

# **THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS**

## **(LESSON SIXTY-EIGHT)**

### ***“DON'T LET ANGER CONTROL YOU”***

#### **EPHESIANS 4:25-27**

*25 Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.*

*26 Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath:*

*27 Neither give place to the devil.*

In our previous Lesson, we stated that in **Ephesians 4:17-24**, Paul speaks of the tremendous change that is wrought in a believing sinner at the moment of his or her conversion, and of his or her gradual conformation to the image of Jesus Christ. In these verses he informs believers firstly, that they have **put off** the **old man**, secondly, that they are being **renewed in the spirit of their mind**, and thirdly, that they have **put on** the **new man**. On the basis of these three points, he proceeds to give them detailed exhortations, beginning in verse **25**.

In verses **25-32**, Paul provides a list of specific sins which were characteristic of the **old man**, but are **not** to be characteristic of the **new man**. He also lists the contrasting virtues which **are** to be characteristic of the **new man**. Since the **old man** with all his accompanying lusts is to be **put off**, and the **new man**, who is created in the righteousness and holiness of the truth is to be **put on**, the life-style of the believer must demonstrate that a radical and transformative change has occurred.

In verse **25**, he writes, *“Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.”* The first filthy garment of the **old man** that Paul urges believers to put off is **dishonesty**. As new creatures in Christ we are to display the life and loveliness of our Lord. Dishonesty has no part in the life of the **new man** in Christ. Paul exhorts believers to **put off** dishonesty and **put on** truthfulness.

The reason for this exhortation to put away lying, and to speak every man truth with his neighbour, is that believers are members of one another. The ground of the exhortation rests on the truth that, in being members of one another, believers are members of the Body of Christ who is the truth! Paul bases his exhortation on the profound Christian idea of union one with another through union with Christ.

Every believer belongs to every other believer in Christ. As members one of another, we affect each other, and we cannot build each other up except with truth. Lying to each other disrupts unity by creating conflicts and destroying trust. It tears down relationships and leads to open warfare in a church.

Brothers and sisters, in the body of Christ, we do not live to ourselves. Therefore, if we lie, we not only hurt ourselves, but we hurt others as well. Paul is saying in effect: “If you, as a believer, lie to anyone, you are not hurting yourself only, you are hurting the whole body of Christ.” The cause of Christ is injured when a believer lies, and Christianity is made contemptible in the eyes of the person to whom the lie was told. He or she considers not only us, but the whole cause for which we stand as worthless.

The second filthy garment of the **old man** that Paul urges the believers to put off is un-godly **anger**. In verse **26** Paul writes, *“Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.”*

The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows: *“Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on the cause of your anger.”*

**John Phillips** makes an interesting observation as it relates to this verse. He writes, "We should note carefully how **Ephesians 4:26** is positioned in the text. Its neighbor is the tongue (verse 25) because it is all too easy for us to say wrong things when we are angry. Its other neighbor is the devil (verse 27), because Satan is swift to take advantage of powerful emotions."

The words "*Be angry*" are the translation of the Greek word **orgizó**: (**or-gid'-zo**), which refers to a brooding, simmering anger that is nurtured and not allowed to die. **Orgizó** describes a settled and abiding habit of the mind. It is seen in the holding of a grudge, in the smoldering bitterness that refuses to forgive. It is the anger that cherishes resentment and does not want reconciliation.

Anger is an emotional arousal caused by something that displeases us. Anger is not necessarily sinful, for the Bible often associates anger with God. The following passages of Scripture, furnish examples of this truth. All the passages reflect the rendering provided by the **New Living Translation**:

#### **Exodus 4:14**

*"Then the LORD became angry with Moses. 'All right,' he said. 'What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he speaks well. And look! He is on his way to meet you now. He will be delighted to see you.'"*

#### **Deuteronomy 1:34-37**

34 *"When the LORD heard your complaining, he became very angry. So he solemnly swore,*

35 *'Not one of you from this wicked generation will live to see the good land I swore to give your ancestors,*

36 *except Caleb son of Jephunneh. He will see this land because he has followed the LORD completely. I will give to him and his descendants some of the very land he explored during his scouting mission.'*

37 *“And **the LORD was also angry** with me because of you. He said to me, ‘Moses, not even you will enter the Promised Land!’”*

### **Deuteronomy 9:8**

*“Even at Mount Sinai you made **the LORD so angry** he was ready to destroy you.”*

### **Judges 2:20-21**

20 *So **the LORD burned with anger** against Israel. He said, “Because these people have violated my covenant, which I made with their ancestors, and have ignored my commands,*

