

Walking in Our Father's Footsteps (Part 2)

Ephesians 4:25 – 5:2

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Well, I invite you once again to turn with me to Ephesians and to Ephesians 4 where we find ourselves in the middle of a several-year study of this great book of Paul's to the church in Ephesus as well as to the churches in the surrounding area there of Asia Minor. I was thinking this week about my first few weeks in California back in 1987. I remember it for a lot of different reasons. Certainly, it was a different world than where I was coming from in Mobile, Alabama, and then Greenville, South Carolina. Some of the reasons were good, but at least one of them, and I remember it well, was not good.

I remember early on in my time in California, I found myself, as is very common there, sitting in traffic one morning. It was twelve or sixteen lanes wide, the freeway at that point, and there was literally nowhere to go. But you know how it works in traffic, particularly in California if you've ever been there. People are trying to inch their way and to fit into the next little space to gain just a few feet in hopes that somehow that means they'll get there quicker.

And I remember sitting there on the 5 freeway in the valley watching two men, watching in shock as two men in expensive cars dressed in very expensive business suits were hanging out of their windows threatening each other and yelling and gesturing obscenities at each other. And I was in shock for a number of reasons. I'd never really seen road rage up close and personal before. In addition to that, it seemed so incongruous with who these men were. Obviously very successful businessmen, and here they are, for some small provocation on the 5 freeway, hanging out their windows absolutely out of control. They had apparently read Mark Twain, who said, "When angry, count to four, and when very angry, swear" because they were following that advice that morning.

Anger is a universal human reality. All of us understand anger at some level. I certainly understand anger. Before God saved me at the age of eighteen, I was often very angry. In fact, this may come as a surprise to some of you, but I often got in physical fights with other people. And the Lord saved me, and after Christ, I was never involved in another physical altercation, but that doesn't mean that my struggle with anger completely went away. It has continued to be a struggle in my mind and occasionally in my words to this day. But I can tell you that I have seen,

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by God's grace, a decreasing pattern of that sin in my life over the thirty years since I've come to Christ.

But anger is something that, if we're honest with ourselves, not one person here this morning can say that that is not a sin that you have ever been tempted by, that is not a sin that you struggle with. If we're honest with ourselves, we know that this is one of the most common of human sins. And unfortunately, it's one of the most common in all our hearts. It's this sin of anger that Paul calls us to put off from us this morning as we come back to Ephesians 4.

You remember Paul summarizes the second half of this letter in chapter 4:1. After all that he's told us about our position in Christ, he says I want you to walk in a manner that is worthy of that calling, that's worthy of that high position that you have been given in Christ. And the rest of the letter explains how to walk worthy of that new position that we have been given in Christ. We've already seen that to walk worthy, we have to walk in unity with each other. We have to walk in new life. And we're in the middle of a section where we're learning that to walk worthy, we must also walk in love. That's the theme of the section we're studying together that runs from Ephesians 4:25 down through 5:2, so the end of chapter 4 and the first two verses of chapter 5. Paul states the theme of that paragraph at the very end of it. Look at 5:1,

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love.”

If we want to walk in a way that's worthy of our new position in Christ, then we must walk in our Father's footsteps and specifically, we must live a life that is defined by, permeated by, saturated by, love.

As Paul develops this theme of walking in our Father's footsteps, specifically when it comes to love, he describes how it is that we can walk in those footsteps, how we can imitate God in this way. We're looking then at the way to imitate God by walking in love, the way to imitate God. Beginning in verse 25 and running down through the end of chapter 4, Paul gives us five illustrations or examples of exactly how it is we can imitate God and walk in love.

Last week, we looked at the first of Paul's five illustrations of how to walk in love like our Father. And that was this, don't lie; instead, speak the truth. Don't lie; instead, speak the truth. Our God is a God of truth. He never ever lies. And that's a way that He demonstrates His love for all of us as His creatures. We can trust what He says. So, if we're going to imitate our Father, then we too must walk in the truth. And that's how we walk in love.

This morning, I want us to examine the second illustration of the way to imitate God and walk in love. Not only must we not lie and speak the truth. Secondly, don't get angry; instead, resolve your conflicts. Don't get angry; instead, resolve your conflicts. Look at verses 26 and 27. As Paul sort of fleshes out what sanctification looks like, what putting off and being renewed and putting on looks like, this is what he writes,

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.

