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Dr. Robert Jeffress.....2

Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church Dallas, Texas

Bible Teacher on “Pathway to Victory” television and radio programs

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Befitting and Unbefitting Anger in Office



Feeling anger is part of the human condition; we all feel angry from time to time. But do you know that there are different kinds of anger? Do you know which kind of anger the Bible approves and which anger is considered sin? Do you know how God expects Christians to behave in each circumstance?

The Bible contains some specific aspects about anger—when it’s acceptable, when it’s not, and when you feel anger, what is considered acceptable behavior and what is not.

Understanding the various forms of anger and what God’s Word says about how Christians should behave in each instance will serve us well at home, in our districts, and while we are working with colleagues in the capital community.

In this study, “Befitting and Unbefitting Anger in Office,” let us take a look at what God has for us regarding good and bad anger. Read on, my friend.

Ralph Drollinger

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MINISTRY LEADER QUOTE

Oaks in Office
'Invaluable Tool'
to Teach Local
Government Leaders
Word of God



'Evangelical pastors as a whole have largely overlooked the importance of building effective ministries that disciple local government leaders for Christ.

'With over 40,000 local governments in America, we need to birth ministries similar to what Youth for Christ and CRU (Campus Crusade for Christ International in the U.S.) are doing on high school and college campuses.

'If we are to truly 'Make America Great Again,' initiating these kinds of outposts is essential.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Ephesians chapter 4 is quite simple to understand in a cursory sense, containing fairly straightforward instruction. At least five profound truths in this chapter are both essential to spiritual maturity and important to thoroughly understand. Notice in particular, the topic of this Bible study in Ephesians 4:26-27:

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.

Everyone deals with anger. This passage implies that some anger is righteous, while other anger is sinful. As James Boice said, 'It is as wrong not to be angry in a situation demanding anger, such as gross injustice, as it is to be angry at the wrong time and for the wrong reasons.' In addition, whichever of the two angers you feel, this passage teaches that you must deal with it swiftly, lest Satan use the delay to exploit you and, through you, the body of Christ.

The second half of Ephesians addresses the behavior of the believer. Paul lists in shotgun fashion five 'put-off and put-on' characteristics that need to characterize all believers. The practice (or lack of practice) of each of these five qualities relates to the respective health or illness of the body of Christ. In other words, your and my obedience to these behavioral commands directly impacts not only the unity of the body of Christ in our churches back home and the communities in which we live, but the health of the body of Christ in

the political arena as well. Accordingly, after we are saved (Paul deals with the subject of salvation heavily in chapters 1 to 3, the positional truths portion of the epistle), we are to live in conformity to these following five practical imperatives:

Ephesians 4:25-32

- 1. Put off lying and put on speaking truthfully.
2. Put off selfish anger and put on righteous anger.
3. Put off stealing and put on being industrious.
4. Put off unwholesome talk and put on edifying others.
5. Put off bitterness and malice and put on showing love.

In this study we will concentrate on the second imperative, anger. I want us to glean four powerful insights about anger from Ephesians 4:26-27. Those truths make up the following outline:

II. THE SANCTION OF ANGER

BE ANGRY...

There is a definite place for anger in the life of the believer. This kind of anger is commonly referred to as 'righteous indignation.' When God's character, His attributes, His name, His Word, His will, or His purposes are impugned, it is incumbent upon the believer to defend the truth. This is righteous



♥ VERSE OF THE WEEK

Ephesians 4:26–27***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.***

anger over evil. As a matter of fact, to be complacent in the face of *anger* is not to love the God Who saved you, Who is *righteous altogether* (Psalm 19:9). Failure to react to manifest evil is “a sign of moral decadence and of godlessness and irreligion,” states D. Martin Lloyd-Jones.² It stands to reason, if we are to be Christ-like, then we too will hate sin and not tolerate it because God hates sin. Notice how the Psalmist substantiates our need to be *angry* regarding sin:

Hate evil, you who love the LORD....
(Psalm 97:10).

For zeal for Your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me
(Psalm 69:9).

Burning indignation has seized me because of the wicked, who forsake Your law (Psalm 119:53).

