

# “CAUTION: Angry Person Ahead!”

A sermon by  
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**TEXT: Ephesians 4:25-5:2 and Mark 11:15-19**

## **Ephesians 4:25-5:2**

*So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil. Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

## **Mark 11:15-19**

*Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He was teaching and saying, ‘Is it not written, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations”?’*

*But you have made it a den of robbers.’*

*And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.*

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Once there was a couple that had been married for more than 60 years. They had shared everything. They had talked about everything.

They had kept no secrets from each other except for one. It seems the little old woman had a shoebox in the top of her closet. She cautioned her husband never to open the box or to ask her about it. For sixty years, he never thought about the box. Then one day, the little old woman got very sick. The doctor said she would not recover. In trying to sort out their affairs, the little old man took down the shoebox. He took it to his wife's bedside and said that perhaps it was time he knew the purpose and contents of the box. She agreed. When he opened the box, he discovered two crocheted doilies and a stack of money totaling \$25,000!!

He asked her about the contents. "When we were to be married," she said, "my grandmother told me the secret of a happy marriage was never to argue. She told me that if I ever got angry with you, I should just keep quiet and crochet a doily." The little old man was so moved; he had to fight back tears. Only two precious doilies were in the box. From the evidence, he concluded she had only been angry with him two times in all their married life. He almost burst with happiness. "Honey," he said, "that explains the doilies, but what about all of this money? Where did it come from?"

"Oh," she said, "that's the money I made from selling the rest of the doilies." (Source: Carol Kagdis, Ledgewood Baptist Church, Ledgewood, New Jersey)

If only anger were so profitable for the rest of us!

Unfortunately, it is not. Anger turned inward, destroys our health creating ulcers, high blood pressure, angina, and other maladies. Anger loosed outward destroys our relationships, creates resentment and may foster greater hostility. Unresolved anger can fester into chronic bitterness, making us unpleasant people and isolating us from others. In fact, a study conducted at the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, NC, showed that a major reason successful people are fired or forced to retire before advancing as far as they were expected was due to their inability to handle anger, especially under pressure. (Source: How to Deal with Difficult People [Workbook])

Yet, we do get angry. The Bible never tells us we should not get angry. However, Scripture does instruct us how to use anger in the right manner. By the grace of God, we can! Anger, like our other emotions exists for a reason. Dr. David Seamands, Christian psychologist, writes, "Anger is a divinely implanted emotion. Closely allied to our instinct for right, it is designed to be used for constructive spiritual purposes. The person who cannot feel anger at evil is a person who lacks enthusiasm for good. If you cannot hate wrong, it's very questionable whether you really love righteousness."

That is why St. Paul writes, "In your anger, do not sin." Actually, Paul is quoting the Old Testament here. The full quote is found in Psalm 4:4-5 and reads, [SLIDE] "Be angry, but sin not; commune with your own hearts on your beds and be silent. Offer right sacrifices and put your trust in the Lord."

Simply put, **BE ANGRY FOR THE RIGHT REASONS ABOUT THE RIGHT THINGS**. Jesus got angry. He got angry at sin and its effect upon peoples' lives. Jesus got angry. It upset him enough when people took advantage of others to overturn tables in the Temple courtyard and chase out the moneychangers with a whip of cords. Jesus got angry. He railed at the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Scribes.

We call this kind of anger 'righteous anger.' Yet our anger rarely approaches this kind of anger. Righteous anger does not mean "being angry because I know I'm right." Neither does righteous anger mean "being angry because I know my rights." Righteous anger is "anger that desires to set things right."

Jesus never got angry because he was personally slighted, humiliated or because he experienced a personal injustice. He took these in stride. In such instances, he taught us, as his disciples, to turn the other cheek, to pray for those who persecute us and to do good to those who do evil to us.

Paul writes to a young Christian church in Ephesus. As he writes, "In your anger..." he acknowledges that anger is a reality for Christians as well as for non-Christians. Christians do get angry. Getting angry is not the issue. What we do with that anger, however, is of critical importance to our spiritual health and well-being.