He's dealing obviously with the theme of sinful anger.

Now the first question that we need to ask is what is anger? If I were to ask you, we'd all have similar, but perhaps divergent definitions of anger. Here's one encyclopedia, the online encyclopedia Wikipedia's definition,

Anger is an emotional state that may range from minor irritation to intense rage. The physical effects of anger include increased heart rate, blood pressure and levels of adrenaline. While most of those who experience anger explain its arousal as a result of "what happened to them," psychologists point out that an angry person can be very well mistaken because anger causes a loss in self-monitoring capacity and objective observability.

In other words, anger is an emotional state that ranges from irritation to rage, has some physical reactions with it and causes us in the process to lose our objectivity about what's really happening.

When it comes to anger, what do you think most people today think about anger? Well, it's interesting because the article in Wikipedia went on to say this, "Modern psychologists view anger as a primary, natural [and are you ready for this?], mature emotion experienced by all humans and as something that has functional value for survival." Essentially, the mindset of the world around us is this, there's nothing wrong with anger. It is acceptable behavior unless it hurts you or it causes you to physically hurt others. For us as Christians, the question is never, so what do the people around us think about this. The question is always (what?) what does God think, what does the Bible say about this.

Let me give you a little bit of a glimpse of how the Bible addresses this. Listen to just a few of the references that address this issue of anger. Proverbs 14:29, “He who is slow to anger has great understanding, But he who is quick-tempered exalts folly.” Proverbs 16:32, “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.” Proverbs 19:19, “A *man of* great anger will bear the penalty, For if you rescue *him*, you will only have to do it again.” Proverbs 25:28, “*Like* a city that is broken into *and* without walls Is a man who has no control over his spirit.” If you have no control over your spirit, if you lose control in anger, then it’s like a city that has no protection, no walls. Anything can influence you. Anyone can get to you. You’re like a city without walls. Ecclesiastes 7:9, “Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, For anger resides in the bosom of fools.”

Fast forward to the New Testament. In Galatians 5, Paul includes anger in the list of the deeds of the flesh, and he says this, “those who practice these things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” You can even go beyond the New Testament into the early church after the death of the apostles. The earliest Christian writing that we have, probably the end of the first century, that is not in the Scripture and is not inspired by God, but is a very interesting and helpful little document called the Didache, says this, “Never give way to anger for anger leads to murder.” Never give way to anger for anger leads to murder. You see, anger is universally condemned by the Old Testament, the New Testament and the early church after the New Testament.

Conflict in every relationship is inevitable. If you have relationships, there will be conflict. That is inevitable. But in verses 26 to 27, Paul identifies for us the destructive element in every conflict. It is ungodly, sinful anger. Anger is how conflict starts. Anger is how conflict escalates. And ultimately left unchecked, anger is what will destroy relationships. Proverbs 30:33 says this is inevitable. “For the churning of milk produces butter, [that will inevitably happen; you churn milk, you’ll get butter] ... pressing the nose brings forth blood; [you wring the nose enough, you will get blood; it’s inevitable] So the churning of anger produces strife.” It’s inevitable, conflict.

But Paul doesn’t leave us here in Ephesians with just the diagnosis. He also provides the cure. Maybe this morning, you’re here and anger is the struggle of your life, or perhaps it’s a struggle. Regardless, Paul here provides us with the practical instructions we need. In fact, in this passage, he outlines for us two practical solutions to help us deal with the anger that breeds conflict and destroys relationships. The first practical solution that I want you to see in this passage is this. Don’t allow sinful anger to begin. Don’t allow sinful anger to begin. Verse 26, “Be angry, and yet do not sin.” It’s kind of a strange way of putting it actually on Paul’s part. Be angry, and yet do not sin. There are two basic options of how to interpret that phrase. One view says this is a

command – be angry. Paul is telling us this view says that we must occasionally be angry for the right reasons. If that's true, and I don't think it is true, then this would be the only place in all the Bible where we're commanded to be angry. In addition, verse 26, notice, warns us about the danger of anger. And go down to verse 31. Verse 31 tells us to put all anger away. So, this is probably not a command to be angry.