Given this imperative to *be angry*, it is not surprising that Scripture often articulates the Christian life in terms of a battle—and the believer as a soldier fighting for the truths of Scripture—as it does in 2 Timothy 2:4:

No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.

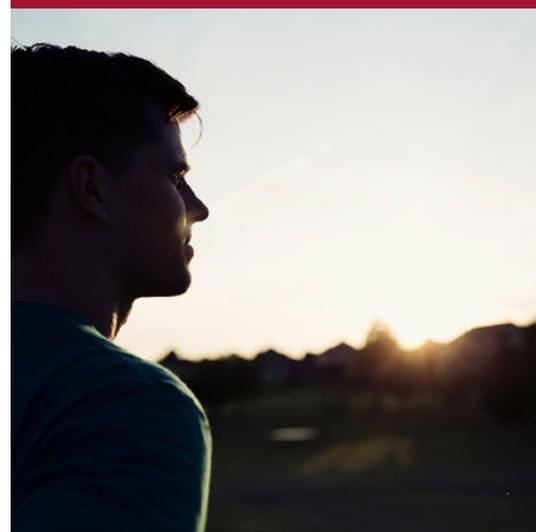
Jesus was also such a warrior. In Mark 3:5 He expressed righteous *anger* over the Pharisees’ reactionary condemnation of His healing the man with the withered hand. Why? Jesus had performed this miracle on the Sabbath,

and He was appropriately angered over the Pharisees’ outlandish alterations of biblical commandments. In addition, Jesus cleansed God’s temple of the moneychangers not just once, but twice (cf. John 2:15, Matthew 21:12). Why? “When the holiness of God and His worship was at stake, Jesus took fast and furious action.”³ So should every believer who is a mature, avid follower of Christ take action when blatant, unrepentant wrong exists. As believers, we are God’s appointed ambassadors (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:20) whom He expects to uphold and defend His righteousness in a fallen world. Such action is in keeping with the Matthew 5 concepts of salt and light. Being an ambassador has a lot to do with upholding truth.

**Definite displeasure
with human sin reveals a
healthy moral nature.**

Conversely, a lack of *anger* over sin is a statement about a person’s moral apathy—an admission of spiritual laxity and immaturity.

On a personal note, the Ephesians 4 passage, combined with a broader understanding of Scripture, has over the years formed in me a righteous *anger* over the misuse of Scripture and over the diminution of the gospel’s acknowledged authority in the capitol communities of America. Contending for the faith (Jude 3) should be a part of every believer’s life; any believer who is not willing to wage battles for what is right is not worthy of his or her calling. One Christian lyricist put it best, “The mark of a godly man...is what he is fighting for...”



Fight for righteousness,
possessing a righteous anger;
and shun bad anger in
yourself and others.





Continued from page 2

“Statistics indicate that most of our political leaders in state capitols and Washington, D.C. were once city council members.

“In *Oaks in Office*, Ralph Drollinger provides an invaluable tool to equip pastors and laymen with pertinent Bible studies to initiate discipleship ministries with those serving in local government.

“I highly recommend this excellent resource.”

— DR. ROBERT JEFFRESS

Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church
Dallas, Texas

Bible Teacher on “Pathway to Victory”
television and radio programs

Government and Vengeful Anger

There is a time and place for vengeful *anger*, but it is reserved for God’s institution of government. Vengeful *anger* is never to be executed by an individual; no person has the biblical right per 1 Thessalonians 5:15, which states, *See that no one repays another with evil for evil...* and Romans 12:19, which states, *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.*

However, in the OT book of Exodus in 21:23–24 the Lord clearly states, *“But if there is any further injury, then you shall appoint as a penalty life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.”* Again, this passage does not give an individual the right to take revenge. Rather, this passage and others empower government with the God-given authority to perform capital punishment.¹¹

The institution of *government* is God’s manifest surrogate for His avenging wrath on sin. This authority is echoed in the New Testament book of Romans (13:4), which states the following: *for it [government] is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword*

for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil. Accordingly, God has designed government—not individuals—to be His surrogate executor of wrath on those who do evil. In the future, Christ will return and physically rule the world as its perfect and just judge.

