

THE AGE OF ANGER
Ephesians 4:26-32

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This hatred is etched in stone. It can never be erased.

No, I mean literally, this anger is etched in stone!

I came across the story of Manette Chase Stegall at the Citizen's Cemetery in Clarendon, Texas. Her story is literally engraved upon the tombstone of her grandparents. I hold in my hand a picture of that tombstone, and I want to read to you what is etched across the gravemarker of granite. "Gravemarkers are in place on this lot for the remains of L.W. and Effa Chase and all of their descendants and spouses, with the exceptions of their only granddaughter, Manette Chase Stegall, her spouse and their descendants."

Wow! Grandma and Grandpa Chase bought burial plots for their family, but they want to make certain – lest anyone forget – that Manette Chase Stegall has done something so horrid that neither she nor her spouse nor even her children should be allowed to be buried in the same plot with the rest of the family.

What did Manette Chase Stegall do? I don't know. I've tried to imagine in my mind what a granddaughter could do that would be so horrid that even her own grandmother wouldn't love her. It's pretty hard to do something so horrid that granny doesn't love you.

And, her grandparents wanted to make sure they could keep the hatred alive after they were dead. They wanted to make certain that no one would forget and forgive – lest little Manette might find herself buried right beside them. I guess it made them feel powerless to think that they might lose the ability to keep the fires of hatred stoked after they were gone.

It's appropriate that hatred is etched in the gravestone. A Chinese proverb says, "He who seeks revenge should remember to dig two graves." You're not only bringing down your enemy to the pit of death. For as you are filled with hate and anger, you deteriorate your own soul, your own heart as well.

Now, I want to tell you a lie. Anger is an emotion we can't help. Anger is a feeling we cannot overcome. If we are angry at someone, it's because we just can't help ourselves. We're human. We have no choice but to be angry.

That's a lie.

Unfortunately, it's a lie many people believe. If you believe you can't stop your anger, then you have justified your anger.

What kind of philosophy is that? It goes something like this: **If we can't help but be angry, then our rage is never our fault, is it? But if we can help it – if you admit you can help it – then anger is a choice. Every time you're angry for more than just a moment, you are choosing to continue to be angry. (Philip Gulley, *For Everything a Season*, p. 204, "Anger Substituted for Hatred")**

One poet of antiquity said, **"Revenge is always the weak pleasure of a little and narrow mind." (Juvenal, 50-130)**

In fact, it has been said that the measure of a person is the size of what makes him angry.

We're feeding our souls with an unhealthy diet of outrage. I even discovered a book entitled *Christians in an Age of Outrage: How to Bring Out Our Best When the World's at Its Worst*. (Ed Stetzer)

Have you met someone who is angry all the time? His anger probably goes way back, some cobwebs from the family closet. But he is angry, or she's angry. He walks around life angry – his feelings on his shoulders, looking to be hurt. Always angry. Can't keep him happy. His anger spills over onto the innocent ones around him.

Dr. Richard "Sumie," a pastor in Houston, told famed preacher Haddon Robinson that he had a well-known Bible teacher in for a week of meetings. Before one of the meetings, they went out to get a bite to eat. While the waitress was serving the food, she spilled some water on this well-known Bible teacher. He was furious. He told that waitress what he thought of her and rebuked her for her carelessness. She should be more careful if she was going to be a waitress! And on it went.

She went off to get a towel. As she left, "Sumie" leaned over and said, "Doc, when that girl comes back, I dare you to witness to her." And the Bible teacher couldn't. His rudeness had destroyed his witness.

That's worth keeping in mind, isn't it, when you look down at folks who wait on you and make a mistake. It's certainly worth keeping in mind if you travel a lot and the airlines are late again. How you handle a person at the counter has a lot to do with your Christian witness.

We need to hear the words from 1 Corinthians 13: Love isn't rude. It doesn't put other people down. It's not nasty. (Haddon Robinson, "Cultivating a Good Memory that Forgets," July 28, 2017, Gordon Conwell Seminary, accessed on YouTube)

We will not win people to Christ by shouting at them online or in person. Christians should carry the essence and fragrance of Christ.

Interestingly enough, anger is a secondary emotion that usually results from something else. Jim Nicodem (*Preaching Today*, “The Straight Scoop on Anger,” Tape 172) says there are three roots of our anger.

(1) *Hurt feelings.*

When we’re hurt, we’re angry – when you feel rejected by someone, you feel left out by someone. In fact, Dr. Les Carter says that if we look closely, we will detect a fair amount of grandiosity behind a lot of our anger. We just can’t believe somebody would treat us that way. We are just better than that, and we deserve so much better. If somebody hurts our feelings, we feel like they’ve mistreated us, belittled us, betrayed us. We become angry. Anger is not the first emotion. We’re really hurt. That’s the real emotion.