The second option, and the one that I really believe is going on here, is this is a concession, a condition. Paul is saying something like this. I don't want you to be angry, but because we're all fallen, you will become angry. So, when that happens, don't let it degenerate into further anger and further sin. If you become angry, do not sin. It's a command not to sin in anger. It's like Jesus' statement, you remember when He told His enemies, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Destroy is a command, but Jesus wasn't telling them to kill Him. He was basically saying, if you destroy this temple, I will raise it up. It was an imperative used like a condition.

And I think in the same way, Ephesians 4:26 is not a command to be angry; it's a command not to sin in anger. We could paraphrase it like this, don't sin by indulging anger. As one commentator writes, "Anger is to be avoided at all costs, but if for whatever reason you do get angry, then refuse to indulge your anger so that you do not continue in sin." Don't allow sinful anger in your heart. That's what Paul is saying. Don't allow sinful anger in your heart. He's quoting David from Psalm 4. In Psalm 4 David is speaking to his enemies, those who had joined Absalom's rebellion. And he tells them not to engage in sinful anger against him. So that's what this is a command to do. Don't let anger begin in your hearts.

It's true that not all anger is sinful. God is often angry and demonstrates anger. Christ was angry. We saw that just recently in Mark 3. He was angry with the scribes and Pharisees for their attitudes. Even human beings can demonstrate godly anger. In Exodus 11, Moses is righteously angry with Pharaoh. Exodus 32, Moses is righteously angry with Aaron for being, going along with the golden calf. Nehemiah 5, Nehemiah is angry with the people and their sin.

So, we can be angry and it not be sin. The question is when, when is our anger not sinful? You ever thought about that? When is our anger not sinful? Well, I think it's appropriate, since this week was his five, five hundredth anniversary of his birthday, to let John Calvin speak to this. Listen to what he says,

There are three faults by which we offend God in being angry. The first is when our anger arises from slight causes and often from no cause whatever or at least from private injuries or offenses. The second is when we go beyond the proper bounds and are hurried into intemperate excesses. The third is when our anger which ought to have been directed against ourselves or against sins is turned against people. [He goes on to write,] Our anger is not sinful [here it is, our anger is not sinful] if the objects of our anger are sought not in others but in ourselves, if we pour out our indignation against our own sins. With respect to others, we ought to be angry not at their persons, but at their sins, nor ought we to be excited to anger by private offenses, but by zeal for the glory of the Lord.

So, when is your anger not sinful? Your anger's not sinful if it's directed against your own sin or if it's directed against the sin of someone else, but not their person and if your reason for being angry with their sin is not personal offense, but the glory of God. Pretty high standard, in fact, can we say that by that standard most human anger is (what?) sinful, almost without exception. You know, there's this constant temptation we all have to excuse our own anger as righteous indignation and everybody else's anger as just being a bad temper.

James 1:20 says, "... the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God." Therefore, sinful anger should not be tolerated. Look down in verse 31, "Let all wrath and anger ... be put away from you." Now maybe you're one of those people sitting here this morning who doesn't believe that you ever get angry. You don't believe you ever struggle with anger. Can I tell you this gently? You're kidding yourself. And the reason you think that is probably because you have redefined anger in socially acceptable terms. So, you would never say I'm angry. You'd say I'm not angry, I'm frustrated, I'm stressed out, I'm irritated. Where are those terms in Scripture? You won't find irritated or frustrated in that sense in Scripture. Instead, I hate to tell you the Bible calls it anger.

Now if you're going to keep anger from beginning, which is what Paul's commanding us here, it really helps to know what starts us toward anger. What are the causes of anger? What are the reasons for our anger? This week I had a very interesting study. I just took the Scriptures as a whole and sort of traced this issue of anger through the Scriptures looking for examples of why people got angry in some of the Biblical examples. And I sort of catalogued them into a few categories. Let me give them to you just briefly. Here are some of the reasons we get angry.

Number one, when inanimate objects or animals fail to do what we want, when inanimate objects or animals fail to do what we want. You remember Numbers 22? Balaam's on the donkey. The donkey sees the angel of the Lord, supernaturally allowed to see the angel of the Lord. It says "she lay down under Balaam; so Balaam was angry and struck the donkey with his stick."

