



# Ephesians

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**“Be angry, and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, Ephesians 4:26**

Paul now reaches back to the psalms for a necessary thought concerning his discourse. This is a citation from the Greek translation of Psalm 4:4. Here he uses two different words to describe the emotions. The first is “angry” and conveys the sense of showing “settled opposition.” It “is *positive* when *inspired by God* – and always *negative* when arising from the *flesh*” (HELPS Word Studies). The second is “wrath,” and it conveys the sense of “irritation (exasperation, bitterness) which is provoked, i.e. by someone causing a personal (‘up-close’) sense of anger” (HELPS Word Studies).

Paul says that we are to in fact be angry when it is right and proper to be angry. If we have a godly anger towards something, we are showing a correct attitude, not a negative one. Our anger at the sinful nature is not only anticipated, but it is expected and approved of. It is not sinful to be filled with righteous indignation. However, in our anger we are told “do not sin.” We should not let our anger at the sinfulness of another cause us to sin.

A good example of this is that we are to be angered at the vile conduct of those who oppose God through such things as the support of abortion. As this is a tenet expressly stated, for example, in the platform of the Democrat party of the US, we are to be angry at all democrats for supporting the murder of the unborn. And yet, we are not to allow our anger at them to turn into sin through violence or vulgarity.

Paul then tells us to “not let the sun go down on your wrath.” As noted, this indicates irritation which is provoked. When we allow ourselves to become exasperated to the point where it

consumes us, we lose our direction and our focus. Instead of thinking on the things of God, we think on the things of the fallen world. If we continue in this state, it will eventually push out everything else. And so, in order to keep that from happening, we are to put our irritation aside and not dwell on it.

Paul uses a known custom of the times to demonstrate how to do this. The Pythagoreans bound themselves to find reconciliation to their differences before the sun set. They would shake hands, or find some other token which would bring about peace. Thus, the bitterness that could well up in the night would be quieted before it could get out of control. This is a sentiment not unlike the second half of Psalm 4:4 –

“Be angry, and do not sin.

Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still. Selah”

In meditating on what is good, pleasing, holy, and pure, the things which caused us to get riled up will fade away.

Life application: Carrying around bitterness for an extended period of time will inevitably cause harm to the one carrying it. It may also result in physical acts which will later be regretted. The more we carry such anger, the more rash and impulsive we are likely to become.

**...nor give place to the devil.** Ephesians 4:27

The word *diabolos*, or devil, means “slanderer.” In this case, it is used with an article to indicate “The Slanderer,” or “The Devil.” He is recognized as the same as Satan, a name which Paul uses throughout his writings. The name “Satan” describes one of his methods of working evil; he is “The Accuser.” Thus he stands accusing man before God, and he also strives to set man against man. The title, “The Devil,” describes the one who introduces enmity into man through slander.

To “give place to the devil” is to allow him to work his wickedness in one’s life. It is allowing the heart to be influenced by his evil intent. This is done through a variety of means. Paul has already addressed putting away lying, and not allowing the sun to go down on one’s wrath. If we fail to do these things, the devil will certainly seize his opportunity to enter the situation and cause trouble to arise.

He will continue with a list of things which could allow the devil to find a place in our heart. In the end, if it we do something opposed to God and His word, we are allowing ourselves to be opened up to the work of the devil. In fixing our eyes on Jesus, and in contemplating the word of God day and night, we will have our hearts open to Him and shut to the devil.

Life application: The Bible acknowledges that the devil and demons are real. As this is so, we need to heed the commands and exhortations of the Bible lest we get sideswiped by these miscreants. And the only way to do this is to know what these commands and exhortations state. Read and know your Bible.

**Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with *his* hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.** Ephesians 4:28

In the Christian world, we might ask, “Why does Paul even bother with this? Isn’t it an obvious thing?” The answer is that among Christians, stealing is certainly known as something which is wrong to do. And even among those who are not Christians, but who know the general precepts of the Bible, it is known that Christians look down on stealing. However, this is not a universally applied precept, even in today’s world.

It is true that pretty much every society has rules against stealing, but the individual is often brought up in a culture where it is normal to take things that don’t belong to them, even without a second thought. If they don’t get caught, their conscience simply ignores what they have done. They have been seared to the concept of considering this as moral wrongdoing.

In the case of those in Ephesus, this was certainly the case. Paul saw this common trait of the people and he knew that they lacked the proper moral guidelines to govern their conduct. It may have been a law in the Roman Empire to not steal, but in the lesser cultures, they lived by those norms which they had always lived by. And so, Paul needed to include this thought to show them that the moral expectation of Christian living was not to steal.

And further, he goes beyond the thought of prohibiting it by giving them a positive precept to replace their prior conduct. Instead of stealing, they should instead labor. Such a person should find a way of “working with *his* hands what is good.” This sets stealing off as the opposite of good. It is contrary to what is morally sound. And then, to further strengthen his words, he goes beyond simply doing what is good for self by supplementing the “good” of which work provides even to showing that not only should it take care of one’s personal needs, but it is proper in order “that he may have something to give him who has need.”