*21 I will no longer drive out the nations that Joshua left unconquered when he died.”*

### **1 Kings 11:9**

*“**The LORD was very angry** with Solomon, for his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice.”*

### **Psalm 7:11-13**

11 *God is an honest judge. **He is angry** with the wicked every day.*

12 *If a person does not repent, God will sharpen his sword; he will bend and string his bow.*

13 *He will prepare his deadly weapons and shoot his flaming arrows.*

### **Isaiah 12:1**

*“In that day you will sing: ‘I will praise you, O LORD! **You were angry** with me, but not any more. Now you comfort me.’”*

In **Mark 3**, we have evidence of anger being associated with the Lord Jesus. The **New Living Translation** translates verses **1-6**, as follows:

*1 Jesus went into the synagogue again and noticed a man with a deformed hand.*

*2 Since it was the Sabbath, Jesus' enemies watched him closely. If he healed the man's hand, they planned to accuse him of working on the Sabbath.*

*3 Jesus said to the man with the deformed hand, "Come and stand in front of everyone."*

*4 Then he turned to his critics and asked, "Does the law permit good deeds on the Sabbath, or is it a day for doing evil? Is this a day to save life or to destroy it?" But they wouldn't answer him.*

*5 He looked around at them angrily and was deeply saddened by their hard hearts. Then he said to the man, "Hold out your hand." So the man held out his hand, and it was restored!*

*6 At once the Pharisees went away and met with the supporters of Herod to plot how to kill Jesus.*

The capacity for anger is part of the image of God in man. If an individual cannot get angry there is something wrong with him or her. Such an individual is denying his or her essential humanity! The Greek New Testament scholar, **Kenneth Wuest** made the following insightful comments: "When guided by reason, **anger is a right affection**, so the Scripture permits it, and not only permits, but on fit occasion demands it ... There is a 'wrath of God' (**Matthew 3:7; Romans 12:19**); who would not love good unless He hated evil, the two being so inseparable, that either He must do both or neither; a wrath also of the merciful Son of Man (**Mark 3:5**); and a wrath which righteous men **not merely may**, but, as they are righteous, **must** feel; nor can there be a surer or sadder token of an utterly prostrate moral condition than the not being able to be angry with sin — and sinners."

**John Phillips** notes that the words "*Be ye angry,*" "is a positive command. There is nothing wrong with being angry for a righteous cause. Anger can be wholesome. There are times when we should be

angry. Anger can be kindled by the fire of Hell or by the fire from the altar of God. Anger kindled by the old man is always sinful, destructive, and devilish. Anger kindled by the Holy Spirit at the sight of some injustice, some great depravity, or some monstrous iniquity, is intended to give those who are engaging in the sinful activity reason to fear. The person who cannot get angry at the seduction of an innocent girl, at the corrupting of a child, at those who practice and propagate perversion and pornography, must either be spineless or wholly without moral conviction."

**Henry Ward Beecher**, the American clergyman and abolitionist, said, "Now and then a man should be shaken to the core with indignation over things evil."

Remember that in these verses, Paul is giving believers specific instructions as to how they should **put off** the **old man** and **put on** the **new man**. It is characteristic of the **old man** to manifest an indifference toward sin at best, and a selling of self to do evil at worst. This is unlike God, for God detests sin and displays His righteous wrath against it. Since sin destroys people, God would be neither righteous nor loving if He did not hate sin with a holy passion. And, if we want to be godly people, we must learn to hate sin. First of all we must hate and be angry at the sin in ourselves. We must consider the beam that is in our own eye and remove it first! (**Matthew 7:3-5**) But we must also be angry at the sin and injustice that we see in the world. In our righteous indignation however, we must be careful, lest we fall into sin.

Brothers and sisters, the truth is that it is very difficult for us to have a truly holy anger or a righteous indignation, because our emotions are tainted by sin, and we do not have the same knowledge that God has in all matters. God sees everything clearly and knows everything completely, and we do not. Our judgments therefore are often coloured by prejudice. Someone has observed that, "It is not a sin to be angry, but it is hard not to sin when we are angry." The Greek philosopher **Aristotle** wrote, "Anyone can become angry but to be angry with the

right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way - this is not easy."

The words, "*Be ye angry,*" are a present imperative in the Greek text, commanding a continuous action. Paul is commanding believers to manifest a righteous anger as a lifestyle! This **orgizó**, this abiding, settled attitude of righteous indignation against sin and sinful things, is commanded, together with the appropriate actions when conditions make them necessary. But the words "*and sin not*" which follow, provide a check and restraint to the anger. Paul is speaking here of an anger that is approved by God and is to be encouraged in believers. Paul forbids only a particular form or measure of anger. He is acutely aware that even righteous anger has the potential to become sinful if it is not restrained by temperance.