Now not many of us have donkeys, but we all have things in our lives, inanimate objects or animals, that can be very frustrating. Occasionally, my anger is displayed on that little dog in my life. More often however, it's something like my computer. You know, I'm a fairly well-educated, well-read person, but you'd walk into my office at times and think perhaps that wasn't true because I'm talking to my computer. "I didn't ask you to do that! Why did you do that? Who's in charge here?" We can get angry with things. We've all seen it, we've all experienced it. That's why number fifteen of Jonathan Edwards's seventy resolutions was, resolved never to suffer the least motions of anger toward irrational beings. Remember he rode a horse everywhere he went. We could add inanimate objects. So sometimes we get mad when things don't do what we want.

Secondly, and this is more frequent, when others sin. We get mad or angry when others sin, particularly when they sin against us. Genesis 27, you remember Esau was sinned against by Jacob. And Rebekah says this to Jacob. Genesis 27:44,

"Stay with ... [our relative] a few days, until your ... [brother Esau's] fury subsides, and he forgets what you did to him."

In other words, Esau was angered (how?) by the sin of his brother Jacob. And often, you and I can get angry when others sin against us.

Sometimes we can get angry when they don't sin even so much against us. But against God, we can get sinfully angry. This is what happened to Moses, you remember? Moses couldn't go into the Promised Land for this very reason. Numbers 20. Numbers 20:10,

... Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, "Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?" Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod....

Moses wasn't angry because the people had sinned against him. He was angry because the people had sinned against God, but he got sinfully angry, and this is why he wasn't allowed to go into the Promised Land. You and I can even be angry against someone else's sin in a sinful way.

Number three, we can get angry or mad when our own sin is confronted. You ever gotten mad when someone tells you what you're doing isn't right? That happens. Luke 4:28, it happened in the extreme. Jesus shows up in Nazareth in the synagogue. He's preaching to the hometown crowd, people He grew up with. And Luke 4:28 says, "... all *the people* in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things." What could Jesus possibly have said to the hometown crowd that would make them that angry? Well, He told them they were spiritually blind and spiritually deaf, they were prisoners in need of release. He confronted their sin, and it made them angry.

Stephen in Acts 7 preaches that wonderful sermon, and at the end of it, they say, "Thank you Stephen. You really encouraged us. You confronted, we're so grateful." No. "When they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him." They were angry because he confronted their sin. And sometimes we get angry when others confront our sin.

Number four, and this is probably one of the most common of all. We get angry when people don't do what we want them to do, when people don't do what we want them to do. First Samuel 20:30. Saul hated David, was jealous of David, and wanted his son Jonathan to go along. When he discovers Jonathan isn't going along with the plan, he gets angry. Verse 30 of 1 Samuel 20, "... Saul's anger burned against Jonathan and he said to him, 'You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you are choosing the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of your mother's nakedness?'" It's angry because Jonathan isn't doing what he wants him to do.

First Kings 21, you remember the story of Naboth, the vineyard that Naboth had there by Ahab's palace. And Ahab wanted to buy that vineyard for himself. He wanted the vineyard and, and Naboth refused because it wasn't right to pass that, that vineyard out of the family. And so, verse 4 of 1 Kings 21 says, "... Ahab came into his house sullen and vexed because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he said, 'I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers.'" Ahab was mad because Naboth wouldn't do what he wanted. He wouldn't go along with the plan.

Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 3, you remember, had that great image dream and he built the great image of gold that was to be worshipped. Seemed like a great plan to him and everybody went along except for three of the Hebrews, and he got mad because they weren't going along with the plan. "Nebuchadnezzar in rage and anger gave orders to bring Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego." And you know the rest of the story.

Herod, you remember, was mad at the magi when they, when they didn't come back and tell him where Jesus was. And in his anger, he ended up killing all the children two years of age and under in Bethlehem and its vicinity.

Number five, we get angry when people don't treat us like we think we deserve. We get angry when people don't treat us like we think we deserve. First Samuel 18:8. You remember after the whole Goliath scene, they come back and this was Saul's reaction. "Saul became very angry, for this saying displeased him; and he said, 'They have ascribed to David ten thousands, but to me they have ascribed thousands.'" You know what Saul was thinking? I'm the king. I deserve a higher degree of respect than this young guy David is getting. And because of that, he became angry. He wasn't being treated like he thought he deserved to be treated.

