

Righteous Anger

Agape (love) is a very powerful emotion. It can dominate thoughts, motives, and deeds. Anger is also a very dominating emotion—and, like love, can control what we think and do. The difference is, *agape* focuses outwardly, seeking the wellbeing of others, whereas anger only satiates a desire to hurt others while consuming the soul. Anger is the foundation for revenge and destruction. Anger is selfish, only wanting to satisfy a lust for position, power, wealth, gain, and advantage.

But what about “righteous anger”? Certainly the Bible has many examples of God’s anger. Surely there is a time and place for God’s people to show proper anger. Take, for example, this scripture: “[When] **you become angry**, do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger” (Eph. 4:26).

This appears to tell us how to be angry without sinning by assuaging our anger before the end of the day. But is that what this scripture means? What about situations that stir up anger and cannot be resolved in a day? There are many circumstances that can plague us for much more than a day. If someone maligns our reputation at work or robs our home, the impact can continue for a long time. So how does the above scripture apply in those situations? Since God’s word does not contradict itself, there must be other scriptures that either uphold or better explain Ephesians 4:26.

First, let’s take a look at some additional passages:

“But now, you should also **put off** all *these* things: **wrath, indignation, malice**, blasphemy, *and* foul language from your mouth” (Col. 3:8).

“**Cease from anger**, and **forsake wrath**; do not fret yourself, it leads only to evil” (Psa. 37:8).

“Now the **works of the flesh** are manifest, which are *these*: ... **hatred**, strifes, jealousies, **indignations**, contentions...” (Gal. 5:19-20).

“The discretion of a man **puts off his anger**; and *it is* his glory to **pass over a transgression**” (Prov. 19:11).

“Because man’s **wrath does not work out God’s righteousness**” (James 1:20).

“Beloved, **do not avenge yourselves; rather, leave [sheath] *this* to God’s wrath**; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine! I will recompense,” says *the Lord*” (Rom. 12:19).

This last passage means to “sheath” one’s anger—just as a sword is put into a scabbard when it is *not* to be used. There is no uncertainty in these scriptures. They are all unified in the theme of putting away and ceasing from anger. Neither is there anything about so-called “righteous anger.” In fact, that phrase is *nowhere* to be found in the Bible.

So, is there any situation in which anger is acceptable? “Or do you despise the riches of **His [God’s] kindness and forbearance and longsuffering**, not knowing that the graciousness of God leads you to repentance? But you, **according to your own hardness and unrepentant heart, are storing up wrath** for yourself against *the day of wrath* and revelation of God’s

righteous judgment, Who will render to each one according to his own works” (Rom. 2:4-6).

The answer to whether or not there is an “acceptable” kind of anger, or there is an appropriate time for it, is reflected in this scripture. The fact that God forbears with us and suffers long with us so that He might lead us to repentance and eternal life does *not* give us the authority to judge others. So why would we think we have the right to be angry at others when they offend us? Only God can judge righteously and He promises to avenge His people. Notice that there is a *day of wrath* coming. This is not a day of *our* wrath but a day of God’s wrath. When we get angry, are we not seeking to satiate *our* anger?

But what about Ephesians 4:26? Doesn’t it imply that *some* form of anger is acceptable? The answer lies in the source of Paul’s statement, because he is quoting Psalms 4:4: “Tremble, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah.” The word *tremble* means to “quiver with extreme emotion, especially anger or fear.” Paul quoted this scripture but said “be angry, and sin not.”

The psalmist says that when you are angry you are to “commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still.” He is, in essence, saying: “The things you say in your heart, be sorry for them upon your bed.”

Anger produces higher levels of adrenaline and affects our muscles, heart, and mind, which produce physical responses and negative thoughts. As we ponder our thoughts and feelings of anger at night upon our bed, we are to “be still.” This is the exact opposite of being angry. When angry, we are at a minimum agitated in our minds and bodies. To avoid sinning because of anger, we must take hold of the anger and establish forbearance, peace, quiet, and calm within our hearts. In doing so, we avoid sin!

The Scriptures are clear that we must *put away* anger because *all* anger is a work of the flesh. There is no such thing as “righteous anger”—except with God.

There is no question that everyone feels anger at times. Of all people, Paul knew anger at times, as did the “sons of thunder” who wanted to call down fire on a city (Luke 4:51-56). When Paul quoted Psalms 4:4 in Ephesians 4:26, he said, “Do not let the sun go down on your anger.” He was not giving us a timetable for how long to remain angry; instead he was telling us to *control* and *manage* our anger. Paul was a man who reacted with anger in his earlier years, but scripture shows that he later learned to replace anger with love. Paul’s warning to us was that anger needs to be dealt with quickly and not be allowed to fester day after day.

So what is Psalms 4:4 telling us? Read the next verse: “Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the LORD” (verse 5).

Ephesians 4:26 and Psalms 4:4 are both telling us that when we have feelings of anger in our hearts we are to commune with God and ask for peace and comfort—to replace the anger. Let Him, who has the authority for all judgment and promises to exact vengeance, help you manage such feelings. Prayer is a sacrifice (Psa. 141:2; Hosea 14:2; Heb. 13:15); therefore, pray for the “**peace of God**, which surpasses all understanding”—which “shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7).

Paul knew exactly what he was saying in Ephesians 4:26, and he doesn’t contradict any other scriptures. This is why, just five verses later, he said this: “**Let all bitterness, and indignation, and wrath, and clamor, and evil speaking be removed from you, together with all malice**” (Eph. 4:31).

God doesn’t want our hearts filled with anger *at any time*—but to have His peace in us. He promises that peace will rule in our hearts if God’s *agape* is in us. “Peace I leave with you; **My peace I give to you**; not as the world gives do I give *it* to you. Let not your heart be troubled,

nor let it fear” (John 14:27). “But flee youthful lusts; and **pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace** with those who are calling on the Lord out of a pure heart” (II Tim. 2:22).

Colossians three is a beautiful and encouraging message on putting away anger. All anger leads to unrighteousness because it is a selfish and destructive emotion. Instead, God wants us to have His peace in the depths of our hearts and minds. “Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so also you *should forgive*. And above all these things *put on* love, which is *the* bond of perfection. And **let the peace of God rule in your hearts**, to which you were called into one body, and be thankful” (Col. 3:13-15).

Anger is like a sword worn on our belt. Even though we sometimes are tempted to draw that sword, we must have the self-control to keep it sheathed and refrain from using it. A sheath is a covering. Anger is something that shouldn’t be found among God’s people. We must strive to put away anger, and we do that by sheathing or covering our anger with God’s Spirit of *agape* and peace. In doing so, we allow God to have *His* judgment on *His* day of wrath.