

EPHESIANS 4:26 - COMMAND, CONDITION, OR CONCESSION? HANDLING ANGER GOD'S WAY

"Be angry and do not sin," from Ephesians 4:26, is quoted with alarming regularity by psychologizers to justify a Freudian-based ventilation of one's anger. Examples include *Love is a Choice*, authored by well-known psychiatrists Frank Minirth and Paul Meier, *Healing for Damaged Emotions* by pastor David Seamands, and others.¹ Those who have some understanding of the Greek text, such as David Seamands, stress the imperative tense that is used for "be angry."² However, such an interpretation seeks to impose on Scripture a worldview that is fundamentally alien to the Christian faith, a perspective formulated by unbelievers such as Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Carl Rogers, and numerous others. Their anti-Biblical presuppositions obscure the meaning of God's pure Word. This sort of hermeneutic abuse fails to consider the context of the passage, the grammatical construction in the Greek text, or other Biblical teachings about anger.

The purpose of this paper is to do a proper exegesis of Ephesians 4:26, considering its context in the immediately surrounding verses as well as the book of Ephesians as a whole, examining the possible interpretations allowed by the grammatical construction in Greek, considering the quotation of Psalm 4:4, studying the Greek words for anger (*orge*, *thymos*, *parorgismos*), and exploring other Biblical teachings related to anger and its expression. In doing so, it is hoped that the reader will be provided with an interpretation of this passage that will help him handle anger in a manner that is pleasing to God. At the same time, the fallacy of the psychological perspective ought to be made clear.

None of the commentators give support to the view that Ephesians 4:26a commands a ventilation of anger. Only one commentator, Andrew Lincoln, even makes mention of that idea--and he does so only to quickly dismiss it. Along with many others, Lincoln believes the first imperative ("be angry") to have concessive force, but:

"It is important, however, to be clear about the force of

¹ Dr. Robert Hemfelt, Dr. Frank Minirth, Dr. Paul Meier, *Love is a Choice* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989). David Seamands, *Healing for Damaged Emotions* (Victor Books, 1981).

² David Seamands, *Healing for Damaged Emotions* (Victor Books, 1981), p. 106.

this construction. It is not granting permission to be angry. Although verse 26b recognizes that anger will occur, verse 27 indicates how dangerous it is and verse 31 repudiates all anger (cf. also 6:4). The focus of verse 26a, then, is on not sinning by indulging in anger. Its paradoxical formulation was not meant to encourage speculation about what types of anger might be permissible. **Whatever the merits of the traditional notion of righteous anger at injustice or the modern notion of the healthiness of expressing rather than suppressing anger, they should not be thought to have support in the concessive aspect of this prohibition.**"³

Commentators vary as to exact interpretation and application of this passage, some taking it as a command, some as a condition, and others as a concession. None, however, believe it to be a command to ventilate according to the psychological orientation.

CONTEXT

Book of Ephesians. This epistle paints a beautiful picture of the believer's glorious eternal hope in Christ. In view of that hope, the apostle Paul gives practical counsel on how the Christian is to walk during his daily life on this earth. Generally, the first portion of the book details the believer's unmerited position in Christ resulting from God's grace. He is God's child (1:5) and purchased possession (1:14), called by God (1:18), appointed to an inheritance (1:11), alive and raised with Christ (2:5, 6), elected and predestined according to God's purpose before the foundation of the world (1:4, 5), sealed with the Holy Spirit (1:13), holy and blameless in the presence of God (1:4), and the like. This is contrasted with a graphic description of his former position apart from Christ--dead in sins and trespasses (2:1), an object of God's wrath by nature (2:3), having no hope and being without God (2:12), separated from God's people (2:12), a stranger to God's covenant (2:12, 19), fulfilling the lusts of the flesh (2:3). (See Appendix A.) Because of this glorious new position, he is exhorted to walk a walk that is worthy of the high calling of Christ (4:1), no longer living according to the manner of the unbeliever (4:17). Specific exhortations follow in chapters 4 through 6, and it is in this context that we find the injunction to "be angry and sin not." (See Appendix B.)

Ephesians 4:17-5:2. Calling this section a "call to holiness," Charles Hodge explains that it "contains a general exhortation to holiness (vv. 17-24), followed by injunctions about

³ Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians* (Word Biblical Commentary 42), (Dallas: Word, 1990), p. 301.

