

Biblical Help for the Anger in All of Us, Part 2

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on February 20, 2011

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Ephesians 4 (NASB95) ¹ *Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,* ² *with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,* ³ *being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

... ²² *that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit,* ²³ *and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,* ²⁴ *and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.* ²⁵ *Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE of you WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another.* 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.* ²⁸ *He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.* ²⁹ *Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.* ³⁰ *Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.* ³¹ *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.* ³² *Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*

1. Defining your anger (Eph. 4:26-32)

Robert Jones, in his book *Uprooting Anger*, discusses how to distinguish anger and sin (v. 26):

‘While an offending spouse, rebellious teen, or unfair boss can tempt (not cause) an anger response, you must ask yourself some key questions: Are you angry because of what the person did to you, or what he or she did to your Savior? Whom do you regard as the one most offended – you or Jesus? In the midst of your heated emotion, are you consumed with yourself or with God? Does your indignation arise because God’s name is dishonored, or because your pride has been hurt? Righteous anger arises because of the other person’s sin against God, not because of your personal hurts or desires [to get back] ... “Sure I was angry,” declared Clarence, “but I had a right to be angry.” ... [But] his claims of “righteous anger” in response to his teenager’s disobedience merely covered his own ungoverned wrath. How so?

He had viewed his daughter [getting in the way of having] his world convenient and orderly ... she did not fit his tidy agenda. When she failed to live by her dad’s script, he became angry. The fact that she was also failing to live by God’s Word was of only marginal importance to Clarence at the time ... he was anything but Christlike in how he responded to his daughter ... “It was all about me, not her,” [or the Lord] he later confessed.

Once Clarence repented of his sinful anger and his self-deception [in rationalization] he could minister more effectively to his daughter. And his wife became more supportive. In fact, that ministry began the day he humbly asked them both to forgive him, not only for his outbursts but also for rationalizing them.’¹

Now verse 28 is not directly about anger, but do you see any principle in this verse that tells us about true biblical change?

²⁸ *He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.*

(Gets to heart change, and heart motivation, not mere behavior)

v. 31 has the “PUT OFF” of all forms of anger

“Bitterness” – refers to attitude

“anger and wrath” – deal with disposition (essentially synonyms)

“shouting and abusive language, evil speaking” – deal with the manner of speech (note loud words is only one form of anger)

“malice” – deals with intention, may not be obvious or outward

v. 32 has the “PUT ON” of righteous replacements

Be kind – not just a matter of not being angry, being kind

Tender-hearted – change of heart, not just a change in behavior

Forgiving as God in Christ has you

(Dr. Street will cover forgiveness and conflict resolution this coming weekend)

*This is where the gospel is essential to true transformation

Various forms of anger in *Respectable Sins*, by Jerry Bridges:²

- **Resentment** (anger held on to; internalized, nursing its wounds, dwelling on the ill-treatment)
- **Bitterness** (animosity, ill will, “reaction to real or perceived wrong when the initial anger is not dealt with ... bitterness frequently occurs within a local church family [or biological family]. Someone is ill-treated in some way, or at least she thinks she has been. Instead of seeking to resolve the issue, she allows her hurt to fester and over time becomes bitter ... regardless of the actual or perceived ill-treatment, bitterness is never a biblical option”)
- **Enmity and hostility** (‘usually expressed openly ... speech toward or about the object of the animosity ... usually spreads its poison outward to involve other people’)
- **Grudge** (desire to get back, which he may like to rehearse in his mind even if he never takes action to actually do it)
- **Strife** (open conflict or turmoil between parties, “church fights ... family feuds”)

Bridges adds ‘it often occurs between self-righteous Christians who never consider the possibility that their own attitudes or heated words contribute to the strife. In their minds, it is always the other party who is in the wrong and is causing the strife ... Sinful words do hurt, especially if they come from someone close to us, but we can choose whether or not they make us angry. We can absorb the hurt as real hurt without becoming angry at the person who spoke the hurtful words ... “[Love] ... keeps no record of wrongs” (1 Corinthians 13:5, NIV). Do you tend to file away in your mind wrongs done to you? This is a sure road to bitterness.

The statement, “I can forgive, but I can’t forget,” simply isn’t true. If you keep rehearsing in your mind old hurts that occurred months or even years ago, you haven’t forgiven.

