

Ephesians 4 - Part 2

by Robert F. Adcock

Christians can be angry, but it must be controlled by the Spirit of God and not lead to bitterness and resentment.

Duration: 41:58

Scripture: Matthew 5:23-24, Matthew 6:33, Ephesians 4:17, Ephesians 4:22-24, Hebrews 12:14-15

Topics: "Holy Love", "Christian Witness"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the importance of distinguishing between hating sin and showing love towards individuals. He emphasizes the need to respond to sinful actions with anger, but to also demonstrate love towards the person involved. The preacher highlights the love of God towards sinners, even when they were dead in their sins. He urges believers to make the most of their time on earth, understanding the urgency of witnessing and living for Jesus Christ. The sermon also warns against the dangers of anger, as it can lead to bitterness, which hinders the work of the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

I'd like for us to look again at Ephesians, Chapter 4, to hear this morning and lay some reference to the fact that we would consider this evening perhaps the aspect of the passage that we read, what we considered, and which we should be very careful. How we make a recommendation, well, it's not our recommendation, it's the truth found in the Word of God, that it is scriptural to be angry, but to be very careful not to sin when we do. Now, there are some that are not back, and perhaps they were only interested in the first aspect of it.

They can justify now being angry, but they're not interested in the truth connected with this passage. Perhaps I should have told them. Maybe I erred in not going all the way, but it felt like to me it would be appropriate to consider the two separately.

Reading from verse 17, Chapter 4, This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that he henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them because of the blindness of their heart, who being past feelings have given themselves over unto lasciviousness to work all unfundeness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ, if so be that ye have heard him and have been taught by him as the truth is in Jesus, that ye put off concerning the former manner of life, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful law, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Wherefore, putting away lying,

speak every man truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

Be ye angry, and say not, let not the sun go down upon your wrath, neither give place to the devil, let him that stole steal no more, but rather let him labor, working with his hands to things which is good that he may have to give to him that needeth. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God by whom ye are sealed unto the day of redemption, that all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice.

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you. Now, just a couple of verses in Hebrews 12. Hebrews 12 and verse 14.

We'll read verses 14 and 15. Follow peace with all men, and holiness without which no man shall see the Lord, looking diligently, lest any man fail of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness bringing up trouble you, and by it many be defiled. So we look to the Lord again in a word of prayer.

Our Father in Heaven, we thank thee for this day, and indeed it's been a day of happy fellowship with our dear people, and for what we enjoy as we gather together to remember the person of Jesus Christ, your Son. We thank thee and praise thee that we have sought to make him the center of all our gatherings, and all that we would understand from thy words. We pray that it might build us up in our most holy faith, that it might draw us closer and nearer to him, that we indeed may know him better, and indeed we may be fitted for his service in a more effective way.

Knowing full well that the days are short, knowing full well that in a moment of time we could be in his presence, do we pray the impress upon our hearts the urgency of witnessing and living for Jesus Christ in these distressing times, for we ask this in his worthy name. Amen. The passage that we've read, and the things that we'd like to address ourselves to, deals in a sense with spiritual maturity as believers.

Now there are things that are suitable for babies, for young people, for adults, and in the natural realm we understand that. The same thing applies in the spiritual realm. The baby, he likes milk, and he thrives on it, he grows on it.

But one day he progresses beyond that stage and he's able to take stronger food, meat. That's what Paul says. In fact, Paul is grieved by the fact that there were some that had lingered too long in that early stage of their Christian experience in which they were still characterized as being babies.

He would have them to be strong, mature spiritually so that they could handle the deeper things of God, that their discernment concerning spiritual things would be sharper and clearer, and they would not err in their spiritual judgment. That's the desire of the Apostle Paul. The Ephesian epistle, of course, deals with things that relate to Christian conduct, and this chapter that we're dealing with now, there are many strong exhortations in this passage that remind us of our responsibilities as Christians, our manner of life, the way we walk, the way we behave ourselves.

You see, Christian testimony is affected by what we do far more than what we say. It's the way we act, it's the way we behave ourselves, and so when we make a statement, as we did this morning, that we as Christians do have a capacity for anger, we believe that there is a place for it in the Christian's life. We place it in the same category as that work of grace that the Spirit of God does in making grace all-sufficient to us in the course of our lives, that work of producing fruitfulness in our lives, which stems basically from

that premise that we must learn how to love, and of course the stirring of one's emotions when we find that we are attracted to someone, when something in the heart is drawn out to another person.