He has, in just one thought, gone from harming others in order to promote the welfare of self, to helping self, and to the additional plus of being able to help others. In stealing, there is actually only harm to all concerned. In working for what is good, there is the possibility of a double blessing. One can enrich himself, and he can also take care of others who are in need.

As another positive benefit of adhering to these words now, there is surely a heavenly reward awaiting those who adhere to God’s word, who are diligent in laboring honestly with their hands, and also who are willing to help those who are in need. All in all, great things can be expected, and are sure to result, from applying the precepts found in this verse.

Life application: A life without productive work is one which will lead to all kinds of troubles. The old saying, “Idle hands are the devil’s playground” is correct. If we don’t fill our time with productivity, we will fill it with that which is detrimental to ourselves and others. Therefore, let us remember the words of Moses –

“And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us,  
And establish the work of our hands for us;  
Yes, establish the work of our hands.” Psalm 90:4

**Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.** Ephesians 4:29

What a difficult verse to properly and continuously apply to our lives! One cannot turn on the TV, sit in a restaurant, or do almost any other thing, without being surrounded by corrupt words. And yet we are asked to, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of” our mouths. The word for corrupt in the Greek is one which indicates that which is rotten, useless, or depraved. It is used in Matthew 7:17 to describe rotten fruit.

Our words are not to bear such corruption. Rather they are to be that which “is good for necessary edification.” This is set in complete contrast to that which is corrupt. Things that are corrupt sink into themselves. They stink, and they become weak and unable to be held together any longer. However, that which edifies is that which builds up. It provides strength and it causes things to bind together in a stronger way.

This is what we are admonished to do towards those around us. What the focus is on is not our vertical relationship with God so much as our horizontal relationship with our fellow believers and even with those who are not believers. In our speech, we are to form our words so “that it may impart grace to the hearers.”

For believers, we will keep from bringing them down, or from causing them to stumble in their walk with the Lord. For non-believers, we are to be an example of that which is right, which is honorable, and that which points to Christ. If our speech is foul and corrupt, we will only cause them to see such loathsome conversation as the norm among Christians. Thus, there will be no truly visible distinction between us and the rest of the world. To “impart grace to the hearers” is to lead them to that doctrine which saves, meaning Christ. If our words are not in accord with the righteousness of God which is found in Christ, then our hearers will not understand how they are to also properly conduct themselves in a holy and righteous manner.

Life application: Wholesome speech is a hard thing to find in the world today. Because of this, and because we are susceptible to assimilating that which we are constantly immersed in, how easy it is for our own speech to become corrupted and just like the rest of the world. It takes real effort to not allow this to happen, but it is what we are admonished to pursue.

**And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Ephesians 4:30**

A list of negative things which we are exhorted to avoid has been given since verse 25. Along with them have been given contrasts which we should engage in. This verse is now introduced to show the effect of participating in such negative actions. And further, the negatives will continue for the next few verses. They will likewise contain positives to contrast them. In avoiding the negatives, and in acting out the positives, we will “not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.”

In these words, a much fuller description of the Holy Spirit is given than is normally introduced. It more literally reads, “The Spirit, the Holy [of] the God.” It is an expression of the Personhood of the Spirit within the Godhead. This expression is further bolstered by the term “grieve.” It is a clear indication that the Spirit is not an “active force” as is claimed by the heretical Jehovah’s Witnesses. Rather, it indicates Personhood. An “active force” cannot be grieved.

Understanding this, it is still to be noted that the Spirit of God cannot actually be grieved by our actions. Instead, the words are used to show the type of grieving that a friend would endure if they were negatively violated by our actions; the kind of behavior which would cause such grief. Paul is saying that we are not to act in a manner which would cause a close and beloved friend to be grieved by what we do.

Immediately following up these words, Paul next says of “the Spirit, the Holy [of] the God,” that it is He “by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” The Spirit is the Seal of our guarantee of redemption. This is more fully explained in Ephesians 1:13, 14 –

“In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”

These words of Paul once again show us that salvation is an eternal decree of God. As noted in Ephesians 1, if God seals us with His Holy Spirit as a guarantee, and if we can lose that, then –

- 1) It was not a very good guarantee.
- 2) It is of our effort and not of God that we are saved.
- 3) God made a mistake in sealing us with His “guarantee.”

As none of these are possible, then our salvation, at the moment we believe and are sealed with the Spirit, is a done deal. Though attacked often as a false doctrine, the terms “eternal salvation,” or “once saved always saved” are biblically supportable and correct. The teaching

of the possibility that one can “lose” their salvation is discrediting of the work of Christ, exalting of one’s own efforts in the place of what God has done, and it calls into question the very integrity of the work of all three members of the Godhead. It is unclear thinking, contrary to the words of Scripture, and is to be ignored and refuted by those who trust that God is fully capable of saving us, and keep on saving us, despite ourselves.

Life application: If you are saved, you are saved.

**Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.** Ephesians 4:31

Paul has just stated that we are to “not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.” This list is certainly given to include those things which would cause this to occur. He is admonishing us that these things will keep us from being filled with the Spirit. Instead, they are an indication of walking in a carnal way which is opposed to a Spirit-led life. The list will go on into the next chapter as well.

