

## *To God Alone Be The Glory*

You hear it when someone has had a rough childhood and hasn't come to peace about it yet: "He's an angry young man. Very angry." You hear about it when one person doesn't like the way another person did such-n-such: "Do you know what she did?!" You see it when someone has had a rough day and hasn't found any relief: "Don't get in my way! I'm liable to explode." It gets angrily shoved back in your face when you correct someone who doesn't want to repent for a sin committed. You can feel anger in the lyrics of some modern songwriters who reckon they've been wronged in some way. Angry people. They're all around us. Sometimes we are the angry person. Anger is one of the things holding back St. John's, keeping us from becoming the kind of congregation God wants His churches to be.

We're not going to delve further into where anger comes from today. Instead we'll talk a little about how to get rid of our anger. But we'll spend most of our time covering **FOUR REASONS YOU CAN'T ALLOW YOURSELF TO STAY ANGRY.**

In his letter to the early Christians, James writes (1:20), "*Man's anger does not bring about the righteous life God desires.*" Anger sets up an environment in which we feel more free to go against

the commands of God. That's why it's such a blessing to have the apostle Paul, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, give us four gospel reasons not to stay angry.

1. The first starts out like this: <sup>4:30</sup> "*Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.*" I'm sure there are many ways to grieve the Holy Spirit. But in this context, the apostle is talking about grieving the Lord by treating others unlovingly, even angrily. Why are we not to grieve the Holy Spirit through our unloving actions or angry words? Because <sup>30</sup> in him you were sealed for the day of redemption. "Paul makes it sound like the day of redemption is still in the future. I thought we were redeemed already." As far as God is concerned, we have been redeemed already, bought back by Jesus, just like unwanted items are bought back by reputable retailers from dissatisfied shoppers. We've been redeemed, not from unhappy buyers, but from sin's consequences like eternal torment in hell. Yes, we still get to suffer earthly consequences for our sins. Try yelling at your boss or at the police officer who has just pulled you over. Earthly consequences follow quickly. Try exchanging angry words with your parent, child, spouse, or a good friend, and see if your anger damages them. So you see, even though we have been redeemed from the eternal consequences of our sins, as long as there are still daily consequences for things we do wrong, Paul can refer to the very Last Day as

“the day of redemption,” the day when the Lord will have bought us back from every consequence of sin. Think of how it will be never again to disappoint someone close to you. That’s going to be awesome! Thank you, Jesus.

In the meantime, we don’t have to stay angry. Why not? We’ve been sealed with the Holy Spirit. A seal is a means of identification and protection, like when an institution wants to make sure that your signature is really yours, so they have you sign your name in the presence of a notary public, who then stamps their seal onto the document near your signature. Something similar happens here in a spiritual way. Little babies who are about to be baptized receive the sign of the cross over the forehead and the chest signifying that they have been redeemed by Christ the crucified. Then the Holy Spirit actually claims babies as his own dear children in Holy Baptism. How long ago did the Holy Spirit put his seal on your heart? You’ve been marked for salvation on the day of redemption by your baptism. If the devil tries to sneak you past the Lord, the Lord will say, “Woah, Satan, this one belongs to me. See, here’s my seal. Run along now empty-handed.” This is the first reason you can’t allow yourself to stay angry. Something awesome has happened to you. **You Were Sealed with the Holy Spirit.** Use this good news to push anger right out of your heart.

2. Before we go any further, remember that anger in and of itself is not necessarily sin. When Jesus, God’s Son, saw the money changers and the sellers of sheep and cattle desecrating the temple, he got angry. The Temple was to be a house of prayer for all peoples, but the merchants had turned it into a place to swindle worshipers. God also gets angry when, instead of repenting, people add to a sin by trying to lie their way out of getting caught. Since it is impossible for God to do wrong, and God gets angry, anger isn’t necessarily sinful. But don’t let anger hang around (Eph 4:26-27). Anger makes it easier for us to sin. And sometimes anger itself is a sin. If you do wrong, and someone corrects you, and you get angry about it, that anger is sinful anger.

Paul says, <sup>31</sup>*Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.* In English this is just a list of six nasty attitudes and behaviors. In the original Greek, however, each anger-word seems to escalate the intensity as if Paul is trying to tell a story by his list. First there’s bitterness. “You slighted me, or maybe you’re just better at something than I, and I’m bitter about it.” Bitterness often grows into anger, and then into seething rage. Finally I blow my stack and raise my voice at you, crying out in strife, followed by name calling and other such slander. “*Get rid*

of it,” Paul says. Pick up every form of malice and throw it away from you like so much trash. The longer you let anger course through your veins, the harder it is to dissipate it. (See Ecclesiastes 8:8b.)

