord. You remember in Mark 3, Jesus was in the synagogue and there was a man there whose hand was withered, verse 1. Verse 2, "They were watching Him to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. Jesus said to the man with the withered hand, 'Get up and come forward!'" He is provoking a confrontation here to make a point about righteousness. He says in verse 4, said to those in the audience who were looking for a way to accuse him, he says, "'Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?' But they kept silent." Now, their silence was most unrighteous. It does not take any kind of concession to say, "Surely it must be righteous to do good on the Sabbath." You don't have to make any concessions in order to say, "It is righteous to save a life on the Sabbath," and yet they would not do that. Why? Because they had an ulterior motive. They had a point that they wanted to make. They didn't want to concede anything to Christ lest their position of argument would be diminished and compromised.

What did Jesus do in response to that when they wouldn't even acknowledge the obvious when it comes to righteousness? Verse 5, "After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored." Jesus looked at their hard unwilling hearts, their unwillingness to state even the most axiomatic basic principles of truth and said, "This is not right," and there was an inner response of some manner of anger. It could not

possibly have been sinful because our Lord is a sinless Lord. He's not even able to sin and so he was angered but in some manner there was a righteous dimension to his anger.

Look over Mark 11:15. Jesus "entered the temple and began to drive out those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves; and He would not permit anyone to carry merchandise through the temple. And He began to teach and say to them, 'Is it not written, "MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL THE NATIONS"? But you have made it a ROBBERS' DEN.'" There was a righteous indignation at the corruption of worship in the temple and Jesus comes and literally cleans house, not in a mild, milquetoast sort of way but asserting control over the situation to magnify and to defend the righteousness of God.

So we see from the life of our Lord that anger can be justified when it is expressed at things that God hates. There is a place for indignation at false teaching and wickedness. It can be a powerful motivation. Even speaking for those who teach the word of God, when error rises up and when wicked men distort and twist the word of God, there is a place for the man of God to step up and with a sense of fire in his bones to respond to that and say, "No, that is wrong and here is the truth and we need to honor what God says in response." And that indignation at some crooked, wicked man twisting the things of God for his own financial gain, it is a right thing for a man of God to step up and respond to that. That's just by way of illustration and the righteous indignation becomes that which motivates a man to engage the conflict which he otherwise might not want to engage. Anger that motivates you to act for truth has a righteous place and I believe that's the spirit of what Paul is alluding to here in verse 26 when he says, "Be angry." It's got to be a righteous anger because he couldn't possibly be telling us, "Engage in sinful anger," right? So there's got to be, whatever this anger is, there's got to be some righteous dimension to it.

But even in that, even in that, there is a risk in even righteous anger, a risk that our Lord did not fall into but which you and I are very prone to and, beloved, let's just step back and say it this way: it's one thing to respond to a situation in righteous indignation. As we are going to go along here, what you need to see is this and this is where the rubber meets the road for so many of you, this is where the pot sits on the burner in the kitchen. I don't know, these illustrations just come to my mind sometimes. I have to let them out. Here's what you need to see: the truth of the matter is that not many of us when we're experiencing anger are experiencing anger over false worship and false teaching. You're experiencing anger, you get upset and you start stewing because of something that's been done to you, because of some resentment that you have and that is a completely different realm. And you need to understand something: an angry disposition is not the spirit of Christ. An angry demeanor, a pattern of anger in your heart, is absolutely contrary to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is wrong and it is antagonistic to the very things that Christ stands for. It is contrary to the fruit of the Spirit which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. As you look at the fruit of the Spirit from Galatians 5:22 to 23, it's hard to wedge an angry demeanor into that. In fact, you can't because the realm of the Holy Spirit, the realm of our righteous, glorious Christ, is something different from what our world cultivates in you and what your own

heart would teach you to do if it was not restrained by grace. So we just need to be honest with ourselves and just kind of lay this all out on the table and be honest with ourselves that those of you who are prone to quick tempers, those of you who are prone to anger and raising your voice in your home when you don't get what you want and snapping off at people who displease you, you need to realize that that whole disposition of life, the whole totality of that is something from which you need to repent.