That is why Paul ends the admonition, "In your anger, do not sin."

How do we sin with our anger? We sin by yielding control to our anger, letting it have the upper hand. Instead of controlling our actions and our speech, anger grabs the steering wheel. Now we must go where our anger takes us, and our actions and speech are controlled by that anger. Such abdication of control can cause us to act foolishly and rashly.

Several years ago, William F. Merten of Mt. Clemens, Michigan, wrote to Reader's Digest to tell about a memorable argument he had with his wife. The argument was well under way as they left a party one evening. Once they were in the car, words were flying. The area they were driving through was not the best of neighborhoods, so they stopped arguing just long enough to lock the doors. Then they started in again.

Merton's wife had really worked up a storm! After a few choice words from him, she shouted, "Stop the car and let me out!" Merton pulled over to the curb. His wife unlocked the door and got out, but then looked around and got back in again. Looking a little sheepish she said, "Take me to a better neighborhood."

That broke them both up -- and the argument too. Anger can cause us to do some dumb things. (SOURCE: Reader's Digest)

Not only do we need to be angry about the right things...sin, injustice, the needs of others, oppression, immorality and indifference.

### **BE ANGRY AT THE RIGHT TIME IN THE RIGHT WAY.**

We all know the term "inappropriate anger." Perhaps we have even engaged in it. Anger becomes inappropriate when it is re-directed at an innocent party (known as the "kick the dog" syndrome), vented at the wrong time or released in the wrong venue. These are all actions that result from anger and are not the anger itself.

Anger as an emotion must be acknowledged. First, we must be aware that we are angry. Then we must discover why we are angry before we take any kind of action. Am I ashamed? Have I been humiliated? Have I been offended? Have I been victimized? Have I been hurt? Answering such questions requires self-understanding that will never be realized in the heat of the moment. We need to step outside the fray in order to gain a godly perspective. We need a buffer of time and distance for such self-analysis. We will never discover it in the white-hot emotion of fully vented anger.

I never met my mother's father. He died when my mom was a young girl, leaving my grandmother a widow at a very early age. My grandmother loved my grandfather... so much so that she never remarried. She raised three children and cared for her own mother with very few resources through the Great Depression.

Nanny was only five foot tall. She was small, but she had a temper. She once told me that early in her marriage, she would blow up at my grandfather for something he had said or done. She knew my grandfather was upset or angry. Instead of fighting back, he would grab his hat, put it on his head and say, "Ruthie, I'm going for a walk." When he returned, there would be a discussion, not a fight. Time away gives perspective. Perspective creates a buffer. Time and distance create the atmosphere for a gentle answer and a tender response.

The Book of Proverbs contains much wisdom when it comes to anger. "*A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. (Proverbs 15:1) Or how about this one: "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit is better than he who takes a city." (Proverbs 16:32) Or this one: "A wrathful man stirs up discord, but one slow to anger calms strife." (Proverbs 15:18)*

James the half-brother of Jesus gives us this gem. *“You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God’s righteousness.” (James 1:19-20)*

Early in my ministry, I heard Dr. Louis H. Evans Jr., former pastor of the National Presbyterian Church in Washington, DC speak at a conference. Something he shared stuck with me because it was so profound. He said, “Everyone will die somewhere. The only choice we get in life is which hill we will be buried on.”

This has allowed me some perspective on my own anger. Not every battle is worth fighting. It is possible, even likely, to win a battle and lose the war. Yes, indeed! Therefore, I must choose. Is this hill worth dying on? Is it worth releasing my anger and venting my spleen or would the long-term damage I cause outweigh any short-term benefit I might imagine by demanding my rights and demanding to be considered right by the other person?