The word "*sin*" is a translation of the Greek word **hamartanó**: (**ham-ar-tan'-o**), which means, "to miss the mark, to err, be mistaken, to miss or wander from the path of uprightness and honor, to do or go wrong." It is to act contrary to the will and law of God. In this verse, the word is in a construction in the Greek which forbids the continuance of an action already in progress. The believers in Ephesus were getting angry and sinning! Paul says to them "Be righteously angry but don't miss the mark. Keep your anger under control." Anger may be sinful or righteous, and the solution to sinful anger is not to refuse to ever be angry. The answer, instead, is to be angry only when it is appropriate.

When a righteous indignation is aroused within us, we must deal with it in a way that is scripturally sound, so that the devil is prevented from gaining an opportunity in our lives. All of the sins that Paul deals with in this section (**Ephesians 4:25-32**) have the potential to disrupt "*the unity of the faith*" (**Ephesians 4:13**). The negative attitudes and actions associated with the **old man**, which we are to **put off**, all contribute to disunity within the Body of Christ. The positive attitudes and actions associated with the **new man**, which we are to **put on**, all contribute to

the unity of the Body. Our motive in seeking to preserve the unity of the Spirit should be to glorify our Lord, who gave Himself for the church.

Remember that anger is only one letter short of danger! As someone has well said "Don't fly into a rage unless you are prepared for a rough landing."

Moses is a very good example of the danger of righteous indignation which is unrestrained by temperance. In **Exodus 2:11-15**, we read the following:

*11 Many years later, when Moses had grown up, he went out to visit his own people, the Hebrews, and he saw how hard they were forced to work. During his visit, he saw an Egyptian beating one of his fellow Hebrews.*

*12 After looking in all directions to make sure no one was watching, Moses killed the Egyptian and hid the body in the sand.*

*13 The next day, when Moses went out to visit his people again, he saw two Hebrew men fighting. "Why are you beating up your friend?" Moses said to the one who had started the fight.*

*14 The man replied, "Who appointed you to be our prince and judge? Are you going to kill me as you killed that Egyptian yesterday?" Then Moses was afraid, thinking, "Everyone knows what I did."*

*15 And sure enough, Pharaoh heard what had happened, and he tried to kill Moses. But Moses fled from Pharaoh and went to live in the land of Midian....*

**(New Living Translation)**

Moses felt justifiably angry over the unjust treatment of his Hebrew brethren, but what he did with that righteous anger was unjustifiable and caused serious trouble for Him. He allowed the fallen, unregenerate adamic nature, or the **flesh** to dominate him and as a result, his emotions spiraled out of control. He committed murder. In **Matthew 5:21-22**, our



Lord clearly associated anger with murder and warned about the grave consequences of unrestrained anger. The **New Living Translation** renders the verses as follows:

*21 “You have heard that our ancestors were told, ‘You must not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.’*

*22 But I say, **if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment!** If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell.*

Although Moses was right to feel a righteous indignation about the injustice that was being meted out to the Hebrews, his reaction was sinful. His unrighteous anger revealed how unprepared he was for the task that God had planned for him. God had to hide him in obscurity in the desert for 40 years, using sheep to instruct him in the art of kingdom leadership, in order for him to realize that endeavouring to rescue God’s people in his own way would ultimately prove disastrous. Moses had to learn what we all need to learn, over and over again, that in order to accomplish God’s work in God’s way, we must rely on God’s power.

It is apparent that Moses had anger management issues, because several years after this, his unrestrained righteous indignation once again lands him in hot water! The **New Living Translation**, furnishes the following translation of **Numbers 20:1-13**:

*1 In the first month of the year, the whole community of Israel arrived in the wilderness of Zin and camped at Kadesh. While they were there, Miriam died and was buried.*

*2 There was no water for the people to drink at that place, so they rebelled against Moses and Aaron.*

*3 The people blamed Moses and said, “If only we had died in the LORD’s presence with our brothers!*

4 *Why have you brought the congregation of the LORD's people into this wilderness to die, along with all our livestock?*

5 *Why did you make us leave Egypt and bring us here to this terrible place? This land has no grain, no figs, no grapes, no pomegranates, and no water to drink!"*

6 *Moses and Aaron turned away from the people and went to the entrance of the Tabernacle, where they fell face down on the ground. Then the glorious presence of the LORD appeared to them,*