specific duties (v. 25 - ch. 5, v. 2)." He notes that the word "walk" in scriptural language "includes all the aspects of life, inward and outward, seen and unseen."⁴ Thomas Aquinas writes that Paul "prohibits what is characteristic of the old man," including both "interior sins which corrupt the spirit" and "exterior sins which corrupt the flesh."⁵ Andrew Lincoln notes that Paul treats four undesirable behaviors which illustrate the difference between the old and new life: lying, anger, stealing, and evil talk. He notes that "the vices and virtues selected are those which will either disrupt or enhance the life of a community," consistent with the teachings in Ephesians about the unity of the body of Christ, in which we are "members of one another" (4:25). He recognizes that the "therefore" of 4:25 provides a link to the preceding passage, discussed earlier regarding the believer's new position in Christ. He mentions the call to be "imitators of God" (5:1) and the "live in love" of 5:2, which summarizes the preceding admonitions.⁶ A sermon delivered by John Calvin motivates the believer to heed the exhortations contained in this passage:

"There ought to appear such a change in our life when God has subdued us to Himself by His gospel, that we may no more resemble the wretched unbelievers who walk in darkness, but consider that our Lord's enlightening of us is to bring us into the condition of new creatures."⁷

The Interpreter's Bible stresses our membership with one another in the church, helping us to place verse 4:26a in proper perspective:

"For we are members one of another is the fundamental principal which gives force to all his injunctions. **Falsehood** (v. 25), **anger** (vss. 26-27), **thieving** (v. 28), and **foul language** (v. 29) are all offenses against fellowship. Conversely, truthfulness, placability, honest toil, and gracious language, and readiness to forgive (v. 32) are the virtues that reflect the reality of our fellowship and are

⁴ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1856; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), p. 130-131.

⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Ephesians* (Magi Books, Inc., 1966), p. 183.

⁶ Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 293, 294, 299, 300.

⁷ John Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), p. 452-453.

the proper and necessary evidence of our respect for the personality of those who share with us in the common life of Christ."⁸

Generally speaking, the fourth chapter of Ephesians contrasts living in the truth with the ungodly behaviors characteristic of the unbeliever. The Christian must *put off* the "old man" and *put on* the "new man," created in the likeness of God.

Immediate Context: Ephesians 4:26-27. These two verses are closely related. Thomas Aquinas summarizes them in three general parts (1) a warning (4:26a), (2) an explanation (4:26b), and a reason for Paul's concern (4:27).⁹ Each of these generally receives discussion in commentaries.

First, the warning: "Be angry and do not sin." Some believe this to be a **command**. Thomas Aquinas believes that righteous anger, against your own sin and the sins of others, is commanded but must follow the dictates of reason; evil anger, however, is only permitted but not commanded.¹⁰ A more recent commentator, Gordon Clark, agrees that certain righteous anger is being commanded:

"Does Paul here command Christians to be angry? Stott is to be commended for his affirmative answer. In the United States, with the election of Reagan in 1980, evangelical Christians seem finally to have become angry with the pagan heathenism of the liberals, both in Congress and the Supreme Court. The legalization of the murder of innocent unborn babies should generate an immense anger."¹¹

Clark goes on, however, to state that in this context Paul "directs his remarks to personal animosities within the church. Many such cases are quite trivial and can easily be remedied before the sun goes down."¹² John Eadie, a century earlier, supported the imperative tense as being correct. Anger is not totally forbidden, and sometimes the occasion requires it.

⁸ *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon Cokesbury Press, 1983), p. 699.

⁹ Aquinas, *Commentary on Ephesians*, p. 183.

¹⁰ Aquinas, *Commentary on Ephesians*, p. 184-185.

¹¹ Gordon H. Clark, *Ephesians* (The Trinity Foundation, 1985), p. 157.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 158.

However, he notes that the emphasis of the verse is on *not sinning*, thus the time limit.¹³ In a recent technical article, D. L. Wallace concludes that this verse commands the believer to be angry about sin within the church, and to act quickly to confront the erring brother.¹⁴ John Calvin finds in the verse a command to be angry at *one's own sin*, stating that the Apostle Paul:

"...shows us how we may be faultless before God with respect to anger and temper, that is to say, by each one of us thinking upon his own faults to condemn them and to be sorry for them, and to feel such anguish of mind for them that we are like men half paralyzed. That is a holy anger, and such as God approves." Having thus examined our own sins, "we shall no longer be so angry against such as have done us some wrong; but we will rather bear with them."¹⁵

Reviewing in general those who hold the imperative tense to be correct, it is evident in each case that the anger ought to be directed toward *sin* in imitation of God's anger; no commentator teaches that the command is to ventilate for one's own emotional relief.

Some commentators take *orgisesthe* as a **concession** rather than a command. It was noted earlier that Thomas Aquinas sees a command to righteous anger, but merely a permission for evil anger. He is quick, however, to note the warnings of such verses as Matthew 5:22 and Genesis 45:24.¹⁶ Marcus Barth is another who holds to the view that a concession was intended:

"The O.T. and N.T. contain rare additional examples of this 'concessive imperative.' In most cases a factual permission is granted by this imperative, but an explicit command is not contained in it. Ephesians 4:26 concedes that righteous anger is aroused by injustice. Among the saints who are 'God's imitators' (5:1) such anger cannot be excluded any more than in God Himself (Romans 1:18; 2:5, 8; 5:9) or in judgment upon the angry man (Matthew 5:22, Genesis 45:24),

¹³ John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* (Baker Book House, 1979, reprinted from 1883 edition by T and T Clark), p. 348-349.