This is the word of God. It really doesn't leave us much room to negotiate on it because Paul quickly qualifies the positive command. I'm going to show you by way of observation something here that I think is really cool in a moment. Paul says, "Be angry." He doesn't expound on that. He doesn't expand on it. He doesn't explain it. In a simple little phrase there, he acknowledges the place of righteous indignation but he goes on and immediately, joined by the word "and," there's not even a comma in the original language, "Be angry and," join these 2 thoughts together, "do not sin." In your anger, do not sin. If you find yourself angry, do not sin. In other words, as soon as you start feeling anger in your heart whether it's righteous or otherwise, immediately you should join together with, "I cannot sin in this situation." I recognize the welling up of this sense of indignation and whether it's righteous or not, immediately join to your thinking on this, "and," join together, matted together, cemented together is this simultaneous thought that says, "and do not sin." You are immediately cautioned, immediately called to the fact that when you find yourself in the spirit of anger, that there is an immediate command upon you, "Do not sin here in what you are finding. Be on guard for anger can produce sin." One commentator says it this way, he says, "We have to make sure that our anger is free from injured pride, spite, malice, animosity and the spirit of revenge."

Now, here's what I promised you, what I think is a really cool observation. Look at the English text with me again. I'm just going to read it and I want you to notice something. "Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger and do not give the devil an opportunity." There are 3 negatives there: do not sin, do not let the sun go down, do not give the devil an opportunity, that's a valid observation but it's not what I want you to really see right here. Notice something those of you that are prone and practiced and skilled at justifying your anger and excusing it in your own mind and to those around you, I want you to notice something really crucial in this text. Paul says, "Be angry." In our English text 2 words. Then he immediately goes and qualifies and restricts and restrains it with everything that follows in the rest of those 2 verses. There are 2 English words that say "be angry" and then in English there are 23 following words that restrict it. In the Greek text, it is one word, "be angry," and there are 16 words that follow that restrict and restrain it. Don't you miss this point. Don't you miss this point: Paul's emphasis here is not on commanding you to be angry over righteous indignation sorts of things, he is restraining and directing and controlling your tendency to anger and giving you the principles of self-discipline and self-control which are necessary for you to respond righteously to it. The whole point here, in other words, for those of you that are prone to anger, the whole point here is not the one Greek word at the start of this verse justifies everything about your angry disposition, the whole point is found in the 95% that follows that is designed to channel this and have you respond to it properly.

So as we read this text, don't let your eyes focus on "be angry" because that's focusing on one word, 2 words in the English, and you see by the weight of portion that Paul gives that he's much more concerned to tell you what to do with it when you have it. That is essential. That numerical proportion should instruct your heart and, brothers and sisters in Christ, friends, boys and girls, people on the internet listening later, listen: you must watch your own demeanor when you start to feel that burning sensation inside. Rather than jumping on the wave and riding that wave of anger wherever it takes you, your job is to get off the surfboard and get to shore where self-control is exercised. And you must recognize that the point of this, the way that this passage is structured is for you to take immediate control of that anger, to get ahead of the curve rather than letting anger run with you. This is essential. Stated differently, use a different word picture: when you start to feel that sense of resentment coming up, understand that silently what's happening is this [knock, knock, knock]. What's happening is when you start to feel anger, even if you haven't sinned just yet in it, understand that sin is right there knocking on the door. That sin is just on the other side of your anger and it is crouching ready to get in just like the Lord warned Cain to get control of his anger over Abel's superior sacrifice, he said, "Because sin is knocking at the door." And what we just have to do is we have to empty ourselves of our love for self and our love and our self-justifying manner in our heart, unteachable hearts, and realize that this is real life and to not think that it doesn't apply to us because it does. Sin is right at the door. It is just on the outer boundaries of those emotions of anger in your heart and most of you have far too much sad experience to know that to be true, don't you? I don't have to explain this to you from Scripture, your past is littered with examples that you could illustrate this from. I'm starting to get mad and boom, out comes the lashes of your tongue on the objects of your displeasure.