That's, that's where the whole plan of Haman to annihilate the Jews comes from in Esther. In Esther 3:5, it says, "When Haman saw that Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage to him, Haman was filled with rage." And the whole plan flows out of that. 'He's not treated, I deserve because of my position, my place, to be, be treated differently. How dare this person not treat me with what I deserve?' And we often get angry with people in our lives because they're not treating us like we think we deserve to be treated.

Number six, we get angry when God doesn't do what we want. Sometimes we get angry because God doesn't follow through with our plans. That happened to Jonah. You remember? Jonah shows up, preaches to Nineveh, finally gets there, preaches, the people repent. That wasn't the plan Jonah had. And so, Jonah 4:1 says, "It greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry," angry with God because God wasn't doing what he wanted Him to do. And sometimes you and I get angry because we're not happy with what God's doing in our lives.

Luke 15:28, you remember, in the story of the father and the two sons, the elder brother representing the Pharisees, he was angry because of how the father was receiving the prodigal son back.

We can even get angry with the Scripture. James 1:19 in the context is talking about our response to Scripture. And it says, "... everyone must be quick to hear [that is, the Scripture,] slow to speak [that is, to respond, to talk back to the Scripture] *and* slow to anger; [toward the Scripture]. Scripture can make us angry. Usually we don't say, you know, "I'm angry with God, or I'm angry with the Bible." Instead, we get angry with whom? the messenger. Don't shoot the messenger. I have this happen fairly often to me as a pastor. You know, I just show people what the Bible says or, either in a sermon or in counseling. And sometimes, they get angry. Sometimes they tell me. Sometimes they tell others, "How dare he say that to me! Who does he think he is? Who does he think I am?" So sometimes we get angry because God is doing or telling us what we don't want.

Now when you look at that little list I've just given you, and it's not an all-inclusive list, what is the one common denominator? If you were to try to reduce all of those to one basic idea, what would it be? It would be this, I think. I get angry and you get angry when we perceive that our rights are being violated. When you get angry next time, ask yourself this question. What right do I feel is being violated that's making me angry? This is clearly what the Bible teaches. In all of these examples, these people felt like they had a right to something. I have a right to be respected and treated a certain way. I have a right for you to do what I've asked you to do. I have a right for my plans to go forward. I have a right for God to do what I think's best in my life, and on and on it goes.

That's clearly what the Bible teaches so we don't need any proof of that, but it's interesting that even some in the psychological community acknowledge this reality. I read this week a quote from an American psychologist, Albert Ellis, who suggested that "the reason we humans respond in anger is when our personal rules are violated or our personal domain is transgressed." When my rules aren't the ones you live by and when my little kingdom is somehow violated when you're not letting me be the king I want to be.

So how can we keep anger from beginning? That's what Paul is telling us here. Don't become angry. How do we keep anger from beginning? Well, you start by knowing the cause. What, what causes your anger most often? I'd encourage you to keep a little journal. When you get angry, what was the cause and what in your mind was the right that was violated? What right did you have that was violated at that moment?

Secondly, acknowledge that you have no rights. You have no rights. We deserve nothing from God, and we deserve nothing from anyone else. The only thing we deserve from God (is what?)

is eternal wrath. And if others really knew what was in our hearts, all we would deserve from them is (what?) disdain. So really what it comes down to is acknowledging we have no rights, we are not in a position to be king; only God is. It's really an acknowledgment of God's sovereignty. It's not my rights that are being violated if any are being violated; it's God's rights and He has the option to deal with it however He chooses. That's why in Romans 12, Paul says, "Don't take revenge, brothers, but [instead] leave room for the anger of God." If God wants to get angry, He wants to deal with it, that's His business. It's not my rights that were violated; it's His.