¹⁴ D. L. Wallace, "ORGIZESTHE in Ephesians 4:26: Command or Condition?", *Criswell Theological Review* 3, 1989, p. 372.

¹⁵ John Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 449.

¹⁶ Aquinas, *Commentary on Ephesians*, p. 183-5.

but 'indignation on behalf of others is one of the common bonds by which society is held together.'"¹⁷

In both cases, expression of anger is clearly limited.

Similar to the concessional interpretation is the **conditional**, a view held by many. Andrew Lincoln's paraphrase of the verse illustrates this perspective well:

"Anger is to be avoided at all costs, but if, for whatever reason, you do get angry, then refuse to indulge such anger that you do not sin."¹⁸

Meyer is another who notes that the first imperative usually has a conditional sense. Anger is not sinful in and of itself, as there is a holy anger exhibited by God. However, Paul forbids the combination of anger and sin, stressing the second imperative: "in anger do not fall into transgression."¹⁹

Whether command, concession, or condition, commentators are consistent in warning about the dangers of human anger, particularly as they note the time limit imposed in the second half of the verse: "do not let the sun go down on your wrath" (Ephesians 4:26b). Thomas Aquinas warns that even though anger may be human enough, it is sinful to dwell on it: "Do not nurture the seeds of wrath, cast them off before sunset."²⁰ John Calvin's preaching agrees that the Christian must get rid of anger quickly: "Let us use violence in that respect, to subdue our passions that so carry us away."²¹ Westcott notes self-control as a special trait that Paul commends in this verse; that of course is consistent with the "fruit of the Spirit" from Galatians 5.²² F. F. Bruce wisely notes that nursing anger "magnifies the grievance, makes reconciliation more difficult, and destroys friendly

¹⁷ Marcus Barth, *Ephesians 4-6* (Anchor Bible 34A), p. 513.

¹⁸ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 301.

¹⁹ Heinrich Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Ephesians and the Epistle to Philemon* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895), p. 252-253.

²⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Ephesians*, p. 185.

²¹ John Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 450.

²² B. F. Westcott, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952), p. 72.

relations."²³ He gives us an excellent summary of the thrust of this verse:

"There is no doubt a proper place for righteous indignation; but there is a subtle temptation to regard my anger as righteous indignation and other people's anger as sheer bad temper. Here it is suggested that anger can be prevented from degenerating into sin if a strict time limit is placed on it: 'do not let the sun set on your anger.' Let reconciliation be effected before nightfall, if possible. If that is not possible--if the person with whom one is angry is not accessible, or refuses to be reconciled--then at least the heart should be unburdened of its animosity by the committal of the matter to God. In a not dissimilar situation, Paul deprecates anything in the nature of private vengeance: 'leave it to the wrath of God' (Romans 12:19). If retribution is called for, let God take care of it: His retribution will be just, and free from self-regarding motives."²⁴

Another good summary is found in *The Interpreter's Bible*:

"The comment of our writer does not, as is often alleged, suggest that anger may sometimes be justified. His one point is that we must expel it from our hearts before the day is out; we must give no opportunity to the devil by 'nursing our wrath to keep it warm.' Justifiable indignation aroused by cruelty or vileness is not in question; if anger is righteous, it ought to be sustained until the evil which called it forth has been removed."²⁵

In contrast to most other commentators, this one applies the time limit only to unrighteous anger, but nevertheless warns us of the dangers involved. The primary danger is to be found in verse 27, which alerts the believer not to allow the devil an opportunity in his life. Charles Hodge notes how anger may lead to temptation and thus additional sin: "When anger is cherished it gives the Tempter great power over us, as it gives us a motive to yield to his evil suggestions."²⁶ John Calvin's strong words also sound the alarm:

²³ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (New International New Testament Commentary), (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 361.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 361.

²⁵ *The Interpreter's Bible*, p. 700.

²⁶ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 143.

"If we pursue our anger and spite against such as have offended us, it is just as if we gave Satan the right to hold us as captives under his tyranny."²⁷

Thomas Aquinas explains that "the devil gains entrance to us either through sin or consent to it."²⁸ Gordon Clark sees this prohibition as having a broad application; the devil takes advantage not only of unrestrained anger, but other sins as well.²⁹ Eadie notes the close connection between verses 26 and 27:

"Anger nursed in the heart affords opportunity to Satan. Satan has sympathy with a spiteful and malignant spirit, it is so **like his own**" (emphasis added).³⁰

This is a particularly wise observation, because the Christian is to be an imitator of *God* (5:1), being created in *His* likeness (4:24). Marcus Barth summarizes the warning of 4:26-27 quite well: "The devil will take possession of your heart if your wrath endures."³¹ This is surely incompatible with the indwelling presence of Christ (Ephesians 3:17).