So whatever we say about the place of righteous indignation in the Christian life, understand that Paul's point here is to warn us about the dangerous explosive impact of anger so that, so that, so that, purpose clause here, so that you would take control of it and respond to it in the way that your Lord Jesus Christ commands you. Paul was writing as an apostle of Christ. His words are the authority of Christ over your life and this is Christ through his word commanding you, "This is how you must respond to anger," and forfeit, give up, lay down those weapons of self justification that you're so prone to use. There should be, statistically speaking, there should be a number of you within a room of this size and with this many people in the room, there should be a number of you who are just overwhelmed with the sense that God's word is hitting a direct bull's-eye on your life right now.

Sin is knocking on the door. Keep it blameless. How is it then, what does Paul go on to say, what practical help does he give us? You know, he gives us really practical help here. It's remarkable how plain and simple this is. How can you grow spiritually at such times when sin is knocking at the door in your anger? Well, that brings us to our second point this morning. Not only to keep it blameless to make sure that if you are angry you are angry over the right things, over the things that offend God and not simply that which is a personal offense to you. That takes care of 95% of it for most of us. Probably 99% for the rest. You keep it blameless, secondly, you keep it brief. You keep it brief and this is where what we said earlier about anger not being the dominating spirit of the Christian

life becomes so very important. Anger is not meant to be the controlling demeanor in your life as a Christian. And if it's been that way, let me just say it again, say it plainly: you need to repent and turn away from it and disown it because Scripture says to keep it brief.

Look at verse 26 with me again. God says through his word, "Be angry, and yet do not sin." Look at what he says, "do not let the sun go down on your anger." Wow, is that practical. Is that ever an easy thing to grasp and understand. This is a poetic way to warn us against anger and to show us what we do with it. Scripture calls us to a long fuse, not a short one. To be slow to anger, rather than being quick to pop off in your mouth.

Look at the letter to James a little further back in your Bible, just after the book of Hebrews, James 1, as Scripture helps us understand more fully what Paul is saying here. James 1:19 in the context of responding to God's word it says this in verse 19, he says, "This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God." So James says, "Be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." Paul says, "If anger crops up, don't let the sun go down on it." In other words, "Don't carry it over from day to day. Don't give a place to let this become part of the luggage that you carry about with you in life. Settle the day's anger today and go to bed and wake up tomorrow with something new on your mind." The word for "anger" in James is from the same root as here in Ephesians 4.

Beloved, here's the thing to approach this from a different perspective: your anger is a delusion. It is a deluding influence upon you and we have to understand this from Scripture and Paul treats this as very crucial, as something central to the implications of salvation and to realize that your anger is an influence upon your mind and upon your heart that has great potential to deceive you into thinking something that is completely wrong. To deceive you into thinking that you're justified in your retaliation. To deceive you into thinking that this is more important than it really is. It's a deluding influence and therefore don't go there quickly and don't go there repeatedly and don't let it nurse in your heart day after day after day whatever the case that caused it may be. Don't fall into that trap. It's like a net that your heart would throw over you and tangle you up that you don't easily get out of. Scripture just gives us multiple ways to look at this and I'm trying to give you multiple illustrations with which to think about it so that you understand and don't tolerate it in your heart, that you put it to death. Don't fall into the trap of anger. One of the ways that you do that is that you keep it brief.

Now, let me be practical again: if you continually expose yourself to conservative news talk, you are almost certainly breaking this command because those programs live and breathe by keeping you upset. If they taught you to be content with your lot in life and to trust God for what the future holds, then they wouldn't have anything to keep bringing you back. And if you feed yourself a constant steady diet, hours on a day of radio and television that is designed to talk about politics and to get you worked up and, "I can't believe what they're doing here." Beloved, if that's your pattern of life and what you feed

your mind with, I promise you that you are living in violation of the spirit of what Scripture says because those 2 things are on opposite sides of the meter.