When somebody else is angry at you, don't respond in kind. Instead, respond in gentleness and calmness. This is how you keep disagreements in your relationships from developing into conflict, how you respond. Proverbs 15:1, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger." Proverbs 15:18, "A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but the slow to anger calms a dispute." When a person in your life, let's say your spouse, speaks in anger, rather than responding in kind or choosing a harsh word, speak gently and humbly. Calm the anger by a calm and gentle response. And don't associate with people who are angry people. Proverbs 22, Proverbs 22:24 says,

Do not associate with a man given to anger; Or go with a hot-tempered man, Or you will learn his ways And find a snare for yourself.

You'll be trapped. You will begin to learn the same patterns of behavior. You say, well I don't know exactly how to practice that, how not to associate with an angry person because I'm married to one, or I live in the same house with one. The answer is "as much as lies within you, be at peace with all men." Are you feeding that anger? Are you responding in anger? As much as lies within you, be at peace with all men.

So, Paul's first practical solution to anger is don't let sinful anger begin. But what if you find you're already angry? How do you prevent that anger from building?

Notice Paul's second practical solution. Don't allow sinful anger to grow. Don't allow sinful anger to grow. And he tells us how, verse 26, "Do not let the sun go down on your anger." Now the Bible identifies several paths that ungodly anger takes. As we've just seen, anger can be caused by a variety of causes, a variety of reasons. And when we're angry, there are several different sinful expressions of that anger. We don't all express anger the same way. Let me give you a few Biblical sinful expressions of anger.

Number one is blowing up. This is one of the most common. When you're angry, you blow up. Down in verse 31, that's the word translated "wrath." It's like a volcano; it (pkchooo!), it explodes and goes everywhere. It blows up. The encounter of Saul with Jonathan in 1 Samuel 20 gives us several examples of several different kinds of anger responses. It gives us this one. "Then Saul's anger burned against Jonathan and he said to him, 'You son of a perverse, rebellious woman!'" He blows up at Jonathan.

Another expression of sinful anger is yelling. This it goes, it's related to blowing up, but slightly different, yelling. Down in verse 31, it's the word "clamor." Clamor is, I think, a misleading English translation. We don't usually use that word. It simply means to yell, to shout. Yelling is a sinful expression of anger. In a disagreement, you get angry and you yell. That's what Saul did to Jonathan.

A third sinful expression of our anger is name-calling, verbal abuse. Down in verse 31, it's the word "slander." Again, in 1 Samuel 20, you see an example of this. Remember what Saul said to his son? "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman!" He gets into name-calling, abusive speech. And some people when they get angry, they blow up, or they yell, or they use abusive speech, or all of those.

A fourth sinful expression of anger is clamming up. Some people don't blow up; they clam up. That's the word in verse 31 that's translated "anger." We'll look at that word when we get there. It's a different word than the word "anger" up in verse 26. It means to clam up, to sort of have this settled disposition in your heart of anger. In 2 Samuel 13:22, it says, "... Absalom did not speak to Amnon either good or bad; for he hated Amnon." Some people just clam up. They don't say anything. They just become, draw into their shell, and they're quiet. First Kings 21:4, you remember the story of Ahab? Listen to how Ahab responded, how his anger expressed itself. "... he lay down on his bed and turned his face and ate no food." Here's a king and he's pouting, he's clamming up. That's a sinful expression of anger.

By the way, clamming up would include ventilating your anger some other way, releasing your anger. And the only way you deal with your anger is by beating a pillow instead of the person or beating something else, or in some cases exercising strenuously, not in order to get yourself under control to deal with the problem, but as the only way you deal with the problem, or as writing vengeful letters that you never mail. There are a lot of different ways clamming up expresses itself.

Another sinful response in anger is leaving, just take off. Get in the car, drive off, walk out of the room, ignore the person, leave. Second Kings 5:11, Naaman, you remember, was furious when he was told to dip in the river, and he went away and he said, “Behold, I thought, ‘He will surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper.’” He got mad and he walked out. He left. A lot of people respond in anger like that.

Hatred and bitterness is another common angry response, bitterness. Down in verse 31, it’s the words “bitterness” and “malice.” We’ll look at those words when we get there. By the way, hatred and bitterness are nothing but prolonged anger. John Calvin writes, “If you cannot be angry with your brother, then you cannot hate him; for hatred is nothing but sustained anger.”