Psalm 4:4. "Be angry and do not sin" is actually a quote from the Psalms (Psalm 4:5 in the Septuagint). This fact is mentioned and discussed by most commentators. Barth and Eadie both note that the Hebrew word translated *orgisesthe* means to "stand in awe" or to "tremble." Eadie notes, in addition, that *orge* denotes "rage," strong emotion.³² Citing the Targum, *The Interpreter's Bible* says: "Tremble (before God) and you will not fall into sin." Also quoted is the KJV, "Stand in awe, and sin not."³³

²⁷ John Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 450.

²⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Ephesians*, p. 186.

²⁹ Gordon H. Clark, *Ephesians*, p. 158.

³⁰ John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, p. 350.

³¹ Marcus Barth, *Ephesians 4-6* (Anchor Bible 34A), p. 515.

³² Marcus Barth, *Ephesians 4-6* (Anchor Bible 34A), p. 515. John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, p. 348.

³³ *The Interpreter's Bible*, p. 700.

Two of the commentators in this research (Meyer and Hodge) note that Paul may or may not have intended the quote exactly as intended in the original text:

"It must be left undetermined whether Paul understood the original text as the LXX did, or chose this form only in recollection of the LXX, *without* attending to the original text" (emphasis in original).³⁴

"It is not necessary to assume that the apostle uses these words in the precise sense of the original text; for the New Testament writers often give the sense of an Old Testament passage with a modification of the words, or they use the same words with a modification of the sense."³⁵

Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to review some English versions of Psalm 4:4-5. This passage is helpful to us in comprehending the general Scriptural admonitions regarding anger and its expression, and it is at least *possible*, although not certain, that Paul might have intended the general sense of the original. The New King James says:

"Be angry, and do not sin. **Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still.** Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord." (emphasis added) Psalm 4:4-5

Meditating quietly on one's bed is hardly consistent with the ventilation of anger! The Amplified Bible reads:

"Be angry (or stand in awe) and sin not; commune with your own hearts upon your beds and be silent (sorry for the things you say in your hearts). Selah (pause, and calmly think of that)! (Eph. 4:26) Offer just and right sacrifices; trust (lean on and be confident) in the Lord." Psalm 4:4-5

Here we find a spirit of calm, quiet, repentance, and confidence in the Lord. Finally, the New International version offers similar counsel with a slightly different wording:

"In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. Offer right sacrifices and trust

³⁴ Heinrich Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Ephesians and the Epistle to Philemon*, p. 252.

³⁵ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 142.

in the Lord." Psalm 4:4-5

A footnote in the NIV calls this "an exhortation not to give way to exasperation or anxiety (literally 'tremble' in anger or fear) but to look to the Lord."

These passages are helpful to the believer who desires to handle anger in a godly manner.

GRAMMATICAL CONSTRUCTION

The Greek imperative cannot be taken simplistically as a direct command in every instance. Daniel Wallace, in a detailed technical article on Ephesians 4:26, notes as many as seven possible syntactical nuances for the verse:

1. Declarative indicative: "You are angry, yet do not sin."
2. Interrogative indicative: "Are you angry? Then do not sin."
3. Command imperative: "Be angry, and do not sin."
4. Permissive imperative: "Be angry (if you must), but do not sin."
5. Conditional imperative: "If you are angry, do not sin."
6. Concessive imperative: "Although you may get angry, do not sin."
7. Prohibitive imperative: "Do not be angry and do not sin."³⁶

Wallace dismisses the declarative, interrogative, and prohibitive as being implausible. He goes on to group the permissive, conditional, and concessive together, as there are only slight differences between these three. This leaves two basic alternatives to be explored: the command imperative, and the conditional imperative.³⁷ Nevertheless, the range of syntactic possibilities is evidence for the complexity of exegeting this passage properly.

³⁶ Daniel B. Wallace, "ORGIZESTHE in Ephesians 4:26: Command or Condition?", *Criswell Theological Review* 3 (1989), p. 354.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 354-358.