In summary of this portion of the passage, “Paul is placing a moral obligation on believers to be angry as the occasion requires.”⁴ Accordingly, it is biblical for believers to be *angry* as long as that *anger* stems from a selfless, righteous response to scripturally explicit error and/or injustice.⁵

If this is the motive that underlies the Christian activist who earnestly desires to change policy for the sake of God’s glory and the betterment of the country, then he or she should be loudly applauded by all believers! These are those who are motivated by a righteous indignation and possess a proper understanding of this scriptural concept.

III. THE SHUNNING OF ANGER

AND YET DO NOT SIN...

Sinful *anger* is quite different from righteous *anger*. Dishonorable *anger* is selfish, and it appears when a person does not get his way. The imperative command implied in the verse under study is that we are to put off this kind of *anger*, which stems from impure motives of pride, malice, revenge, and



resentment. Furthermore, sinful *anger* is self-defensive, self-serving, and characterized by everything from “passionate outbursts to the sullen bearing of grudges.”⁶ Obviously, this kind of *anger* destroys unity in the body of Christ. When you or I experience sinful *anger*, we are failing to live according to our new nature in Christ, which was imputed to us by the Holy Spirit at the time of our salvation. Rather than putting off the old man, we are living according to his decrepit nature. Conversely, Scripture says in Galatians 2:20:

“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me....”

In other words, our old nature is dead, so why resurrect it as evidenced by bad anger? When you are angry for sinful reasons, you are choosing to behave according to your old, crucified nature. It follows that any Christian activist who is characterized by these vitriolic, acerbic motives and actions should not be applauded.

A Quick Theology on Bad Anger

Learn to Manage It in Yourself

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

Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, for anger resides in the bosom of fools (Ecclesiastes 7:9).

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 (Romans 12:19).

Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension (1 Timothy 2:8).

For the overseer must be above reproach as God’s steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered (Titus 1:7).

This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger (James 1:19).

Learn to Manage It in Others

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

A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but the slow to anger calms a dispute (Proverbs 15:18).

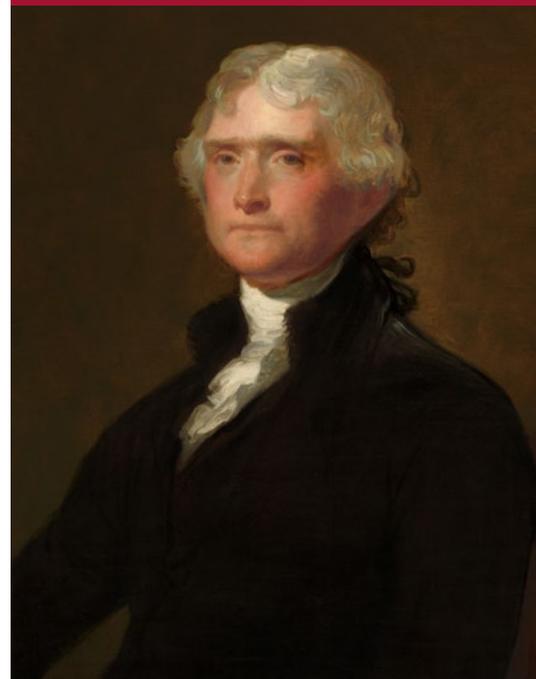
Scorners set a city aflame, but wise men turn away anger (Proverbs 29:8).

Avoid People Given Over to It

Do not associate with a man given to anger; or go with a hot-tempered man (Proverbs 22:24).

An angry man stirs up strife, and a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression (Proverbs 29:22).

Thomas Jefferson



“I never ... believed there was one code of morality for a public and another for a private man.”

— Thomas Jefferson, third president of the United States, signer of the Declaration of Independence, diplomat, governor of Virginia, secretary of state.

Thomas Jefferson, In a letter to Don Valentine de Feronda, 1809.





John Hancock



“Sensible of the importance of Christian piety and virtue to the order and happiness of a state, I cannot but earnestly commend to you every measure for their support and encouragement.”

— John Hancock, signer of the Declaration of Independence, president of Congress, American Revolutionary War general, and governor of Massachusetts.