Look over at Romans 12. How do you keep it brief? How is it that you could come to the end of the day and lay anger to rest? Romans 12. Follow the news if you must but you end each day with a conscious trust in our sovereign Lord. Romans 12:17, "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible," notice the prohibition on retaliation, never do that. "Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,' says the Lord. 'BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." At the core of that is a recognition of the sovereignty of God and not just the sovereignty of God in the sense that he is in control of everything that happens, God reserves the prerogative of vengeance to himself and it is not your place to exercise vengeance, to take the law into your own hands either in your heart or in the things that you do in order to avenge what you think is wrong. You step back and you say, "I am going to trust this sovereign God who has said that vengeance belongs to him. I'll commit my case to him. I'll rest in him and I'll leave the anger of this day behind me."

Yes, there is a lot of evil in the world. That does not mean that you and I become angry, spiteful, vengeful, hard, bitter people in response and so you don't take justice into your own hands, you trust the Lord for his ultimate vindication, you direct your energy to doing good rather than something destructive in word or deed. God entrusts the sword to the government, not to individuals to act upon for themselves. You need to be mindful of the fact that the Lord places restraints on us when it comes to seeing the wickedness in the society around us, that while we might feel a righteous indignation of it, it's not to seep in and become that by which we view everything else in life and we're not to take matters into our own hands. We're to keep it blameless. We're to keep it brief. And we remember that God is sovereign over these things and he is sovereign in justice and we trust him to exercise vengeance when and how he sees fit and to not substitute our judgment about method or timing for his. And if you've been wronged and it has cost you, maybe in really deep personal relational ways not just financially, you've got to come back here and say, "I'm not meant to cherish this anger. I've got to entrust my case to the Lord. He is good. He is sovereign. He will take care of me in the end and I'll just wait patiently for him and right now I'll lay my head down and quietly rest in peace."

You realize, don't you, you know from personal experience that anger feels pretty sweet on the tongue. Kind of roll it around like a good Lifesaver and you just kind of drink it in. Well, Scripture says don't do that. Realize that all of those emotions of your heart are things that Scripture says, "Stop. Don't do that. Be like this instead." And when we study things like the sovereignty of God and the justice of God and the providence of God, understand that this is one of the practical outworkings. You can rest your heart in the sovereignty of God to such an extent that you don't have to go around being ticked off

about everything that has ever happened. "Wow, I'm just going to trust God to work it out." Do you know what that does? That simplifies life enormously. "Vengeance belongs to him. I'm going to leave it with him and love my Christ." You see, the biblical emphasis for you is not for you to go out and correct every wrong that you see. That is not the biblical emphasis. The biblical emphasis on you and especially from this passage is that you would control your response to what you see in the provocations around you. It's not for you to lash out, it's for you to take the reins of your own heart into hand and say, "Whoa, come back." Don't answer the door. Don't answer that door. Step back from it and live righteously instead.

Paul gives us a third reason, a third way to respond. I'm just going to put it this way: we said to keep it blameless, keep it brief, thirdly, keep it bound. Keep it bound. Now, I'll freely admit that bound is not the perfect word for this third and final point but it alliterates, it starts with "B" like the first 2 do and the reason that's important is that it will help you remember and rehearse these things in your mind and I'm more concerned for your spiritual growth than I am for a perfect expression of my point here. Here's what you need to see and here's what ought to stop you. If nothing has slowed you down yet in your anger in what we have seen from God's word, this ought to do it. This ought to do it: anger opens up the door, opens up the boundaries of your life to – watch this – to Satanic influence. It opens up the door for a Satanic influence on your life and for you to become a Satanic influence in the lives of others as well. Wow, that's what Paul says though.

Go back to Ephesians 4. Ephesians 4:27. As Paul is laying down these principles to control and restrain and direct your anger he says, "Don't sin. Keep it blameless. Don't let the sun go down on your anger. Keep it brief. Don't carry it over." Thirdly, "Do not give the devil an opportunity." Some of you will have in your margin a note that says that the word for "opportunity" can also be translated "a place." Do not give the devil a place. Your anger gives a place for the devil to operate. It gives him a foothold in which to do his work to the diminishment of your sanctification, for you to become an instrument in his hands rather than an instrument in the Lord's hands. Here it is beloved, you have to control your anger. You have to work through these things in a righteous godly way because otherwise Satan finds a place to work in it. So in other words, when the knock comes, when the anger comes and you feel that knock on the door, as it were, it's not just sin on the other side, it's Satan right on the verge of coming in.