Another journalist, James Boyer, has done an extensive study of conditional elements in New Testament Greek. He notes several verses where the imperative is used in the conditional sense: John 2:19, Matthew 7:7, Mark 1:17, 11:24, and James 4:7. One example will illustrate the point:

"Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it."
John 2:19

Clearly, Jesus is not *commanding* anyone to destroy God's temple in this context. The one difficulty, perhaps, is that Ephesians 4:26 does not fit the pattern of the other verses, each of which contains two positive imperatives, rather than one positive command (or condition) followed by a prohibition. Eadie makes this point in his commentary; he believes it is incorrect to have a permissive imperative joined by the conjunction *kai* to a command imperative.³⁸

Meyer makes a similar comment:

"No doubt a permission of anger, because subsequently *kai me hamartanete* follows, would not be in conflict with verse 31, where manifestly all *hostile* anger is forbidden; but the mere *kai* is only logically correct when both imperatives are thought of in the *same* sense, not the former as permitting and the latter as enjoining, in which case the combination becomes *exceptive* ("only, however"), which would be expressed by *alla, plen, or monon*."³⁹

Wallace, however, does not believe that this is a strong argument against the command view. He notes, also, that Boyer was unable to find another example of a conditional imperative followed by *kai* and then a second imperative.⁴⁰ After much further discussion and consideration of other factors, Wallace concludes that the passage is a call to be angry about sin within the body of Christ, and to act quickly to remedy the situation, exercising church discipline in order to restore the erring brother.⁴¹

All of this is evidence that even competent scholars, trained

³⁸ John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, p. 348.

³⁹ Heinrich Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Ephesians and the Epistle to Philemon*, p. 253-254.

⁴⁰ Daniel B. Wallace, "ORGIZESTHE in Ephesians 4:26: Command or Condition?", p. 366-367.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 372.

in New Testament Greek and Scriptural exegesis, do not agree in their conclusions. Certainly the psychologists, trained in the wisdom of the world (Colossians 2:8) rather than in biblical theology, are rather capricious in plucking this verse out of context to sustain their unfounded conclusions about the ventilation of anger.

GREEK WORD STUDY

ORGE AND THYMOS

It is helpful to our study to examine two Greek words for anger, *orge* and *thymos*, along with words of the same family, noting their occurrences in the New Testament.

Orge is translated by Bauer's Greek Lexicon as "anger, indignation, wrath."⁴² Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* lists it as "anger, wrath," noting that unlike its complementary term *thymos*, it is "especially oriented to revenge and punishment" and therefore "applied to rulers who must avenge injustice."⁴³ There are 36 occurrences of *orge* in the New Testament, 32 referring to God's anger and only 4 to man's anger: Ephesians 4:31, Colossians 3:8, James 1:19-20, and 1 Timothy 2:8. These four are significant and will be discussed in the next section regarding general Biblical teachings on anger.

Orgizesthe is a form (second person plural) of *orgizo*, which is the verb form of the noun *orge*. It occurs eight times in the New Testament, including four references to God's anger, one reference to the anger of the devil, and three references to human anger: Matthew 5:22, Luke 15:28, and the verse that is the subject of our study, Ephesians 4:26. Westcott's commentary indicates that *orgizesthe* "assumes a just occasion for the feeling."⁴⁴ This may or may not be true, but it should nevertheless be noted that **none** of the occurrences of either *orge* or *orgizo* speak in support of human anger; the same can be said

⁴² Walter Bauer, translated by William J. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (second edition), (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1957 and 1979), p. 578.

⁴³ Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (editors), translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (abridged in one volume), (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), p. 716.

⁴⁴ B. F. Westcott, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 73.

about *thymos* and related words. Only Ephesians 4:26 gives the slightest conceivable support to the wrath of man. Daniel Wallace, in defining the purpose for his article on the verse, says: "How can this one verse be regarded as so crucial to the issue? It is simply because we have great difficulty finding explicit statements in the NT in praise of human wrath."⁴⁵

The second half of Ephesians 4:26 uses the word *parorgismos* where Paul says, "do not let the sun go down on your wrath." This word occurs only this one time in the New Testament. Almost every commentary has something to say about this unusual word. Barth describes it as "violent irritation" characterized by "flaming looks, harmful words, inconsiderate action" and thus "distinctly less permanent than deep-rooted wrath, anger, or hostility."⁴⁶ Clark, comparing *orgizomai* with *parorgismos*, comments that perhaps the latter is an unrighteous anger which is always forbidden, whereas the former is a more general term that may be either good or evil. However, he says this is lexically arbitrary.⁴⁷ In contrast, Eadie describes it as a "fit of indignation or exasperation" which is not absolutely forbidden but ought to be brief. He states that:

"If it be allowed to lie in the mind, it degenerates into enmity, hatred, or revenge, all of which are positively and in all circumstances sinful."⁴⁸

Lincoln sees no significant difference between *orge* and *parorgismos*, but believes the latter to have passive force, referring to anger that has been provoked.⁴⁹ Meyer does see a greater difference in the two words, with *parorgismos* an arousing of wrath, in contrast to *orge*, a lasting mood. He also believes that *parorgismos* is an excitement brought upon us rather than an unrighteous indignation.⁵⁰ Westcott, similarly, defines *parorgismos* as "not the feeling of wrath but that which provokes

⁴⁵ Daniel B. Wallace, "ORGIZESTHE in Ephesians 4:26: Command or Condition?", p. 353.