You are simply feeding your bitterness. To keep no record of wrongs means we cease to bring them up to ourselves or to another party ... we don't keep actively bringing it up and feeding on it. And it also means that if it does come to our minds involuntarily, perhaps triggered by another incident, we immediately dismiss it. We do not give it a chance to gain a foothold in our conscious thinking.³

Look at Ephesians 4:23. How does the biblical change take place? (starts with *renewing of our mind* – notice how that's sandwiched in-between v. 22, laying aside old self and its lusts or desires, and v. 24 putting on new self – it starts inward before moving outward)

2. Discerning your heart

Think of your last conflict or a recurring conflict or contention you have or area where your anger comes out. What would you say the source of your anger was last time you were angry? Who or what would you say caused the last quarrel or what made you angry? "It was my spouse, or my kids, or so-and-so," you say, "they did this, and they know that makes me angry, and they keep doing it." Or "it was the traffic," or "I'm just under a lot of stress at work," or "it's because of this or that, or him or her, what happened ..." Is that your final answer?

James 4:1–2 (ESV) ¹ *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?* ² *You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.*

James 4:1–2 (NAS) ¹ *What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members?* ² *You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.*

James 4:1–2 (NIV) ¹ *What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?* ² *You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight ...*

Paul Tripp says we need to 'understand and confess ... People aren't my problem. Situations are not my problem. Circumstances are not my problem. Locations are not my problem. My problem is in my heart ... [but] I actually want to believe ... my biggest problem is outside of me, not inside of me. I want to think that it's my kids, my wife, my neighbors, my boss ... But that, brothers and sisters, is a very dangerous heresy, because when you are able to convince yourself that your deepest, greatest problems in life exist outside of you, you'll quit being a seeker after the transforming grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. But we all ease our consciences with this heresy, telling ourselves that we said what we said only because of what someone said or did to us. We tell ourselves that our problem is not us, but them ... Are you prepared to make this essential confession with me: "I am my greatest ... problem. The greatest difficulty, the greatest danger, and the everyday traps ... that we all fall into all exist inside of me, not outside of me." ...

It's only when you and I stand before our Redeemer and are humbly willing to say, regardless of the flawed people that you live with and the fallen world that is your address, that you are your greatest ... problem, that you are heading in a direction of fundamental biblical change⁴

A. Recognize your inner desires – the ROOT problem

God's Word says the "source" or "cause" of your conflicts is "your desires" (NIV) or "passions" or "desires for pleasure" (NKJV). And when you don't get it that's the real root cause for conflicts and quarrels, the heart of the problem. The source of all your conflicts and quarrels is inside you, not anything or anyone outside of you. The real cause is in you. My problem is in me, not outside. This gets to the source of our struggles, not just the symptoms.

Conflict or quarrels can always be traced someone's personal desires being interrupted (it could be as simple as a desire not to be interrupted) and if that person's heart is ruled by pleasure-seeking, if the kingdom of God is not conquering the kingdom of self, the battle already lost inside is going to result in a battle on the outside. The "desires" here aren't necessarily sinful, but they are desired to a sinful degree, they have been elevated to the place only God should be, which in biblical language is called an idol. To see the heart of anger problems, we have to see the problem in our heart.

B. Repent of your inordinate desires – the REMEDY for that moment

The Puritans used the term "inordinate desire" for this problem, and the surest way you know when a desire has become inordinate is by how you respond if you don't get it. Do you sin when you don't get what you want, or do you sin *in order to get* what you want (manipulation, insinuation, intimidation, provocation)?

Lou Priolo: 'We have angry conflicts with one another because our pleasures (desires which are not necessarily sinful in and of themselves) have become so intense that they are at war within our members. The term to "*wage war*" is a word that has as its root the idea of being "encamped." When our desires (as good as they may be) become so strong that they "*camp out*" in our hearts, those desires (as good as they may be) become sinful, idolatrous desires; not because they are sinful desires in themselves, but because they are desired *inordinately*. Our hearts covet them so intensely that we are willing to sin (war and fight) either in order to obtain them or because we are not able to obtain them.'⁵

The problem is not desires in and of themselves, ex:

- husband's desire for a little relaxation when he comes home
- wife's desire to have some help around the house or kids behave
- either of their desires for romance or intimacy with the other
- a desire for marriage by those who are single
- a desire for understanding, respect, or even your preferences
- a desire for a particular day or evening to go a particular way

You say, "What, is that such a bad thing?" Not necessarily, but it can be a bad thing, or it can become a bad thing, if that desire is a big thing, bigger and stronger than your desire to glorify God and serve others. When the thought "it would be nice to have if God would graciously allow today" is replaced with "I must have ... I deserve ... I need ... now ... or else there's going to be war!" When desires become demands, and things we would like become things we lust after with insatiable craving ... a fight's coming on.

And when something or someone interrupts or interferes or doesn't allow us to get that desire, let the war games begin. And when we're in the battle, our natural flesh assumes the problem is whoever or whatever is keeping us from our desire, but God's Word turns that upside down and says our desire is the problem.