Look over at 2 Corinthians. You say, "How does that happen? What does that look like?" Well, that's a very good question. I'm glad you asked. 2 Corinthians 2, another writing from Paul helps us understand the way that this manifests itself and the principle here is something that goes to the very heart of redemption, the very heart of why Christ suffered and bled on a cross. Why did he do that? Why did Christ die on a cross? He died so that sinners could be, what? Forgiven. So that God would have a just basis upon which not to take our sins into account as he deals with us. Forgiveness was the goal of the cross. Forgiveness was this act of self-sacrifice that Jesus did.

Now, watch this, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2:10, he says, "But one whom you forgive anything, I forgive also; for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I

did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ." Why? Why did Paul manifest this gracious, magnanimous, forgiving spirit in the realm of the church? Why did he do that? "So that," verse 11, "no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes." The angry spirit that gives room for the devil is the spirit that runs over into a petty, unforgiving, retaliatory spirit in your personal relationships and Satan takes full advantage of that. When you manifest that hostility and that unforgiving spirit toward those that have wronged you, Satan takes full advantage to obscure and cloud the Gospel of Christ by which you say you have been forgiven. "I have received forgiveness from God but I won't forgive." Scripture condemns that inconsistency. Scripture attributes that kind of inconsistency to the work of Satan. When those who profess the name of Christ are mean-spirited and angry and vengeful, you manifest that which is completely contrary to the Gospel that you say you cherish. How can that be? And somehow in a way that Paul doesn't take the time to explain in much detail, he says that Satanic influence operates through that.

Is that what you want out of your life? Those of you that are angry, bitter? Do you want to be a vessel for the work of Satan? That's the choice that you're making. You see, the fear of the devil should motivate us to confine our anger rather than give way to it in a sinful manner. You feel those emotions of resentment in your heart and you say, "Uh-oh, joined right with that, rather than justifying myself, here's an opportunity. I need to get control of this. I need to be ahead of the curve before this gets away from me and this is much more slippery and much more dangerous than I think so I'm going to keep this blameless. I'm going to make sure that I'm not angry over some wrong that has been done to me. If I'm angry, if I'm ever going to be justified in anger, it's going to be because the name of Christ is being sullied by what happens here. I'm going to keep it brief. I'm going to deal with this and I'm going to trust God in the vengeance of it. I'm going to keep this bound. I recognize that this realm of anger, the Scripture warns us about, 'Don't be eager to be angry. Don't associate with an angry man. Don't churn it around.' I'm just going to step back. I'm just going to step back and I'm just going to let it go because there is something more essential in life. There is something more vital in my heart than correcting this wrong that I see that was done to me or that is going on elsewhere. What's more vital is that I would live a godly life in response to the Savior who laid down his life and shed his blood for me at the cross and that's more important to me than anything that has been done to me."

So I am going to separate myself from the world. Separate myself from sin. Separate myself from the seething anger that I am so prone to because I don't want to be an instrument of Satan, do you? Do you want your unforgiving spirit to cast shadows over the cross? You see, what Paul has done here is he has given us a very practical way to grow as Christians. You watch your heart. The Holy Spirit who, I'll say it one more time, whose fruit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, that's what's to dominate you. That's what's to come out of your life. That's to be what flourishes in your heart as a Christian. The Holy Spirit, not anger, must control you. Anger tempts you to justify yourself. Bounce off of the anger instead and use it as an occasion to trust God and to trust his word.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, may we hate sin and false teaching just like Jesus did and never compromise with it. At the same time, our Lord, help us to keep anger in its place. Teach us not to trust our anger and to follow it wherever it leads us. Instead, our God, let us manifest the joy of the Lord which is our strength. For the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

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