⁴⁶ Marcus Barth, *Ephesians 4-6* (Anchor Bible 34A), p. 514.

⁴⁷ Gordon H. Clark, *Ephesians*, p. 158.

⁴⁸ John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, p. 349.

⁴⁹ Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians* (Word Biblical Commentary 442), p. 302.

⁵⁰ Heinrich Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Ephesians and the Epistle to Philemon*, p. 255.

it."⁵¹ Hodge is very brief about the word: "paroxysm or excitement."⁵² This comes close to Kittel's definition: "to spur," "to stir to anger," or passive "to be provoked, incensed."⁵³ All of this is perhaps a testimony to the difficulty in researching and defining a word that occurs only once in the New Testament. It almost sounds as if they should take a vote! More seriously, the word does apparently have the sense of a person being provoked to anger, perhaps righteously, perhaps unrighteously. God still calls the Christian to a righteous response.

Somewhat synonymous to *orge* is *thymos*, defined by Bauer's Greek Lexicon as "anger, wrath, rage."⁵⁴ Kittel calls it "passion, wrath" denoting "violent movement. . . desire, impulse, spirit, anger, sensibility, disposition, and thought."⁵⁵ In English translations, one sometimes finds the word "fury." Interestingly, the Greek word for lust, *epithymia*, is derived from the same root. There are eighteen occurrences in the New Testament, with twelve referencing God's anger and only six referencing man's anger: Luke 4:28 (anger expressed toward Jesus), Acts 19:28 (the riot in Ephesus), 2 Corinthians 12:20 (Paul's concern over what he might find in the Corinthian church), Galatians 5:20 (one of the works of the flesh), Ephesians 4:31 and Colossians 3:8 (both grouping it with *orge* and other sins to be **put off**).

Two closely related words each occur only one time in the New Testament: *thymoo* (be make or become angry) in Matthew 2:16 and *thyomaceo* (to be very angry) in Acts 12:20. Both are references to the anger of Herod, a person not to be imitated by the Christian!

The study of these two Greek words surely does nothing to support the view that it is good or necessary to ventilate anger. Next, we will study some general Biblical principles about how the believer is to handle his anger when it arises.

OTHER BIBLICAL TEACHINGS ON ANGER

⁵¹ B. F. Westcott, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 73.

⁵² Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 143.

⁵³ Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, p. 791.

⁵⁴ Walter Bauer, *A Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 365.

⁵⁵ Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, p. 339.

This could well be the subject of an entire book. However, study of key passages should help to put Ephesians 4:26 into a proper biblical perspective.

There are numerous occurrences in Scripture of selfishly motivated human anger, for example: Genesis 4:5 (Cain), 27:44-45 (Esau), 39:19 (Potiphar); Numbers 24:10 (Balak); 1 Samuel 20:30 (Saul). However, other Old Testament examples note the possibility of a godly anger that focuses on the cause of God: Exodus 16:20 (Moses); Leviticus 10:16 (Moses); 2 Kings 13:19 (Elijah); Job 32:2, 3 (Elihu); Jeremiah 6:11 (Jeremiah).⁵⁶

The Wisdom literature of the Old Testament contains numerous warnings about the dangers of human wrath. Ecclesiastes has at least these two:

"Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools." Ecclesiastes 7:9

"Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good." Ecclesiastes 9:18

Proverbs, in particular, abounds with brief yet profound statements to be heeded by the believer:

"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." Proverbs 15:1

"Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city." Proverbs 16:32

"A man's own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the Lord." Proverbs 19:3

"A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense." Proverbs 19:11

"Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control." Proverbs 25:28

"A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control." Proverbs 29:11

"For as churning the milk produces butter, and as twisting the nose produces blood, so stirring up anger produces strife." Proverbs 30:33

⁵⁶ Examples taken from Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, p. 718.

Note the following in addition: Proverbs 6:19; 14:16, 17, 19; 15:18; 17:14, 19; 22:24, 25; 24:19-20; 25:15; 29:8, 22.

The book of Ephesians notes that the Christian is to be an imitator of God (5:1, 4:24). God's anger toward His children is seen in Scripture as **momentary**, similar to the time limit of Ephesians 4:26b: Isaiah 54:8; Psalm 30:5, 78:38, 86:15.