The problem is not wanting things, we will always want and hope for things, the problem is wanting them so bad we sin if we don't get it (sinful speech or sinful attitudes, complaining, moping, we may not be violent, just give them silent treatment, cold shoulder, some sort of punishment / retaliation whether actual or attitudinal). Don't just repent of the fruit, the end result. Confess what's really going on in your heart, in your desires that have displaced God's.

C. Re-orient yourself to God's desires – the REMEDY for the future

If your desires have become inordinate, more about pleasing self than pleasing Jesus, there is grace! Repent; come to Him for heart-changing grace. Others may have sinned, too, or "started it," or said something first, but first and foremost this passage wants you to recognize your sin in your part in your response to the conflict. v. 2b says "you do not have because you do not ask." Have you ever asked God to change your heart and desires from "my will be done" to "Thy will be done"? Ask him to convict and change you.

Bring all your wants and desires to God in prayer and look to His hand for what you truly need rather than trying to take matters into your own hand autonomously and arrogantly. God is sovereign and in control over how things go in your day; why not speak to Him reverently about your desires rather than speaking rashly to others who aren't in control and who can never love you as much as God.

This text says to pray with right motives. Ask God's help, not to get all your pleasures, but to keep your pleasures in their proper place, subordinate to God. Pray to God for what He desires. It's not wrong to bring our desires to God, in fact this text suggests the problem is we don't bring them to God; we try to get our desires ourselves in our way for our kingdom rather than God's. We need God's help to re-orient our heart to His desires and the main means to re-align us to God's will are prayer and the Word.

3. Dealing with the heart of your anger (James 4:6-12)

⁶ But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, "GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE." ⁷ Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

4. Desiring and pursuing lasting change (Col. 3:5-17, Eph. 4:23, Rom. 12:2)

Colossians 3:5 ⁵Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. [or covetousness is idolatry]

⁶For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience,
⁷and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸But now you also, put them
all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one
another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, ¹⁰and have put on the new self
who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—
¹¹a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and
uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. ¹²So, as
those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness,
humility, gentleness and patience; ¹³bearing with one another, and forgiving each other,
whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.
¹⁴Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. ¹⁵Let the peace of Christ
rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word
of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with
psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.
¹⁷Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through
Him to God the Father.

Practical Strategies and Steps for Change

Below is adapted from Robert D. Jones, Uprooting Anger, chapters 5 and 6

FOR OUTBURSTS OF ANGER:

1. Repent of the evil desires that produce your angry behavior and receive God's forgiving, enabling grace
2. Own responsibility for your angry behavior and identify it as evil before God and man
3. Confess and renounce your angry behavior before God and others
4. Believe anew in Christ and His gospel promises to angry people
5. Commit yourself to taking active, concrete steps to replace your angry behavior with Christlike words and actions. Ex:
 - a. Self-control (Prov. 16:32; 25:28; 29:11; Gal. 5:23)

Proverbs 16:32 (NASB95) ³²He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.

Proverbs 25:28 (NASB95) ²⁸Like a city that is broken into *and* without walls Is a man who has no control over his spirit.

Proverbs 29:11 (NASB95) ¹¹A fool always loses his temper, But a wise man holds it back.

Galatians 5:23 (NASB95) ²³gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

- b. Godly speech (Prov. 10:19-21, 31-32; 12:18; 15:1; Eph. 4:25-32)

Proverbs 10:19-21 (NASB95) ¹⁹When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise. ²⁰The tongue of the righteous is as choice silver, The heart of the wicked is *worth* little. ²¹The lips of the righteous feed many, But fools die for lack of understanding.

Proverbs 10:31-32 (NASB95) ³¹The mouth of the righteous flows with wisdom, But the perverted tongue will be cut out. ³²The lips of the righteous bring forth what is acceptable, But the mouth of the wicked what is perverted.

Proverbs 12:18 (NASB95) ¹⁸There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, But the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Proverbs 15:1 (NASB95) ¹A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.

- c. Biblical peace-making and problem-solving (Matt. 5:9, 23-26, 18:15-17, 21-35; Luke 17:3-4; Rom. 12:18, 14:19; 2 Tim. 2:22, etc.)

Romans 12:18 (NASB95) ¹⁸If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

Romans 14:19 (NASB95) ¹⁹So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.