7 *and the LORD said to Moses,*

8 *"You and Aaron must take the staff and assemble the entire community. As the people watch, **speak to the rock** over there, and it will pour out its water. You will provide enough water from the rock to satisfy the whole community and their livestock."*

9 *So Moses did as he was told. He took the staff from the place where it was kept before the LORD.*

10 *Then he and Aaron summoned the people to come and gather at the rock. "Listen, you rebels!" he shouted. "Must we bring you water from this rock?"*

11 *Then Moses raised his hand and **struck the rock twice with the staff**, and water gushed out. So the entire community and their livestock drank their fill.*

12 *But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust me enough to demonstrate my holiness to the people of Israel, you will not lead them into the land I am giving them!"*

13 *This place was known as the waters of Meribah (which means "arguing") because there the people of Israel argued with the LORD, and there he demonstrated his holiness among them.*

Again, as in the previous scenario in Egypt, Moses was right to feel justifiably angry with the children of Israel for their murmuring, stubbornness and rebellion. But his expression of that justifiable anger was sinful. In expressing his anger, he disobeyed the clear instruction of God and struck the Rock, a type of Christ (**1 Corinthians 10:4**), instead of speaking to it. In his anger, Moses referred to the Israelites as “rebels,” but he also was guilty of rebellion and he paid a terrible price.

In **Deuteronomy 3:23-26** Moses, in reviewing the history of the Israelites subsequent to the Exodus, made the following observations:

*23 “At that time I pleaded with the LORD and said,*

*24 ‘O Sovereign LORD, you have only begun to show your greatness and the strength of your hand to me, your servant. Is there any god in heaven or on earth who can perform such great and mighty deeds as you do?’*

*25 Please let me cross the Jordan to see the wonderful land on the other side, the beautiful hill country and the Lebanon mountains.’*

*26 “But the LORD was angry with me because of you, and he would not listen to me. ‘That’s enough!’ he declared. ‘Speak of it no more.*

**(New Living Translation)**

**The Lords was angry with Moses because of his angry reaction to the people!** No wonder James wrote, years after this incident, “*Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires*” (**James 1:20, New Living Translation**).

The noted Bible commentator **Matthew Henry**, stated, “If we would be angry and not sin, we must be angry at nothing but sin; and we should be more jealous for the glory of God than for any interest or reputation of our own.”

Paul adds this caution at the end of **Ephesians 4:26**: “*let not the sun go down upon your wrath.*” Commenting on this clause, **Ray Stedman** made the following observations:

“That is a common parable out of the life of that time, and it simply means do not nurse your anger, do not hold a grudge, do not let the sun go down upon it, do not let it carry over to another day. Now do not take this in a crassly literal fashion. This does not give one license to get angry at nine o'clock in the morning and go about saying, 'Well, I've got twelve hours left when I can enjoy this and be angry at someone until the sun goes down.' It is simply a way of saying that when the first flush of righteous anger has passed then do not nurse it, do not perpetuate that anger. That was the explosion that was designed to set in motion the engine of your will, but it is not the fuel upon which it is to run. That is to be love and concern. Anger is needed at times to prod us into action, to get us moving along lines of proper concern. We hear of some gross injustice and we get angry, and rightly so. Do not condemn yourself because you get angry like that, but do not let it carry over, do not act out of anger. Act rather out of the love that has made you angry.”

Brothers and sisters, the longer we postpone dealing with our anger, the less likely we are to ever deal with it! If we allow anger to settle in our spirits, it will degenerate into enmity, and we will become bitter and vengeful. This is inconsistent with the **new man** that we have **put on**. **The day of anger is to also be the day of reconciliation!**

Brothers and sisters, Paul's exhortation, “*Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath,*” should drive us to our knees in prayer, for none of us is able to do this in our own strength. We can only obey this exhortation by allowing the Holy Spirit to increasingly exert His influence over us.

We will conclude this Lesson with Paul's words to the believers in Galatia recorded in **Galatians 5:13-26**. The **New Living Translation** renders the passage as follows:

*13 For you have been called to live in freedom, my brothers and sisters. But don't use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love.*

*14 For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."*

*15 But if you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another.*

*16 So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves.*

*17 The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.*

*18 But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses.*

*19 When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures,*

*20 idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, **outbursts of anger**, selfish ambition, dissension, division,*

*21 envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.*

*22 But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,*

*23 gentleness, and **self-control**. There is no law against these things!*

*24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there.*

*25 Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.*

*26 Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another.*