One final expression of anger is revenge. Sometimes it involves physical violence. Other times it’s using your mouth to exact revenge or some other way exacting revenge. In Genesis 4, you remember Cain hated and was angry with his brother Abel because his sacrifice was accepted. He exacted revenge. Absalom in 2 Samuel 13 takes revenge. Haman in Esther 3 takes revenge. And that’s a sinful way we can express our anger.

Listen, those are common sinful expressions of anger. If you are guilty of any of those, you are guilty of sinful anger. Here’s Paul’s point in Ephesians 4:26. Whatever path your anger takes, and it’s different for all of us, whatever your path your anger takes, don’t let it continue in your heart. You must deal with that anger and do it right away. Verse 26, “Don’t let the sun go down on your anger.” The Jewish day ended at sundown, and a new day began at sundown. So, Paul is essentially saying this, before the end of one day and the beginning of another, deal with the anger and the conflict that it’s produced.

It’s crucial that you not allow sinful anger to fester, to continue to express it by blowing up or yelling or clamming up or verbal abuse or any of those other ways that I listed for you. Don’t let it continue. If it develops in your heart, don’t allow sinful anger to continue. Don’t let the day end without having dealt with anger and resolved the source of the conflict. In our context in the 21st century, we could put it like this. Don’t go to bed without dealing with your anger and diffusing the cause of the conflict.

Sheila and I, when we were first married, which by the way was 23 years ago today, in those early years, we made, and we still have this commitment. But we made that commitment from the very beginning that we wouldn’t go to bed, we wouldn’t go to sleep, angry with each other. I

remember in those early years, there were some three and four and five hour discussions up till 3 and 4 in the morning working things out. There were times when I wanted to give up and just go to bed. Now we're at a stage in our life and marriage when it usually doesn't take that long. But whether a few minutes or a few hours, the payoff is worth it, and the cost of not pursuing that resolution is way too high.

How do you deal with anger? How do you keep it from growing? You confess the sin of anger. You confess the sin that lies beneath the anger, whatever the cause of your anger is, whatever right you feel has been violated. And then, Paul says here, you resolve the cause of the anger before the day is over, true, complete resolution, or to use the Biblical expression, "be of one mind."

You remember when there was a conflict in Philippi between two women who were Paul's fellow laborers? In Philippians 4:2, listen to the solution Paul gives them. I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to win at all costs, to have nothing to do with each other. Just tell them to give into each other for the sake of peace. Just tell them to come to some compromise. Is that what he says? No, none of those things are acceptable solutions to conflict. Paul says tell them to live in harmony in the Lord. Literally, I urge them to think the same, to be of the same mind, to be of one mind, to come to complete resolution.

If there is conflict between you and another person, you need to do one of two things. Either number one, if it was a personal offense, you need to be willing to exercise a spirit of forgiveness, give it up, never bring it up in your own mind or with them again and move on if it's not going to continue to bother you.

Or you must go to that person and seek to resolve the conflict. And it doesn't matter whether you were the one who sinned or you were the one who was sinned against. Scripture speaks to both scenarios. Matthew 5 says you discover that your brother has something against you, you sinned. Matthew 18, you believe your brother has sinned against you, he sinned or she sinned. God says that when there's conflict, both parties are responsible to go to the other. From God's perspective, the best scenario is that they run into each other on the way to make it right.

Now maybe you don't think this issue of anger is really that important. Paul certainly thought so. Look at the reason he gives as to why it's important to deal with our anger. Verse 27, "and do not give the devil an opportunity." Here's the reason not to allow sinful anger to begin, and if it does begin, why we should deal with it before a one day passes because failing to do so will give the

devil an opportunity in your life. One leading Greek lexicon defines it this way, “Do not give the devil a chance to exert his influence in your life.” Peter O’Brien, “Through uncontrolled anger, Satan is able to gain a foothold in the Christian’s life.”

Think about this for a moment. Anger is like a Trojan Horse in your soul. It’s like a fifth column that will allow the enemy access to your very soul. If we don’t resolve the conflict, if we don’t deal with our anger, it provides an opening for the devil to destroy us, to destroy our lives through bitterness or personal revenge. William Hendriksen writes,

The devil will quickly seize the opportunity of changing our indignation, whether righteous or unrighteous, into a grievance, a grudge, a nursing of wrath, an unwillingness to forgive. He must not be given any opportunity to take advantage of our anger for his own sinister purpose.