Several commentators, as noted earlier, mention a couple of key warning verses:

Joseph to his brother: "Then he sent his brothers away, and as they were leaving he said to them, 'Don't quarrel on the way!'" Genesis 45:24

Jesus: "But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell." Matthew 5:22

James teaches about the dangers of human anger, and the requirement that man be **slow** and hesitant in becoming angry:

"My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires." James 1:19-20

Paul considered rage (*thymos*) a work of the flesh, which he contrasts with the fruit of the Spirit:

"The acts (works) of the sinful nature (flesh) are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, **fits of rage**, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God." Galatians 5:19-21

The classic passage on love (1 Corinthians 13) demonstrates how antithetical love is to anger:

"It (love) is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs."
1 Corinthians 13:5

Within the context of worship and leadership qualities:

"I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing." 1 Timothy 2:8

"Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless--not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain."
Titus 1:7

Two closely parallel passages, one of which follows almost immediately after "be angry and do not sin," command the Christian to *put off* such unbecoming qualities as anger:

"But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips." Colossians 3:8

"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." Ephesians 4:31, 32

It is within the immediate context of these last two verses, and within the overview of scriptural teachings just studied, that we encounter "be angry and do not sin." Rather than a call to ventilation, in word or in deed, we find here a solemn warning to be heeded in reverential fear of the Lord.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions can perhaps best be summarized under the general themes of the book of Ephesians.

The Christian is to imitate God (5:1). The "new man" is created to be like God in righteousness and holiness of the truth (4:24). Most of the New Testament occurrences of anger, both *orge* and *thymos*, are in reference to God's anger (some eschatological, the "coming wrath"). The possibility of righteous anger cannot be excluded. The command view of verse 26a has some merits, such as Calvin's exhortation to be angry at one's own sins, and Wallace's conclusion that we ought to be angry at sin within the church and exercise church discipline. This is surely consistent with other scriptural teachings (Matthew 18:15-20; Galatians 6:1, 2; 1 Corinthians 5). Human anger, however, is extremely dangerous, all too often leading into sin; thus the time limit of verse 26b and the strong warning of verse 27 that follows. The Christian must be cautious to refrain from taking his own revenge, leaving room for the wrath of God (Romans 12:19); God is totally just and cannot sin. The believer must entrust himself to God's judgment and justice in the face of evil, as even Jesus did (1 Peter 2:23).

The Christian is to "put off" the "old man" which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires, and to "put on" the "new man" created to be like God. All of the characteristics of one's former life as an unbeliever, both interior and exterior, must be discarded. A radical regeneration has taken place. The believer has a new position in Christ, being reconciled to God and now having direct access to Him as His child. His entire lifestyle must be transformed. This is a growing process which continues throughout life, as one develops new, godly habits of living. The impulsive, angry, vengeful actions characteristic of the pagan must be put off.

The Christian is engaged in spiritual battle. The warning of verses 26-27 includes the exhortation, "nor give place to the devil." Later in Ephesians (chapter 6) is the classic passage on spiritual warfare, reminding us of the real enemy. Anger directed against other humans may well distract the believer from the real spiritual battlefield.

The Christian is to live at peace with God and others. The second chapter of Ephesians describes the truth that Christ is our peace, having reconciled us to God and abolishing any distinction between Jewish and Gentile Christian. Ventilation of anger is inconsistent with peaceful relationships. Whatever anger may arise must be handled swiftly.

There is to be a unity in the body of Christ. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father (4:5). The church is to grow together into a holy dwelling place for the Holy Spirit (2:22). We are called to live lives of sacrificial love (5:2). Christians are to live in humility and gentleness toward one another, being members of one another (4:2, 25). Sinful, unrestrained expression of anger has no place in this context, nor does holding on to internal bitterness toward others. Our speech must rather edify others (4:29, 5:4, 19) as we imitate the kindness, compassion, and forgiveness of God (4:31, 32). As we do so, God demonstrates his eternal purpose to rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms (3:10).

The Christian is to mature in Christ, growing in wisdom and sound doctrine. Maturity is to be achieved through sound doctrine, leading to a loving unity and interdependence in the body of Christ (4:12-16). Unlike the unbeliever, the Christian has the Spirit of wisdom and revelation (1:17), as Christ indwells his heart (3:17).

The Christian is to be properly subject to others. We are to submit to one another in reverence for Christ (5:21). Specific exhortations are included here for the husband and wife (5:22-33), parents and children (6:1-4), and for slaves and their masters

(6:5-9). This is consistent with the humility and gentleness called for earlier in 4:2, but certainly **not** consistent with a self-oriented ventilation of anger.

The Christian is to proclaim the gospel fearlessly. Paul asked for prayers in his work of evangelism (6:19, 20). Every believer must be ready to give a reason for the hope that is within him, and to lead others to Christ. Focus on one's own anger surely does not serve this purpose, but rather distracts from it.

In handling of his anger, the Christian is to reverence/fear God. The "tremble" or "stand in awe" from Psalm 4:4 is an excellent reminder that the believer must, at all times, fear the Lord. This is especially true in his handling of an explosive emotion like anger; he must be careful to respond in a righteous manner, not entering into sin.

