

Be Angry and Do Not Sin

“Be angry and do not sin;” Paul wrote, “do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil” (**Ephesians 4:26-27**).

I did not realize the importance of this passage until relatively recently. It’s only been within the past couple of years that I’ve recognized how many of my sins come about because I am angry. When do I gossip? When I begin to resent someone or am angry with them. When do I clamor? When I’m angry. I’ve found it is easier to lust when I’m angry because I want to get into a fantasy world instead of deal with the reality of whatever has angered me. When do I display my arrogance? When I resent someone and want to try to be better than they are.

As amazing as that discovery is, one of the things I learn from it is if I want to avoid a good number of my sins, I need to handle anger appropriately.

First, I need to learn not to be so easily angered. As **James 1:19** says, I must work on being slow to anger. Those who are slow to anger have wisdom, but the easily provoked exalt folly (**Proverbs 14:29**). Those who are slow to anger and rule their spirits are stronger than mighty conquerors (**Proverbs 16:32**).

I’d like to share five keys that increasingly help me develop slowness to anger (though I’m by no means a master of this):

1. *Sense of reality*: People make mistakes. It doesn’t mean they are worse than me. It doesn’t mean they are ignorant or malicious. It means they are people. When I’m anchored in that reality, I am not as easily angered when I recognize people acting like people will.
2. *Humility*: When I recognize my own mistakes, I’m not so easily angered by the mistakes of others. When someone cuts me off in traffic, I can remember the number of times I’ve made the same mistake and have patience with those others.
3. *More concerned for others souls than for my own defense*: When I’m focused on defending my honor or demanding my rights, I get easily angered. However, when I’m more concerned for the souls of others, I don’t get angry as easily. Rather, their sins sadden me, not because of how it impacts me, but because I know what it means for their souls.
4. *Examine personal involvement*: Sometimes someone has angered me but I’m actually the root cause. For instance, I may have started some sarcastic banter but the other person took it to a level I wasn’t expecting. They probably did that because my sarcasm hurt them. If I can see my own involvement, I can defuse my anger by apologizing for what I did wrong.
5. *Proper sense of importance*: Sometimes I get absolutely enraged and then come down off the emotion to realize what I was so angry about was really not all that important in the grand scheme of things. Is it really all that important that Marita is five minutes late to our dinner appointment? In ten years, will this thing I’m enraged about matter? What about in ten days?

If I work on these five keys, it will be increasingly hard to anger me.

However, **Ephesians 4:26-27** doesn’t say that anger is a sin. It assumes that sometimes we will be angered. Anger is just an emotion, neither good nor bad. It simply is. The question is what will we do with it when it happens. Thus, no matter how well we learn to be slow to anger, there will be things that anger us. In fact, I think there are some things so bad that if we weren’t angered it would mean we were abnormal. If we’re not angered when someone abuses our spouses, parents, or children verbally, emotionally, or physically, there is something wrong with us. If we’re not angry when someone attacks our Lord, His church, or our brethren, there is something wrong with us. However, even healthy anger can lead to sin if we don’t respond correctly. What should we do when we’re angered? How can we keep the sun from going down on it?

1. *Sit in the feeling*: Don’t try to escape the feeling. Don’t make yourself feel guilty about having the feeling. Simply understand that is the feeling you have and be honest with yourself about it.
2. *Determine the cause*: Why are you angry? At whom are you angry? What did they do?

3. *Consider the impact:* How did their action impact you? Did it injure your pride? Did it affect your pocketbook? Did it hurt your feelings? Did it tarnish your reputation? Did it cause you inconvenience? Did it cause you to fear? How did their actions actually affect you in a practical way?

4. *Be honest about your own sins:* Sometimes you're carrying this low-level anger because of your own sinfulness. Perhaps you're carrying a grudge. Perhaps you're seeking revenge. I can give you a personal example. I get angry when Marita asks me things like, "Did you brush Trina's teeth when you put her to bed?" My first thought is, "How stupid does she think I am? How dare she question me on this basic thing?" But then I remember, there have been times when she asked and I had to say, "No, I forgot." It was my own untrustworthiness that prompted her question. How can I be mad at her about that?

5. *Talk to the person:* When someone has sinned against you, you need to go to them with gentleness and let them know how they hurt you. Many times when we get those feelings in the open there will be a very quick apology and reconciliation. When there's not, at least you can have the peace knowing that as much as depends on you, you are at peace with them.

6. *Pray about it:* Take your anger to God. He can handle it, even if you are angry with Him. Let Him know it is there and seek His help in dealing with it. Read the psalms; they are filled with the anger of men turning their emotions over to God for deliverance.

7. *Cast it out to others:* Sometimes you are angry and you can't talk to the person who caused the problem. Perhaps you are carrying a long time resentment against someone who is dead, moved away, or that you don't even know. Perhaps you are angry at someone because they died. Perhaps you are angry at someone who hurt you and then was gone (thief, hit and run, rapist). Perhaps you are angry at someone you did try to talk to and they rejected your efforts. Find someone you can talk to about your anger, not as a cathartic dump, but as a means to find reality in the situation. Don't talk to them to gossip about the person at whom you are angry but as a means to help you find peace in the situation, focusing on your side of the issue. Sometimes, just letting out the secret anger defuses it and makes it lose its power. Of course, be careful with this. It can easily turn into slander sessions and it can easily turn into conversations that feed the anger instead of defusing it.

Anger really does give the devil opportunity. Deal with it quickly. Deal with it healthfully. Don't let it master you. Don't justify it. Don't soft sell it to yourself just because you think you have it under control. Remember, Cain killed Abel because of his anger. Anger caused Cain's own demise. If we don't deal with our anger quickly, it will kill us eventually.