We are reminded always that this work of the Spirit of God in teaching us to love is certainly an important part of our Christian experience. But then we learn that being angry is something that the Spirit of God can control, He must control. Let me emphasize that.

He must control those times when we give vent to the resentment we feel in our souls, when we see love wounded, we see injustice, we see righteousness trampled underfoot. The Spirit of God Himself must be in full control of our emotions when we react in anger toward these things. It's very important to remember that.

That's why I would have to hasten to say that perhaps a baby in Christ wouldn't understand that. We know that in these early days, weeks, months of our Christian experience that sometimes we caught ourselves doing things that sometimes instinctively we said, this is wrong. I can remember a friend of mine that he liked cold beer.

He loved cold beer. And after he was saved, he would get off from work, and first place he'd go, he'd go by this place that he thought, and he'd get him a glass of cold beer to repress him. And he went along fine.

He didn't think about it for a few weeks, and one day he was shocked. He was sitting there at that usual place, and he was drinking a beer. And he hung his head, and he said, this is not right.

I can't have much in the way of Christian testimony by being found here in this place. These fellows don't know the Lord. They don't care anything about spiritual things.

Certainly couldn't be witnessing some of these fellows with a glass of beer in my hand. So he abstained. We do know that there is a transitional period very often from the time that we're saved until we begin to truly grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So when we read a passage like this, and we're reminded that indeed we're talking about believers that have some degree of spiritual dissonance, and know what is sitting, what is Christ like when we say, Be ye angry. You've got to know how to handle that. Now, better still, you've got to know how to let the Spirit of God lead and direct when you are angry.

Because I look upon this as a privilege. We have a capacity for this. It's of God, so it must be all right.

But I think we find that there is responsibility, and as a rule, in matters that are spiritual, if we are to react in any situation in a way that brings glory and honor to God, we need good, clear spiritual discernment. Sometimes that's where we err. You know how often you've met with a Christian and they've made some grave mishudgement in interpreting something in the word of God.

And you had the opportunity of weeding it together and sharing it and going over it, and ultimately you arrived at what you believed was the correct interpretation and position, and it was a sense in which you felt like you had accomplished something. Well, we need to do that continually as we look at the word of God. But there is a danger, there's a problem that can develop out of the believer's capacity for anger.

You note how quick Paul reminds us of this danger. He says, Be ye angry, and sin not. He tells you right away there's an element of risk that's involved when you have this experience in your life of responding to

something in this life that indeed makes you angry.

And let not the sun, see it's conditional, let not the sun go down upon your wrath, neither give place to the devil. So note, if you will, just how quick Paul responds after that statement and giving us some very clear instructions as to how we should look upon this matter of being angry, because I believe this danger is very real. Do you really know that usually after you're angry, some of the things that result, and they are mentioned in this chapter, people that get angry a lot of times become embittered, convert bitter.

And we're told that if there's one thing that quenches the work of the Spirit of God that grieves him as he works in and through us, it's bitterness. You know, he just will not operate in circumstances where bitterness is given any place. And Paul knows that if a man becomes angry, and if that anger is something that he doesn't know how to handle, that eventually he'll be embittered.

Therefore he says, do not give place to Satan. And what he really means is don't give Satan an opportunity at a time like that. You don't have to give him much of an opportunity.

Just leave a little crack, he'll be there. He knows how vulnerable you are, he knows all of your weaknesses, you take advantage of every one of them. So you have to be wise, wise as serpents, says the word of God.

You have to be discerning and understand that bitterness and resentment and bearing of grudges and things of this nature, we can't afford them. We pay too high a price. The Spirit of God is grief, no longer spiritual power to wrestle with the enemy of our souls, the devil, no longer any power for witnessing, no longer any power in which we can effectively serve God.

But then again, we know when people become angry, and they become angry in the wrong sense of the word, they harbor in their own souls this bitterness, this resentment. Well then, things are indeed in a bad state of affairs. And I'm not saying that in every case that person may be obeying Christ.