Finally, the Christian has a new, eternal position in Christ. He has been chosen, elected by God before the foundation of the earth, saved solely by God's grace, having received God's unmerited favor and every spiritual blessing (1:3-5; 2:5-8). There is a stark contrast, portrayed graphically in Ephesians, between his former position of spiritual **death**, and his new position of spiritual **life** that lasts eternally. Knowledge of that glorious position ought to put earthly concerns in their proper, eternal perspective. The Christian is not to become **entangled in** the affairs of this life (2 Timothy 2:3, 4), or **entangled by** the sin which hinders him from the walk that is worthy of his calling in Christ (4:1). Ventilation of anger is a sinful behavior which definitely entangles and hinders the believer in his walk with the Lord.

© **19__**, Christian Discernment Publications Ministry, Inc.
www.christiandiscernment.com

APPENDIX A
POSITION OF BELIEVER

IN CHRIST

2:5 alive with Christ
 2:6 raised with Christ
 and seated in the
 heavenlies

1:5 adopted as children
 1:14 God's purchased
 possession
 1:18 called by God

2:19 fellow citizens with
 saints/household of God
 4:25 members of one another
 1:4, 5 elected, predestined
 according to God's
 purpose

1:11 appointed to inheritance

2:18, 3:12 having direct access to
 God
 1:13 sealed with the Holy
 Spirit
 2:5, 8 saved by God's grace
 2:10 God's workmanship
 3:17 Christ indwelling hearts
 3:17 rooted and grounded in
 love of Christ

1:17, 18 having wisdom,
 revelation, knowledge,
 eyes of the heart
 enlightened

1:4 holy and blameless in
 the presence of God
 1:7 redeemed and forgiven

BEFORE CHRIST

2:1 dead in sins
 and trespasses

2:3 children of wrath

2:12 separated from
 God's people
 2:12, 19 strangers and
 foreigners to
 the covenant

2:12 having no hope

2:12 without God

2:13 fulfilling the
 lusts of the
 flesh

**APPENDIX B
 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE**

The believer is exhorted to walk a walk that is worthy of his

calling in Christ (Ephesians 4:1, 17).

NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

4:2 humble, gentle

4:3 eager go guard unity

4:2, 32 compassionate, kind,
bearing with and
forgiving others

4:7, 11 receiving gifts from God
for service to others

4:13, 14 no longer infants, being
mature, having sound doctrine
4:23 mind renewed by God

4:24 created to be like God, in
righteousness and holiness
of the truth
5:9 fruitful in goodness, truth,
and righteousness
5:10 pleasing to God

5:19-20 giving praise, thanksgiving
5:21-33, obedient, subject to others
6:1-9 in relationships as commanded
by God

4:25 speaking the truth in love

4:28 working productively,
giving to those in need

OLD LIFE WITHOUT CHRIST

4:18 hardened heart
4:19 having lost
sensitivity

4:22 corrupted by
deceitful
desires

4:26, 31 bitter, angry,
wrathful,
slanderous,
shouting

4:19 given to
sensuality in
every
uncleanness and
greediness

4:17, 18 darkened in
understanding
and futility
of thinking

4:18 ignorant and
separated from
God

5:4, 5 fornication,
idolatry,
shameful
behavior,
foolish and
dirty talk

4:25 dishonest, lying

4:28 stealing

APPENDIX B (CONTINUED)

4:29	building others up in speech	4:29	corrupt words
5:18	filled with Holy Spirit	5:18	drunkenness

**8 1993, Christian Discernment Publications Ministry, Inc.
www.christiandiscernment.com**

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aquinas, Thomas, *Commentary on Ephesians*. Magi Books, Inc., 1966.

Barth, Marcus, *Ephesians 4-6* (Anchor Bible 34A). Garden City, Doubleday, 1974.

Bauer, Walter, translated by William J. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (second edition). Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1957 and 1979.

J. L. Boyer, "Other Conditional Elements in New Testament Greek," *Grace Theological Journal* 4 (1983), pp. 173-188.

Bruce, F. F., *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (New International New Testament Commentary). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984.

Calvin, John, *Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians*. The Banner of Truth Trust, 1973.

Clark, Gordon H., *Ephesians*. The Trinity Foundation, 1985.

Eadie, John, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*. Baker Book House, 1979 (reprinted from 1883 edition by T and T Clark).

Hodge, Charles, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*. New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1856; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950.

Kittel, Gerhard and Friedrich, Gerhard (editors), translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (one volume). William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985.

Lincoln, Andrew T., *Ephesians* (Word Biblical Commentary 42). Dallas: Word, 1990.

The Interpreter's Bible. New York: Abingdon Cokesbury Press, 1953.

Meyer, Heinrich August Wilhelm, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Ephesians and the Epistle to Philemon*. Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1895.

Wallace, D.L., "ORGIZESTHE in Ephesians 4:26: Command or Condition?", *Criswell Theological Review* 3 (1989), pp. 353-72.

Westcott, B. F., *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952.