Listen, anger will destroy your life. It will eat you up. Maybe you heard several years ago about the man who was so eaten up with anger toward his wife that he just divorced or just divorced him, that when the court ordered him to send alimony support to her, every month he sent her the alimony payments, but he sent it to her in coins, in small coins, in nickels, so that every month she received a package that weighed 160 pounds. Why would somebody do that? He was eaten up with anger. It was destroying his soul.

But the danger of growing anger is even greater than just destroying our lives here. The devil can use out of control anger to destroy, as I mentioned, our very souls. Look over at what Jesus says about anger in Matthew 5. Matthew 5. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addresses this. Verse 21, He says,

“You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be guilty before the court.’ But I say to you [and Jesus makes the law more pointed, more internal, but I say to you] that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; [you deserve the death penalty, Jesus says] and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ [literally, you empty-head] shall be guilty before [the Sanhedrin] the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell.”

You know what Jesus was saying? He was saying that anger and its fruits (what are the normal fruits of anger? verbal abuse) is the moral equivalent of murder. Verbal abuse and the thoughts that accompany it flow from the same anger that leads to murder. And anger and its fruit carry with it the same moral guilt before God as murder.

Listen, if you are angry with someone, if you have used verbal abuse toward someone in anger, Jesus said if that's the only sin you ever committed your whole life, it would make you deserving of eternal hell. That's how serious this is. Anger is the heart's version of murder. And Galatians 5 says that a person whose life is characterized by anger will not inherit the kingdom of God. In other words, it's impossible as a habit and practice of life to practice anger and at the same time, be a Christian.

Frederick Buechner writes,

Of the seven deadly sins, anger is possibly the most fun. To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back - in many ways, it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is yours.

Paul says you better deal with anger. Don't let it begin, and if it begins, don't let it grow. Deal with it before the new day dawns or the new day comes.

Now remember, this command is part of a paragraph. It's part of a paragraph urging us to imitate our Father and walk in love. So, the question is, as we finish our study this morning, how is this true of God? If we're to imitate God by not holding onto our anger, how is this true of God? You remember the first half of Ephesians? We were dead in sins. We were dead in our acts of rebellion against God. We were His enemies. We were children of His wrath – that is, we were the just recipients of His anger and in His case, it wasn't sinful anger. He was absolutely holy and righteous in His anger. He was completely just and right to be angry with you and to be angry with me and to retain that anger forever. God would have been just to have done that.

But what did God do? Even though it was completely holy and righteous anger, what did He do in our case? He sought to be reconciled. He pursued reconciliation with us who were His enemies. We've seen that in Ephesians. Ephesians 2, He reconciled us to Himself.

But I want you to turn to one passage as we finish our study. Turn to 2 Corinthians 5. You know this is a favorite of mine. I just want to remind you how God responded when He was rightfully angry with us. Second Corinthians 5:18,

Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the [message or] word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Folks, you want to walk like your Father? Do you want to walk in your Father's footsteps? Do you want to walk in love like He does? Here is our righteous Father having complete, perfect, holy righteous anger against us. And He could've kept that anger against us forever, and it would've been right, it would've been holy, it would've been good. But because He walks in love, He sought to be reconciled to us. He took the initiative, even though we bore the sole responsibility for the offense, to reconcile us to Himself. You want to be like God? Then don't live in anger, but instead, seek reconciliation.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for the amazing truth that You did seek us out when we were the just objects of your anger and you reconciled us to Yourself.

Father, help us to walk in Your footsteps, to walk in love and not to hold onto anger. Father, don't let anger begin in our hearts. Help us to see its cause and to see that we have no rights. Help us to let it go, to trust Your sovereignty, to give place for Your anger if it needs to be displayed.

And Father, help us when anger does find a place in our hearts to deal with it quickly before the day is done. Lord, help us to commit to never let a day end with anger unresolved, where we have come to one mind with the person whom there's been anger as much as lies within us. We pray that You would do this so that we could walk in Your footsteps, so that we could bring glory to You, our Father, in whose name we pray. Amen.