(2) A second trigger point for anger is *frustration.*

Road construction leads to road rage. Have you noticed how impatient we have all become driving around in Amarillo? If not, take I-27 north from Canyon at 7:00 in the morning and head downtown. Drivers bob, weave, honk, and gesture as they go to work. They drive as if they are piloting a U.S. fighter jet for the Air Force, and the rest of us are Russians in MIGs.

Impatient.

Rude.

Selfish.

Childish.

The new driving etiquette in Amarillo.

We get angry when people frustrate us. When they don’t do when we expect.

(3) Another root behind our anger is *fear.*

Lurking behind anger is often a feeling of fear. Maybe you shout at another driver because you’re afraid your car might get damaged. Maybe you’re angry at a lazy employee because you are afraid that when your company performs poorly, it might reflect badly on you. If someone teases you or makes fun, you might get really angry because you’re afraid of what people might say about you if you don’t take strong action.

Cory Richards, a licensed mental health counselor, has concluded that most of his clients with anger problems are actually afraid. They are afraid of losing control. Afraid of being taken advantage of. Afraid of being ignored.

Dr. Michael J. Duckett, founder of Professional Income Solutions, says you cannot be angry without being afraid of something. If you want to resolve your anger, locate the underlying fear.

I’ll tell you how to put this theory to the test. If you have a friend who is really afraid of mice – I have a friend like that, my friend is a he – put a mouse in his office and see if he thinks it’s a really

funny joke. He won't. He might force a laugh on the outside, but he'll be raging on the inside. Making him face his fear will not win you any brownie points. It will make him angry.

So remember, your anger is not a primary emotion but, rather, a secondary emotion. And behind your anger is probably some hurt feelings, some frustration, or some fear.

I want us to see some things from the book of Ephesians, from the Apostle Paul, about our anger.

I. Anger should be a momentary emotion.

If you're not careful, you will not become angry. You will be angry. You won't get angry – you are angry by disposition. I know a man who is angry all the time – angry at his children, angry at this institution, angry at that institution. His stories are just stories of spewing venom. He's just an angry man. I've had more than one person ask me, "Why is he so angry? Do you know anything about his life, his background? Why is he such an angry man? Why is he so hard to please? Why is he perfect in his own eyes and everything else in the world around him is broken?" "I don't know," I say, "but he is an angry, angry man."

Anger is almost like a drug. You can enjoy being angry, feeling sorry for yourself. It makes you feel good. Like a drug, it feels good for a while but, in the end, it's deadly. It's kind of nice to lick those wounds, to savor the wrongs that others have done to us. To pout

Anger can become a way of life.

A man who was having trouble controlling his anger came to a Christian counselor. He had these outbursts, and it was affecting his work and his family life. So he finally decided to get some help. The counselor wanted to find out if this man could conceive of a different way of living. She asked him, "What would your life look like if you got rid of your anger?" He was quiet for a long time, and then the man said, confessionally, "But if I get rid of my anger, what will I have left?" (Kevin A. Miller, *Anger, Change, Repentance, Sin*, quoted in *Preaching Today*, Spring 2001, p. 75)

In fact, Paul gives us a specific time limit. That's a day. The sun, which marks a new day, must not be a witness to yesterday's outburst. Dragged-over-anger is inappropriate for a new day. As you hold on to yesterday's anger and wrongdoing, you will destroy your relationship of love with somebody. Those little things pile up if you carry them, one day's account to the next day's account. Eventually every relationship is tested by the necessity to forgive. When we say we forgive but brood over the memory of the hurt or the failure, we have not forgiven.

Do you see how the Lord forgives? What does God say? "I remember their sin no more." God relates to us, after He's forgiven us, as if we have never committed that sin. Wow! That's the message of the cross. "Father, forgive them," Jesus said from the cross.

Powder keg anger. Boom. It erupts and is over before the sun goes down. But then there is that crock pot anger. We hold it over and hold it over and hold it over. It bubbles beneath the surface of our lives. This simmering hostility may be the most destructive anger of all.

II. Anger often leads to other sins.

Look at Ephesians 4:27 where Paul says, “and do not give the devil a foothold.”

Do you remember the first story of anger in the Bible? It’s the story of two brothers, Cain and Abel. They both brought sacrifices, gifts to God. God accepted Abel’s; he rejected Cain’s. Cain became very angry. God asks Cain, “Why are you angry?” God rejected the offering because of Cain’s attitude. He said, “Cain, if you’ll change your attitude, I’ll accept your gift.” But then God added this warning: “Cain, right now anger is crouching at your door.” Cain opened that door, and when anger came into Cain’s life, what followed? Cain murdered his brother Abel.