It may be that it's a person that has some degree of spiritual disarmament that may be tripped up by this. We have a way of justifying what we do, and too often we look for some support, and if we find it, it only strengthens our position. In other words, we're going to look in just a moment at Matthew's Gospel, chapter 5, where we are reminded of a condition of heart that didn't produce bitterness in that heart, but it resulted in another person being bitter, becoming embittered by something that we did.

And we're going to discover that we have a responsibility immediately to try to effect reconciliation between yourself and that person. The flesh and the devil will oppose it. The flesh always seeks to justify itself.

The flesh. And of course, the devil's going to be there fanning the fire, trying to keep the thing going, because he knows how this grieves the spirit of God and renders us, in effect, impotent and unable to really function as God would have us function for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's a sad commentary on Christian testimony when we fall victim to these things, yet I'm persuaded that there are many of God's dear children that today have been through some experience in which there's been anger, there's been engendered in their souls a spirit of bitterness, resentment.

And they go on in this condition, sometimes for years, and the spirit of God is grieved, and they are miserable, and they lack any true joy. Because, you see, there's been a violation of the truth as found in God's word. So here's what we have to do.

We have to learn how to make some distinction in the exercise of anger and how we respond to what we see in the world that is sinful. Do you know how to hate sin but to show love toward the sinner? Well, God does. Thank God he does.

And you know how he looked upon us when we were dead in our trespasses and sin? He loved us. Can you make that distinction? Can you see that individual in this life, and his life is being spoiled by Satan? He's involved with so many things that, indeed, he angers you. You feel a sense of resentment.

Well, can you make that clear distinction and say, I love that man's soul, I love that woman's soul, I'd do anything to win them for the Lord? Maybe a brother or a sister in Christ, and they're falling into sin. We have clear instructions in this last verse that we read in Ephesians, that we need to show kindness, we need to be tenderhearted, we need to be forgiving. That's the work of the Spirit of God.

That doesn't appeal to the flesh when we feel like that perhaps we've been wronged. But that's God's way, and God knows how to love poor sinners. Some just can't do it, or maybe they won't do it.

And that, indeed, is sad. Every Christian should have a very gracious attitude toward those who are not as strong as those that have fallen victim or prey to Satan. So Paul says, don't let your anger become a sin.

And that's the thing. And if some of those dear folks went away this morning and they say, you know, that's great. Now when I see sin in this world, when I see individuals that are engaged in these things, and in the past perhaps I've suppressed my emotions, now I feel justified in getting angry about it.

You see, the danger is they may stay in that condition. And you see, we, in a sense, do not have a very high tolerance for anger and resentment, because it's so devastating in the heart and soul of the individual that it experiences and has his emotions stirred in this way. So we, indeed, have to be careful.

Anger becomes a sin when it becomes very personalized. Now, again, we're getting back to this distinction that must be made between the individual that's involved and the sin that is committed. And we must learn to make these distinctions.

Gitterness and resentment are, indeed, the sins that are pointed out as grieving the Spirit of God. But let not the sun go down upon your wrath. I said we couldn't afford to keep anger and resentment of these things for long in our souls, because it does something to you.

So once we have taken our stand, once we have voiced our opposition to that which is sinful, that which is evil, that which is corrupt and vile, we must take them to the throne of grace. That's where we're invited to come, with boldness. And there we make known our plea in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, and we ask God to intervene.

You see, in a sense, I'll leave the judgment up to him. You see, the manner in which he will handle that affair, I can only trust him to do it, and to do it justly and righteously. There again, my judgment might be imperfect, and we couldn't trust our own judgment in these matters.

So anger must be short-lived. We can't handle it for too long a period of time without, indeed, some of those very devastating effects, such as bitterness, and such as feeling deep sense of resentment towards, perhaps, some individuals. And if we know how to respond in these matters, we do recognize that this might be the true measure of a spiritual man, one that has spiritual discernment.

If you see someone and it seems that they just nourish and feed their souls upon the fact that, perhaps, I've been offended, and soon you get the opinion they like it, they enjoy it. And I'm not coming to the meeting, I'm not going to that place, and I'm not going to speak to him, and I'm not going to sit down and eat with her. I've been offended.

Don't you want to be reconciled? You know, sometimes an individual in that state doesn't recognize how miserable they are. And it's bound to be the work of Satan, the one that can blind, make insensible to divine truth, and the way that they really should respond if they're ever to enjoy any spiritual power and liberty in their life again as a Christian. There must be reconciliation.