When we scream, we cannot listen. When we lash out, we cannot learn. When we seek to control others by our anger, we forfeit the opportunity for a Spirit-controlled temperament that is pleasing in God’s sight. Such anger acts out of sin and selfishness, sins in its expression and often causes others to sin in reaction. Anger unleashed in this way is a lose-lose proposition all around. Finally, **ANGER SHOULD NEVER BE NURSED AND REHEARSED**. Simply put, anger should have an end. Period. The Apostle Paul writes, *“Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry and do not give the devil a foothold.”*

When we nurse a grievance, hold a grudge or rehearse an insult, several things happen. First, we become preoccupied with our grievance. It consumes our thoughts, night and day. God is no longer in control. Even we are no longer under control. Anger is driving the bus and we are on it. Second, we unfairly and unjustly begin to attribute impure motivation, rightly or wrongly, to everything the person with whom we are angry says or does. We begin to examine every statement, every action with a magnifying glass, asking, “I wonder what they really meant by that?”

Anger must have a limit, finally, because nursing and rehearsing anger gives the Evil One a foothold in our lives. Anger can quickly turn to resentment. Resentment just as quickly turns to bitterness. Bitterness then taints every relationship. We begin to plot revenge. We consider actions and words that are so far beneath our image of ourselves and of God’s desire for us that objective consideration would find it appalling. We are a pot that quietly seethes and boils just waiting to explode. We approach complete strangers with suspicion. We trust no one. Anger must have a limit, else we need to heed the admonition of poet John Dryden, who wrote, “Beware the fury of a patient man.”

We count our days from sunrise to sunrise. The Jewish people count their days from sundown to sundown. That is why the Sabbath begins at dusk on Friday night. That is also why Paul includes this admonition not to let the sun go down on your anger.

Sundown is the beginning of a new day. The new day can be the beginning of a restored relationship if forgiveness is offered and accepted. Reconciliation can happen. Hurt and anger do not need to be carried. Anger can be resolved before the end of the day. If we do carry hurt and anger, then, we do so by choice. We choose to be burdened. We choose our own enslavement. If our pride will not let us seek reconciliation, we are nonetheless enslaved. If our hurt and disappointment will not allow us to extend an offer of peace, we are nonetheless caught in a downward spinning spiral of negative emotion.

What can free us? Only confession of our anger and the grace of God can set us free. What can liberate us? Only humble actions that seek reconciliation and peace can break the shackles that bind us.

For some, it means starting over altogether, admitting failure, asking God's forgiveness, inviting God's help and turning over one's life... being born again. Perhaps starting over is why Jesus places so much emphasis on children in the Gospels. Jesus says that if we want to enter the Kingdom of God, we must become like little children. That is where the born-again begin...like little children. Entering the Kingdom means learning to talk again, learning to walk again, seeing the world through different eyes and depending heavily upon our heavenly Father for instruction, guidance and support.

Leo Buscaglia writes of observing two children having an argument. The children were quarreling over some insignificant things. "You're stupid!" one said to the other. "Well, so are you!" the other replied. "Not as stupid as you!" the first one said. "Oh, yeah?" the other one said. "That's what you think."

When Buscaglia passed by the playground not more than ten minutes later, these two children were playing together again, having forgotten the whole thing. "No brooding, no wounded egos, no blame, no dredging up the past, no recriminations," Buscaglia writes. There it was, a brief and honest exchange of angry feelings, an even briefer cooling off period, and all was forgiven. "Children are certainly much more forgiving than adults," Buscaglia concludes. "Somewhere in the process of growing up we seem to have become experts at holding grudges, cradling fragile egos and unforgiving natures." (SOURCE: Leo F. Buscaglia, *Born for Love* (New York: Slack, Inc., 1992), p. 202.)

The Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote, "Anybody can become angry -- that is easy; but to be angry with the right person, and to the right degree, and at the right time, and for the right purpose, and in the right way -- that is not within everybody's power and is not easy." No, it is not easy. No, it is not within my power. Nor is it within your power alone. The good news is that it is within God's power.

By the grace of God, it is possible to be angry and not sin. It is possible to let go of anger before the end of the day. It is possible to let the fragrance of Christ's presence linger with every person with whom we come in contact.

May we find that grace this morning. Let us pray.

Soli Deo Gloria. To God alone be the glory. AMEN.