He begins with “bitterness.” The word “bitterness” is a good translation of the Greek. It indicates having an embittered or resentful spirit. We are to avoid this and to instead let go of those things which well up and poison our inner selves.

“Wrath” is a word which signifies “getting heated up” or “breathing violently.” It is a “passion-driven behavior, i.e. actions emerging out of strong impulses (intense emotion)” (HELPS Word Studies).

“Anger” comes from a word indicating “to swell.” It “proceeds from an internal *disposition* which *steadfastly* opposes someone or something based on extended personal exposure, i.e. solidifying what the beholder considers *wrong* (unjust, evil)” (HELPS Word Studies).

“Clamor” signifies loud wailing which is exhibited with great emotion; screaming or shrieking. It would even go to wailing in non-human sounds as if possessed by a demon. Just imagine the crazy person at Walmart who yells incoherently at the checkout counter because there aren’t three candy bars of the same type on hand.

“Evil speaking” is the Greek word *blasphémia*. It indicates abusive language, and thus blasphemy. It “‘switches’ right for wrong (wrong for right), i.e. calls what God *disapproves*, ‘right’ which “exchanges the truth of God for a lie” (HELPS Word Studies).

Paul notes that these things are to “be put away.” We are to not act in such a manner as described by these malignant attitudes. And further, he says that includes “all malice.” In other words, “malice” describes the underlying attitude of evil. It is inherent evil which is present, even if it is not seen in an outward expression. Those evil things which we harbor, even inside, need to be quenched as we walk in newness of life in the Spirit.

Life application: Imagine that someone is filming you as you have a violent outburst described in the above words. How would you feel if it was presented to the world? The Lord is there, seeing all we do. And therefore, how much more should we want to not act in such inappropriate ways.

**And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.** Ephesians 4:32

Q: How did Christ forgive you? Think about that and this will be addressed as we go on.

In this verse, Paul contrasts the words of the previous verse. Instead of bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking, we are to be –

- 1) Kind to one another. The Greek word translated as “kind” “describes what *God* defines is *kind* – and therefore also *eternally* useful! ‘We have no adjective in English that conveys this blend of being *kind and good* at the same time’ (M. Vincent).”
- 2) Tenderhearted. The word is used only twice in the NT, here and in 1 Peter 3:8. It is a combination of the words “good” and “guts.” The visceral organs were considered the seat of emotions, and so the guts are used as our modern term “heart” is used.
- 3) Forgiving one another (qualified by “even as God in Christ forgave you.”) To be forgiving is to overlook that which offends, setting it aside and not picking it back up again. When an offense occurs, how we deal with it will define how Christ-like we ourselves are becoming.

The question above now needs to be addressed, because it is a part of the words which Paul has given us for the rule and guide of our lives. And so, “How did Christ forgive you?” There are several aspects which scholars focus on. Each of them is correct and should be applied in our forgiveness.

- 1) Forgiveness should be unmerited. If someone comes to you and asks pardon, you should be willing to give it without strings attached. God forgave us in Christ without any strings attached. He simply cancelled our sin debt.
- 2) Forgiveness should be complete. If someone comes to you and asks pardon, you are to completely forgive them of their offenses. In Christ, God has forgiven every sin without exception.
- 3) Forgiveness is to be permanent. When pardon of an offense is requested, it is to be forgiven and forgotten. It is not to be taken up again at a convenient time in order to require more of the person. It is to be pushed out of the mind and forgotten.

Having said these things, this verse is one of the most abused verses in Scripture by those who want to lord the precept of forgiveness over others. There is a common element to each of the three points mentioned concerning forgiveness (and any others that may be considered)

which is almost always overlooked. John Gill makes the immense mistake of stating the following in his analysis of this verse –

“...that is, fully and freely, and from their hearts; and so as to forget the offences, and not to upbraid them with them hereafter; yea, they should forgive them before they repent, and without asking for it, and that for Christ's sake...” John Gill

The question is, “How did Christ forgive you?” The answer is, “I asked Him to forgive me, and I was forgiven.” There is an action following an action. And yet, people overlook the obvious and state that we must forgive everyone, unconditionally, and at all times, and even before they acknowledge their offense. This is not how God forgave us in Christ. To state that it is leads to the heresy of universalism. God forgives all sin *potentially*; He does not forgive all sin *actually*. Only when one comes to Him through Christ are they then forgiven.

There is not a blanket waiver of all sins which has been unconditionally handed out to humanity. Rather, there is a blanket waiver which must be received by the offender. Never let any person tell you that you must forgive everyone without conditions because it is what Christ has done. That is absolute heresy. When someone who offends you comes and asks for pardon, you are to pardon them. But until they come to you for pardon, they cannot actually be forgiven; only potentially. Get your boxes right and don't be a Christian “punching bag” for the depraved of the world to beat upon you at will.

Life application: Forgive others as Christ has forgiven you. To understand what this means, re-read the comments above.