God holds us responsible for our emotional outbursts, and they must, and I emphasize that, they must be under the spirit of God's control. I do not know how to handle anger apart from the leading and the directing of God's Holy Spirit. And if you do it in the flesh, you're going to make a miserable mess, and you're going to hurt someone else.

And by the same token, let's be bold. Anytime the emotion is stirred and we love, we can only trust the spirit of God to, there again, indeed promote in a way that would bring glory to God, the love that comes forth from these hearts and from these lives of ours. He, and he alone, knows how to handle the complexities of the human makeup, how to love, how to be angry.

The exercise of all of these things that we have a capacity for, they must be under the control of the spirit of God, because what he makes us fruitful and bountiful for God, he does it in a Christ-honoring fashion, and he never does it in the energy of the flesh. I looked at one, and there are many instances in the scriptures where you can find cases that would illustrate some of the things that we're talking about. I thought about Matthew 5, in which we read verses 23 and 24.

If you'd like to turn, turn over to Matthew chapter 5, and it gives us a very clear-cut position concerning this business of being reconciled when one has been offended. Well, here's a picture. One is about to offer an offering, a sacrifice unto the Lord.

Verse 23 says, Therefore thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there remembers that thy brother hath anything against thee. Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way. First be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

Now, too often how we think about this thing goes something like this, and it's closely akin to what we find in Matthew 18. Too often we say, Well, I have something in my heart against that person. Well, that's bad.

You need to confess it and get rid of it. Let's know what this is like. Here you are.

You're on your way up to the temple. You have a gift. You have something that you're going to offer up to the Lord.

And you are made aware that you have offended someone. There's someone that's not going to the temple. There's someone that's not offering a gift to God.

That individual has been hurt because of you. You say, I didn't know anything about it. Well, you know about it now.

What are you supposed to do? Go and seek to be reconciled to that person. Don't carry the gift. That's not important in the sight of God.

You see, we understand here that there are certain priorities. There are some things that are so important we might say, Well, go ahead and offer the gift. Go ahead and go into the presence of God.

There are matters that need to be set right. You see, God wants purity within the inner being of a man. And the very fact that I represent a stumbling block, that I've done something that hurt or offends another member of the body of Christ, that thing needs to be rectified.

There's no justification for any one of us that knows about bitterness and resentment that's been bred in the hearts of some of the individuals, and we don't seek to correct that thing. We may have to humble ourselves. We may have to ask that individual, Please forgive me if I've offended you.

Do everything that we can to see that that brother or sister in Christ is reconciled to us. And then it says, Go offer your gift. First and foremost, to see that believers in Jesus Christ are practicing day by day that wonderful unity of the Spirit of God, the bond of love that we have in Christ that does absolutely nothing nothing in our lives that represents a threat, a threat to disrupting and bringing about a cleavage between individual believers in the body of Christ.

Because God loves spiritual oneness in the body, and he sees us as one. Paul is teaching this principle without any doubt, and in verse 27, when he gives us that warning about, Do not give any opportunity to Satan, he knows that he lurks and he waits for any opportunity in which we may be lacked, in which we may not be discerned, and say, It doesn't matter. You know, I can't help it.

They just have sensitive feelings. They've been offended. Fuck, they'll get over it.

Well, the word of God addresses itself to that problem. He says, That's a serious matter. You see, that's what sometimes robs us of Christian fellowship, harmony within the body of Christ, little things that go unattended.

We say they're not important. The word of God says it is important. And we say, I'm regular at the services, I do all the right things, always in attendance, and yet we wouldn't take a time.

We wouldn't sense the seriousness that the word of God attaches to something like this. We say it's a small thing. God says it's a major thing.

It must be taken care of. And then, after reconciliation, we can be assured that spiritual blessing and power has been restored. Now, that passage that I read in Hebrews 12 reminds us that one note of bitterness, if it's harbored in the heart, not only does it affect one individual or two individuals, but it has the effect of spreading.

And it has such a disruptive way of robbing the assembly and individuals of any spiritual power. It says, Fall at peace with all men. Fall at peace with all men.