Richard Walters is a psychiatrist in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He writes: “People will be murdered today because of someone’s anger.” (Jim Nicodem, “The Straight Scoop on Anger”) Right now, on the day that we live, someone, out of anger, will open the door of sin and take someone else’s life. Because of their anger. Moreover, someone will employ gossip to tear down a brother or a sister because they are hurt and angry.

Have you ever tried to deal with somebody who is angry? Greek philosophy defined anger as “a short madness.” Ever try to speak to, much less reason with, a person who is in the heat of a rage? Did you ever make any headway with him or with her? Didn’t you have to wait until the person cooled off? Only after sanity was restored could the cause of the person’s anger be safely addressed.

When we get angry, we say hurtful words that we don’t mean. Our sin of anger turns into the sin of attacking someone that we love. Have you had the experience where you were angry at someone and you did open that door to the next step of tearing that person down? You lost your temper, and afterwards someone said, “I really never saw this side of you.” Or, even worse, a child might say, “Daddy, I was scared. I didn’t know who you were.”

Anger will be destructive in our lives.

Proverbs 14:17 says, “An angry person does foolish things.” A few chapters later, in Proverbs 29:22, the sage wrote, “A hot tempered man commits many sins.”

III. Anger will develop into bitterness.

Ephesians 4:31

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Quite candidly, may I ask you “Whom are you bitter at?” The problem with being bitter at someone is that you’re giving him or her free rent in your head. You’re letting the very person you despise control your life. You think about him in the morning. You think about him at noon. You think about him at night. You think about ways to hurt him. Ways to hate him. Ways he has

hurt you. Ways he has expressed his anger toward you. In the end, there is rent free space in your head occupied by the very person you want to destroy.

You see the irony? You don't hurt him. You hurt yourself by being bitter.

Stop being bitter. Are you carrying the poison from childhood? Is it an ex-husband? Or an ex-wife? Is it anger at a brother or a sister? Anger between mother and daughter, father and son? "I hate you. I'll never talk to you again. Get out of my house." Words set in the heat of the moment, yet stinging for a lifetime.

Bitter at a boss who fired you? Bitter at someone who claimed your idea as her own?

Forgive. Forget. Move forward. Put away these things. Notice what Paul says. "Put away bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander..." Notice how anger and slander go together. They do. "...along with all malice."

IV. Anger should be replaced by forgiveness.

Ephesians 4:32

And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

The wonderful thing about those who are disciples of Christ is that we have one-up on the world in the ability to forgive. The world has no reason, and really no right, to forgive. But because God has forgiven those who are His people, we are able to forgive others. You did not deserve God's forgiveness. You have truly wronged God with your sins, with your disobedience, and with your rebellion. You have hurt Him. Yet because of the death of Christ Jesus, God isn't wrathful any more. His wrath is poured out on Calvary's cross toward His own Son.

How has God forgiven us? Paul says, "In Christ." Because of the death of Christ, God is able to forgive us. And because of the death of Christ, we are able to forgive each other. Knowing that we have been forgiven by God when we didn't deserve it, we can, likewise, forgive others.

We must replace anger with a heart of forgiveness.

I don't know what Manette Chase Stegall did to her grandmother or her grandfather or to anyone in her family. But I do know that not only was she all the worse for the bitterness, anger, and hatred that comes from her grandmother and grandfather Chase, I know they were the worse for it, too.

What if they had forgiven? What if that long-seated bitterness had been melted away at the foot of the cross of Christ Jesus? What if a grandmother reached out and, not because a granddaughter deserved it, because of the love of Christ embraced a prodigal grandchild? What if this story had a different ending – a different ending because it came along the path of the cross?

Lord, in perhaps every heart here today, there is anger on which far too many sins have gone down. Today we want to deal with our anger before the resentments in our hearts gnaw away at the foundations of the relationships we treasure – between husband and wife, between parents and children, between siblings, between friends. We now lay before you the anger we carry. We lift it up and put it on the table. Perhaps there is a person with whom we are particularly angry this morning. Perhaps that anger is well-founded and just anger. Father, we pray that You would help us to release this person into the hands of your justice. Your Word says, “ ‘Vengeance is mine, and I will repay,’ saith the Lord.” Help us to release those people who have done us wrong into your hands so that we can get on with our lives. Help us to go back right now in our minds and slice away the hurtful deed from the person who performed it. Remind us again that when we forgive, we set free a prisoner; and the prisoner we set free is ourself. Through the power of the cross, give us strength to release our anger and to forgive. In the wondrous name of Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray. Amen. (Dr. Victor D. Pentz, Senior Minister, Peachtree Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, GA)