Independent Chronicle (Boston), November 2, 1780, last page; see also Abram English Brown, *John Hancock, His Book* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1898), 269.



I can vividly remember a time when I sat in on a committee hearing and listened to a legislator who regularly attended and publicly identified with our Bible study/ministry in the California Capitol. He went on an ad-hominem rage, denouncing another legislator over his supposed incompetence—an unbelieving legislator who had visited the Bible study several times. I thought in my heart, Well, he’ll never be back. Sure enough, I was right. Believers are not to be bad-tempered, irritable, and irascible (i.e., “easily incensed”) people; such antics are characteristic of the old, pre-Christ self! States 1 Corinthians 13:5, Christians should be those who are not easily provoked. An anger problem equates to a hugely bad testimony and drastically harms the corporate witness of the body of Christ, to say nothing of the loss of momentum for all ministries in the capitol. The clear imperative of Scripture is to put off this kind of anger. Shun it in yourself and others.

IV. THE SETTING-UP OF ANGER

do not let the sun go down on your anger.

This stanza of our passage does not mean that we have a biblical license to be *angry* until sunset.

Nor should it be interpreted with a wooden literalism, otherwise mountaineers who are angry with their climbing partners during a summer ascent of Mount McKinley would have weeks until they needed to reconcile as compared to a

climbing team on the same day in Patagonia who would possess only minutes to reconcile lest they find themselves dishonoring this passage.⁷

The prevailing principle of this passage’s Pauline prose is that *anger* should be dealt with in short order—swiftly and promptly. Author Paul was Jewish, and the Jewish day ended at sunset. “Sunset was regarded as a time limit for a range of activities, for example, the paying of a poor man his wages lest by failing to do so one would be guilty of sinning (Deuteronomy 24:15).”⁸ In other words, we should deal with *anger* soon after it arises lest bitterness and resentment set in.

“The day of anger should be the day of reconciliation.”

This quote is a good way of understanding and remembering the principle being taught in this passage. There should be no prolonging of problems that need resolution and no brooding or nursing of a hurt. *Anger*, be it just or unjust, should be dealt with immediately.

Having stated that, a prompt seeking of resolution doesn’t mean a person will always work out the problems related to his *anger*, even though Romans 12:18 commands believers, *If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men*. Nonetheless, peace with others remains dependent on the other party’s attitudes of pride versus humility and other factors. For instance, does the other party desire to continue to cover up his activity, or



does he desire to come clean and be transparent? The point is this: *so far as it depends on you...do not let the sun go down on your anger.* We all know that reconciliation is a two-way street; don't allow bad *anger* to set up and jell in your heart.

V. THE SECURING OF ANGER

and do not give the devil an opportunity.

Lastly, this passage states the reason why every believer needs to deal quickly with righteous or unrighteous *anger*. The word for *opportunity* is *topos*. We use this same word for *topography*, which means "location or place." If we fail to deal quickly with *anger*, we allow Satan the *opportunity* to gain a foothold, a location or a place within us and the body of believers. This is not to suggest that Satan can indwell a believer; I do not think Scripture ever teaches that possibility. "Do not give the devil a chance to exert his influence"¹⁰ is a good understanding of the meaning of this passage.

VI. SUMMARY

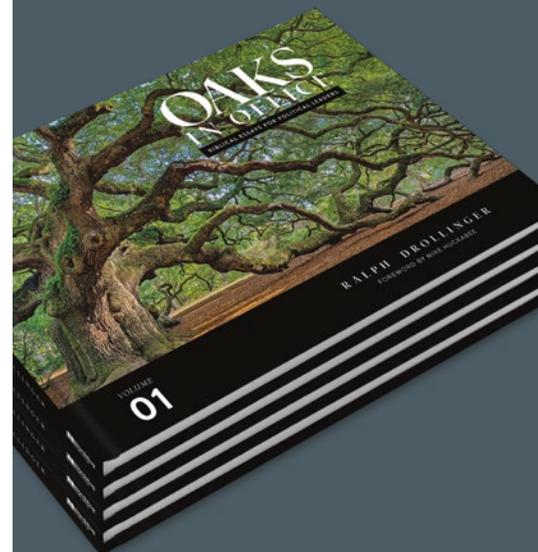
Believers are in a spiritual battle. One of the greatest God-given weapons that Christians possess to defeat the whims of the Devil and build God's kingdom is the corporate unity of the body of Christ. This unity amongst believers, while often overlooked and unmeasured, is a significant, formidable force, which God intends for His ambassadors to utilize to achieve His purposes. States Jesus in this regard in a conversation with Father God in John 17:23:

"I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me."