Is it firmly established in my own mind that I should do everything that I can to promote harmony, oneness, a condition, an attitude of peacefulness among the people of God? Or do I go on and say, well, this thing is just between him and me? No, it's not. Eventually it'll spread, because all of us, it seems, have that weakness of wanting to share with someone else, telling someone else, I've been wounded, I've been

hurt. You don't know what he did to me.

You don't know what she did to me. And we share these things. And then it spreads and it spreads and it spreads, permeates the whole body.

And then the body is weakened, the body, there are divisions in the body. And you see what it does, it saps, it robs the body of the spiritual power that it should have with God. And I believe that today, among God's people, so often this is one of the reasons that we have no power with God.

We say, these things are not important. I'm too busy, let's get on with a program. What program? There's no program that's so important that we can bypass these things.

You want spiritual power with God? You've got to be pure. There must be holiness within the inner man. The Spirit of God must not be grieved in our hearts and lives.

You don't have power with God? How dare I say it's not important? We've got everything lined up, got a wonderful program all lined up, everybody's functioning in a way that seems to be acceptable. We just press on, press on with, press on with. We've given place, we've given an opportunity for sacrifice, and you see the Spirit of God grieve? No power.

Indeed, this is to be, and we are victims of our own self-delusion. We talk about the heart being deceitful. We've deceived ourselves into believing that we can go out, go on, and not deal with these matters.

In Ephesians and Hebrews as well, both of these portions, it reminds us of just how easy it is to fail to show grace. And in the Hebrew epistle it says, are you going to fail in the exercise and show of pure grace towards any believer? Can someone look at you as a believer in Jesus Christ and say, you're a very gracious person? You're quick to forgive. You're easily reconciled.

Would someone say that about you? Very gracious person. Or did someone look at you and say, the grace of God hasn't done one thing for you since you've been praised? You're just as hard-headed, you're just as stiff-necked, you're still just as self-willed as you ever were. And you're not easily reconciled to anyone.

You're always asserting your will, your way. You're always trying to justify self. Well, in the work that the Spirit of God would do in making you a gracious person, he has failed to do what he wants to do in your life.

And that's what Hebrews is telling us. Has it failed, that work of grace that God started in your heart and life? Have you been growing in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus, or have you fallen by the wayside? Now you're living the Christian life in your own strength. You think you're doing a pretty good job.

You're a fop. You're a failure. When you fool yourself, you can't fool God.

And anyone that has one lick of spiritual discernment, you can't fool them. They can see through all of that hypocrisy that so often surrounds an individual that in their own strength, because of their own willfulness, because of their lack of tenderness, because of their lack of kindness, because of their lack of willingness to forgive, they go on. But they don't go on in the power of the Spirit of God.

They walk on a lonely pathway, disobedient to God's will, and bringing irreparable hurt and harm upon the body of Jesus Christ. Christlikeness, conformity to God's will, always produces divine results. The carrying out of God's will, the results, they're divine results.

And that can be achieved. You see, it is so simple. If we obey the Word of God, if we do God's will for our lives, the results are divine.

And indeed, that ought to encourage every one of us to have that divine experience day by day of saying, what God can do in my life today as an obedient believer in Jesus Christ is something that thrills me to the point I dare not do anything in my own strength. I will indeed walk in the Spirit and fulfill not the lust of the flesh. Shall we pray? Our Father in Heaven, we bow in thy presence, deeply grateful to thee for the divine truth that is before us.

Give each one of us clear discernment about these matters. The Spirit of God that indwells us as believers, let him fill us completely. Grant, we pray thee, that each one of us shall be receptive to his leading and his direction for our lives.

Grant, we pray thee, that we shall be yielded in a way that our lives will be fruitful and productive. Grant, we pray thee, O God, that we shall be a blessing to someone else, never a stumbling stone. Grant, we pray thee, that we shall not be offensive to any member in the body of Christ.

Grant, we pray thee, O God, if it's made known to us tonight that we have offended, if we have imparted any spark of bitterness or resentment to the heart of any believer in this room, it's made known to us that we'll not lay our heads upon our pillows, we'll not sleep again until we've been reconciled with that person. We do all of this with a view to bringing glory and honor to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and strengthening the body, maintaining that wonderful bond of love and the unity of the Spirit of God in his body. For his glory and honor we ask this, giving thanks.

Amen.

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