2 Timothy 2:22 (NASB95) ²²Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love *and* peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

6. Establish and carry out a workable temptation plan
 - a. Avoid unnecessary occasions that tempt you to show anger
 - b. Remove yourself when possible, as quickly as possible, from explosive situations
 - c. In the midst of the temptation, ask Christ for strength, and recite key verses or biblical truths you have memorized (ex: Prov. 15:1, 12:18, 29:11, 16:32, 25:28, etc.)
 - d. Enlist mature believers to pray for you, counsel you, hold you accountable, and be available during and after crises
7. Continue to prayerfully study Scripture and Scripture-based resources on the topic

Further Biblical Helps for Anger

Below is adapted from Stuart Scott, The Exemplary Husband, p. 268-70

Before anger hits again:

1. Confess your past sins of anger to God and others who have been aware of it. Explain your intentions to be gentle patient, patient, and humble in the future and ask for forgiveness (Matthew 5:23-24)
2. Ask God to work in this area of your life and help you to put forth full effort toward Christlike change (2 Corinthians 9:8)

2 Corinthians 9:8 ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;

3. Come up with the right thoughts to combat the wrong ones you typically have. Write them out. Use Scripture or Scriptural concepts in your new thoughts. Include thankfulness in your new thoughts. Put your new thoughts in prayer form whenever you can (Romans 12:2)
4. Memorize some verses on anger and some verses on gentleness, patience, forgiveness, or humility (Ephesians 4:23)
5. Since anger always involves pride, selfishness or both, seek to put on loving and humble thoughts and actions daily. Make a list of times and ways you can show love and humility (John 13:35; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7; 1 Peter 5:5).

John 13:35 ³⁵ “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

1 Corinthians 13:4–7 ⁴ Love is patient, love is kind *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant, ⁵ does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*, ⁶ does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; ⁷ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

6. Determine what godly desires and goals you should be fixed on in situations in which you typically become angry (Psalm 40:8; 1 Corinthians 10:31).

Psalm 40:8 ⁸ I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart.”

1 Corinthians 10:31 ³¹ Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

7. Do a study on the patience and long-suffering God has with you (Numbers 14:18; Psalm 145:8; 2 Timothy 2:15, etc.)

Numbers 14:18 ¹⁸ ‘The LORD is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth *generations*.’

Psalm 145:8 ⁸ The LORD is gracious and merciful; Slow to anger and great in lovingkindness.

2 Timothy 2:15 ¹⁵ Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

8. Be alert, ready to exercise self-control and to change your thinking. Watch out for situations and thoughts you have discovered. Make a list of each one (1 Pet. 1:13)

1 Peter 1:13 ¹³ Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober *in spirit*, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

9. Ask others to hold you accountable for your anger (Gal. 6:1-2; Heb. 10:24-25)

Galatians 6:1–2¹ Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.² Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.
 Hebrews 10:24–25²⁴ and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

At the time you are tempted to become angry or beginning to become angry:

1. Pray for God's help (Hebrews 4:16)

Hebrews 4:16¹⁶ Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

2. Put off being angry (Proverbs 14:17)

Proverbs 14:17¹⁷ A quick-tempered man acts foolishly, And a man of evil devices is hated.

3. Put on gentleness, patience, and humility (Proverbs 16:32; James 1:19)

Proverbs 16:32³² He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.

James 1:19¹⁹ *This* you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak *and* slow to anger;

If you fail and become sinfully angry:

1. Ask yourself, "How did I sin?" Be specific
2. Ask yourself, "If I had this to do over again, what should I think or do differently?"
3. Take care of your sin and anger as soon as possible (Ephesians 4:26)
4. Confess and ask forgiveness of God and anyone else who may have been aware of, or the recipient of, your sinful anger. Be specific about how you were sinfully angry; wrong thinking, wrong actions, lack of love, etc. (Psalm 32:5; James 5:16)

Psalm 32:5⁵ I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"; And You forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah.

James 5:16¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

5. Tell God and others what you plan to do in the future instead of becoming sinfully angry (Psalm 119:59-60)

Psalm 119:59–60⁵⁹ I considered my ways And turned my feet to Your testimonies.⁶⁰ I hastened and did not delay To keep Your commandments.

6. Be on guard once again (1 Peter 5:8)

1 Peter 5 (NASB95) ⁵ You younger men, likewise, be subject to *your* elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE. ⁶ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, ⁷ casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. ⁸ Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. ¹⁰ After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you. ¹¹ To Him *be* dominion forever and ever. Amen.

¹ Robert Jones, *Uprooting Anger*, p. 40.

² Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, pp. 130ff.

³ *Ibid.*, 133, 135-36.

⁴ Ted Tripp, *War of Words: Getting to the Heart of Your Communication Struggles*, p. 31-32.

⁵ Lou Priolo, *The Heart of Anger : Practical Help for the Prevention and Cure of Anger in Children* (Amityville, NY, Calvary), p. 105.