Jesus says the reason for unity is so that the world may know. Know what? That God the Father sent Jesus the Son to be their Savior! This is the best means for effectively evangelizing the lost in our nation's capital! And Satan knows it! Accordingly, his plan is to attack and destroy the unity of the body of Christ—to hinder and disrupt the corporate witness on the Hill that Jesus is the Savior—*so that the world will not know!*

So how does Satan go about unplugging God's grand design and circuitry? Bad *anger* in the believer is a regular avenue and antic that he attempts to exploit—often successfully—to disrupt the unity of believers and short circuit the power of our corporate evangelistic effort. Bad *anger* is the way in which Satan gains *opportunity*, a place in our midst (but not in us) if we are not careful. Therefore, be vigilant to put off unrighteous *anger* and put on righteous *anger*.

Could this be what Paul meant at the end of his ministry when he said, *I have fought the good fight...* (2 Timothy 4:7) versus in any way being involved in incestuous infighting—filled with bad *anger* toward other brothers and sisters in Christ? Fighting for righteousness, possessing a righteous *anger* versus a bad kind of *anger*, is not only good for your own spiritual wellbeing and outlook, but it effectuates the fitness and ensuing



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power of the corporate body of Christ here on the mission field of our nation's capital.

Please do not underestimate the profundity of what Jesus is teaching here or naively diminish your overall responsibility in this regard! Make sure you put bad anger far away from yourself. Amen.

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1. James Boice, *An Expositional Commentary: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 168.
2. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "Sinful and Righteous Anger: A Sermon on Ephesians 4:20–27," Westminster Chapel, London, from a series preached from October 1954–August 1962, mljtrust.org, <https://www.mljtrust.org/free-sermons/book-of-ephesians/4/>, accessed October 17, 2022.
3. John MacArthur, Gen. Ed., *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Nashville: Word, 1997), 1579, 2:15.
4. Earnest Best, *The International Critical Commentary: Ephesians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 449.
5. It is interesting to further note that one of the primary tenets of the Neo-Evangelical movement in their attempt to eclipse militant Fundamentalism in the late 1940s (which was strong in displaying a righteous indignation in response to the liberal Protestant takeover and diminishing of Scripture in American Christianity from 1865 to 1915) was an insistence on "positivism and not negativism." Harold Ockenga said in his commencement speech on the founding of Fuller Theological Seminary, one of the centers of Neo-Evangelical thinking, "Our [students] will have no time for that kind of negativism. We want the positive presentation of the Christian faith..." With such a foundational attitude, there was no way one could later criticize (which was interpreted as negativism) encroaching theological error in their own institution! Accordingly, *within one generation* the seminary abandoned a high view of Scripture and today continues to drift further and further from its biblical moorings. (Quote excerpted from the Fuller Seminary Archives, *The Convocation Address of President Harold Ockenga*, Pasadena Civic Auditorium, October 1, 1947.) Quickly the truths of Scripture can be lost if no one is willing to be properly angry when they are diminished in any way.
6. Best, 449.
7. Located in the northern hemisphere, high on the mountain in the summer, the sun never really sets due to the extreme latitude and altitude of Mt. McKinley, versus the length of a similar day in Patagonia, located near the tip of South America.
8. Peter T. O'Brien, Gen. Ed., *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 340.
9. This statement was the interpretive summary of John Eadie, who wrote his commentary on Ephesians in 1854 after reading and referencing over 100 previous commentaries on the same.
10. O'Brien, 340.
11. Exodus 21:23–24 is reiterated by Jesus in Matthew 5:38.