

Discovering Our Purpose
“Be angry but do not sin”
(Eph. 4:26-27)

Intro: As we study each week about God’s purpose I hope that there is an emerging realization of what God had in mind when he planned the church. Paul in Ephesians sets before us the noble walk to which we are called in order that we might enjoy the wealth God planned for us.

Walking the walk means that we are not to live as the world around us, but in contrast to the world, not in the futility and darkness of human wisdom but in the purpose and light of divine revelation; not with callous hearts but with hearts sensitive to the will of God and ready to be transformed by it.

Further we have learned that walking the walk means putting aside the old man and putting on a new man modeled after the Lord. That can very well be stated in contrasting terms. Thus Paul says, “Lay aside false and speak truth every man with his neighbor for we are members of one another”.

This morning let’s consider another statement that may at first puzzle us; but is an important part of the Christ-like character. “Be angry; yet do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your wrath. And do not give the devil an opportunity”

Be angry and do not sin

Paul borrows his wording from Ps. 4:4. In that psalm David speaks of wicked men who did not honor what was right, v. 2. They were a source of dishonor to God and a source of mistreatment to His people. They are the kind of people that David said make you “quake” with anger and keep you up at night thinking about how they have acted. But David warns his readers that such anger should not be allowed to lead us in the wrong direction. v. 4-5 Paul simply borrows the OT principle of righteousness and encourages us to walk the same walk.

Some important distinctions:

Paul did not mean to legitimize all anger. Some of it is just plain selfish, egotistical tirade. Such should be put away! (More later) But there are things we are justified in being angry about.

Jesus was angry at the misuse of God's house (Jn. 2:17), of the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (Mk. 3:2, 5). This anger grows out of our sense of the honor of God and his will.

Like Jesus we may be righteously indignant about the abuse of God’s truth in society or even in religious circles. In addition, we may be justifiably angry at the mistreatment we experience at the hands of someone who has wronged us.

There are some people who have so little conviction that nothing ever bothers them. They just smile their way through the world because they have no starch in their convictions. If sin and wicked don't upset us, we may have reason to question how serious we are about truth.

Even this legitimate anger can be misused. It cannot be expressed in a sinful way. Be angry and sin not! It occurs to me that there are many areas where we might be truly indignant with a holy anger that may lead us to sin.

Apparently Timothy McVey's anger over the governments' handling of the Waco situation led him to blow up a building in Oklahoma city killing dozens of innocent people and children. Pro-choice activists have been known to murder doctors by taking justice into their own hands against these people who are wrongly taking human lives.

How many times are we tempted in anger to behave just as the person who has made us angry?! We need to remember that a sin provoked by anger is just as wrong as one committed in intentional hatefulness.

Cf. Rom. 12:17-21 It is so easy to justify wronging others because we have been wronged in some way.

The world commonly lives by this rule. "He had it coming" "He did it to me first" "I don't get mad; I get even!"

Cf. The truck driver who was roughed up in the restaurant by a couple of "hell's angels" types.

Someone else's wrong never gives us the right to do wrong! Instead the Psalmist urges two important principles:

Offer the sacrifice of righteousness. We need to keep doing right. Rather than act on emotional impulse we need to simply perform the studied obligation of the word of God.

Trust in the Lord. God is still in control even when evil men have their way with innocent people; and God is perfectly capable of handling any person who thinks he can defy His power!

No one illustrates this patient reserve more perfectly than the Lord himself! Cf. 1 Pet. 2:24ff; And thus Peter later urges us in 1 Pet. 4:19

Do not let the sun go down on your anger and do not give the devil an opportunity, v. 27.

These two warnings are appropriate here. They help us carry out the preceding exhortation. The first says, "Deal with anger speedily. Don't allow it to fester!"

This exhortation urges us to deal with problems day to day and not to accumulate hard feelings or ill-will. If there is a problem with someone, deal with it and get back on good terms with them. Otherwise our "righteous" indignation may become unrighteous bitterness!

Brooding over real or imaginary wrongs has many harmful effects:

Postpones loving associations and creates alienation in relationships

Impairs our ability to forgive. The longer we hold to a grudge or problem the harder it is to turn loose.

Makes future resolutions more difficult

Punishes the one who holds the grudge. Cf. The farmer and the mules.

Infects others (Heb. 12:15)

Don't give the devil opportunity! Paul knew that the more we allow anger to reside in our hearts the easier it is for Satan to find a door into our lives. Isn't it amazing how being zealous for what is right can easily be perverted into something wrong! Even when we may be in the right, our attitudes can be corrupted and we become filled with pride and even mean-spiritedness toward those that we think are in the "wrong". I have been amazed at some of the obvious animosity that has developed among brethren who get in a congregational fuss (raising their voices or even coming to blows) or between preachers who get in a "preacher war" in the papers (and who write slanderous letters about one another!). Story about the death of the rattlesnake.

Conclusion: Brothers and sisters, "Be angry, and sin not!" It's God's purpose for us all. It is how we glorify him in this sinful world. It is how we follow Jesus Christ! It is how we will become one in Christ. It is how we bring peace and sanity to all our relationships. If we could all practice these exhortations, how different our homes would be, our jobs, our marriages. It is difference that marks a Christian from a non-Christian.