A friend of mine was an angry person for a couple days, and he was not much fun to be around. Things that normally would have been taken in stride really irritated him. At work, for instance, a supplier unexpectedly told him he could no longer have what he was used to receiving for years. Pity the poor supplier, who couldn’t do anything about it but got chewed on anyway.

This Christian knew it wasn’t right to stay angry. But how to do what the Bible says and get rid of the anger? My friend started with thinking about why he was so irritable. He had stubbed his little toe that morning, not with much force, but it was a direct hit. Hurt so bad he started dancing. Was that a legitimate excuse to stay angry and make others suffer? No. \*The next morning he could tell he was coming down with a cold. It didn’t help that he had stayed up late the night before and got up early that morning. All day for the second day in a row, he was an angry person. I suppose most people would have told this man, “Get some rest, cut yourself some slack.” And that would have been good advice for the physical and emotional aspects of the problem.

But there is always a spiritual component to every difficulty we face. For this we need God’s law and God’s gospel. Hold the mirror of the law up to your face and see how much God hates the ugly results of your anger. Then go to the cross of Christ for a full pardon. Finally come back to this text with a happy heart for a wise way to proceed: <sup>32</sup>*Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.* Oh, how different this is from staying angry. There’s tenderheartedness here, and greater awareness of the needs of others than of self. This is how to handle the spiritual component of anger: you think about how God hates sinful anger and how God treats you according to his mercy—**You are Forgiven by God in Christ** for your anger-based conduct. Instead of staying angry, practice mercy on others.

3. There’s a third reason you can’t allow yourself to stay angry—to borrow from Paul’s wording, “*Don’t be angry; <sup>5:1</sup>be imitators of God.*” Imitators. It’s fun to watch socially aware children in an unfamiliar situation. They cleverly observe what everyone else is doing and figure out what to do before anyone explains it to them. That’s what Paul is urging us to do. We are to take note of what God does, how he acts toward his dearly loved children, and then to act as he does when we deal with others.

Imitate God because **You are God's Dearly Loved Children** (5:1). Dearly loved. This is the kind of love which has no ulterior motives. There's nothing in it for God. He just wants to do good to you. So he does. Imitate God. Do something good for others. It's hard to do good to others when you're holding onto anger. Let it go. You are God's Dearly Loved Children.

4. Instead of staying angry, <sup>2</sup>*live a life of love*. Literally translated, *walk the life of love*. Why? Because <sup>2</sup>*Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*. You see? You can't allow yourself to stay angry, because **You are Saved by Christ's Fragrant Sacrifice**. \*Think of the smelliest thing you've ever had the pleasure of enduring. It was so bad that you broke out the air freshener. And then, [sniff, sniff]: "Oh, that's much better." \*Our sins are a foul odor in God's nostrils—like the smoke from the palms we burn on Ash Wednesday. Our sins stink. But Jesus is the air freshener. He took our sins on himself. God smells the fragrant offering and sacrifice Jesus made for us on the cross, and God is pleased. He [sniff, sniff] near us and says, "Oh, that's much better." \*When you're angry, you're not thinking about how Christ loved you and gave himself up for you. You're probably thinking about yourself: how you've been wronged, how things are not going the way you want. Look up, look away

from yourself. Look at the Lord and his love for you. You are Saved by Christ's Fragrant Sacrifice. Let go of your anger.

During World War I, a German soldier jumped into an out-of-the-way shell hole. There he found a wounded enemy. The fallen soldier was soaked with blood and only minutes from death. The German soldier offered his enemy water. Kindness caused trust. The dying man pointed to his shirt pocket. The German soldier took from it a wallet and removed some family pictures. He held them so the wounded man could gaze at his loved ones one final time. With bullets raging overhead and war all around, the German was compassionate toward one who, under other circumstances would have tried to kill him, and vice versa. \*This is what it means to forgive just as in Christ God forgave you—to live as if you have no enemies and to treat kindly those who just yesterday (or for some here in Lake City 30 years ago) harmed you or said something hurtful. Let your anger go. Ask God to help you. He can. He doesn't want you to stay angry. Here are four good reasons. 1) You are sealed for eternal life by the Holy Spirit. 2) You are forgiven by God in Christ. 3) You are a dearly loved child of God. 4) Christ made you smell good to God. Get rid of all anger.