

The Walk of the True Christian, Part 2

Scripture: Ephesians 4:25-32

Code: 49-25

Well, we are making an effort at working through Ephesians. It's been a bit of a challenge, but we want to go back to Ephesians chapter four. And I confess that I am the culprit in this speed with which we are going through Ephesians because I keep getting stuck on the importance of each verse—and that will be the case again today. But for the general flow of this text, let me read chapter 4, starting at verse 17 through the end of the chapter. Very practical. Much of it we have covered already, and we'll advance a little bit this morning as we get to the message.

“So this I say”—or, “Therefore”—“and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

“Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. 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 who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need. Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”

This is a very pragmatic section, starting in verse 25, and it'll continue to be so as we march through chapter 5 in the future. But there's a turning point here, and it's in verse 20: “You did not learn Christ in this way.” Prior to that, in verses 17 to 19, is a description of the unconverted, the people who are in their fallen condition: They walk “in the futility of their mind,” they are “darkened in their understanding,” they are “excluded from the life of God,” they are ignorant, they are hard-hearted, they are callous, they are sensual, and they are committed to “the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.” “But you did not learn Christ in this way.” And what we've been saying through our study of Ephesians is that true salvation makes a dramatic change. There is a true spiritual transformation.

Yes, we understand the doctrine of imputed righteousness, that the imputed righteousness of Christ is granted to us by faith. But there is also a complete change in our nature. We are new creations:

The old things are gone; new things have come. So if you have truly learned Christ, if you have truly heard Him, verse 21 says if you have been truly taught in Him—that is, the gospel—if you have truly embraced the truth that is in Jesus, then you no longer function according to your former manner of life. The old self is gone; you've been renewed in the spirit of your mind; you have a new self which, verse 24 says, "in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth."

Now to understand conversion, you need to understand that that is exactly what the Bible says happened: You are totally transformed. In the language of 1 John that I read to you, you no longer live in an unbroken pattern of sin; you now live in a pattern of righteousness—still broken by sin because you haven't yet been released from your unredeemed humanness, but your life is different. The power of sin has been broken, the power of the devil has been broken, and you have become a slave of righteousness.

I think it's summed up most clearly at the end of verse 24. Literally, "You are a new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." Righteousness, holiness, and truth mark a believer. This is a dramatic, spiritual transformation. And Paul has been saying through this entire chapter that it has consequence. The first three chapters described the essence of that transformation; talks about salvation and all of its components. But when you come to chapter 4, you have in verse 1, "Therefore." So now we have the consequence of our transformation: We are to "walk in a manner worthy" of our calling.

The second "therefore" is in verse 17: Therefore we no longer walk as the pagans walk. And here is the third "therefore" in verse 25: "Therefore, laying aside falsehood." And beginning in verse 25 we have a series of exchanges that are part of the transformation. As a consequence of our regeneration, which encompasses sanctification, we are remade internally by God, through the truth, by the Holy Spirit, in union with Christ, so that we literally have been recreated in righteousness and holiness of the truth. This is radical transformation. It is the 180-degree opposite of what we saw as a description in verses 17 to 19.

Drop down to chapter 5 for a moment. To show you how clearly this distinction is made and related to our condition and our standing before God, verse 5 says, "For this you know with certainty"—there's no doubt about this—"that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater"—that is worshiping anything other than the true God alone—"has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." In other words no one is going to be in the kingdom of God if that person is immoral, impure, covetous, or an idolater. And don't let anyone," verse 6 says, "deceive you with empty words." If those things are part of your life, "the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience."

Verse 9 says this: "The fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth." And there you have it again. If the light has dawned on you, if gospel truth has come to you, if you have been regenerated, you are marked by goodness and righteousness and truth. "You"—verse 8—"were formerly darkness, now you are Light." That's stark transformation. You were dead; you're alive. You were darkness; you are light. You were ignorant; you know the truth. This is the work of salvation.

Now we understand that that transformation redefines our mind, our heart, our behavior, our conversation—everything about us. It doesn't mean we're perfect; we're not yet perfect, but we are transformed so that we have new affections, new intentions, new motivations. Our speech changes,

our attitudes change, our behavior changes, our relationship changes. The focus of our life moves from the worship of self to the worship of the true God. This is total transformation.

And as a result of that, there are exchanges that can be noted, and that's what we see beginning in verse 25: You exchange lying for the truth. Verse 26, you exchange unrighteous anger for righteous anger. Verse 28, you exchange stealing for sharing. Verse 29, you exchange unwholesome words for edifying words. This is to say that if you are a believer, it shows up in how you conduct your life. You walk differently; you will, and you must.

Now just a word about a couple of weeks ago, for those who weren't here, that we looked at. Verse 25, the first thing that the apostle Paul notes is that when you have been transformed by the gospel, by the power of Christ, you're "laying aside falsehood," and you "speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another." That language is basically borrowed from Zechariah 8:16, as we saw. "You lay aside"—that's a verb that can mean "to take off your robe," "take off your cloak"; it's used in the book of Acts in chapter 7, when the people who were going to stone Stephen took their cloaks off and got ready to throw stones on him. So it's a simple picture. You shed some things when you have been transformed, and the first thing is: You shed falsehood, and in its place comes truth. And we looked at that in some detail.

Everything in the control of Satan is essentially part of the fabric of lies. John 8:44, Jesus said Satan's "a liar and the father of lies." He operates in deceit: It is endless deceit; it is unending deceit. Occasionally, he'll say something true—like the clock that doesn't run is right twice a day—but only for the purpose of further deceit. He is the deceiver. He is bent on deception. He is the architect of all false religion, which is the ultimate deception, for it is the most damning of all ideologies because it keeps you from the true salvation only in Christ. Satan is "a liar . . . the father of lies." So since the whole of society—1 John 5—lies in the lap of Satan, the world is basically a house of cards held up by lies.

I think we seem to be somewhat overwhelmed by the current brashness of lies. Society reaches a point, in our case, where they don't even try to hide that they're lying, even though they're being videotaped, and you can repeat the things they say and show that they're lies. It seems to have no influence on them at all. It's disturbing to all of us to live in a world of lies, but it's not really nothing new. It's always been lies that damn people—lies about God, lies about man, lies about everything. The whole system of Satan is a house of cards built on lies. And this is obvious to us, I think, because we see those lies, but it's also obvious because we see how desperately this society wants to protect itself from the truth.

The greatest danger to the system of lies is the truth, and therein is the reason for persecution coming against Christianity. We are the people of the truth; the church is the pillar and ground of the truth. We expose the lies; we will continue to expose the lies. We expose not only lies—theological lies, spiritual lies—but all lies, whatever those lies may be. And the system has a hard time tolerating anyone who speaks the truth about anything. We all have seen that with the Internet. Now we see the evil system in a panic because Elon Musk bought Twitter and threatens to let people tell the truth; and nothing is more dangerous to a complex of lies than the truth. Society depends on deception; it's nothing new. But when you become a believer, you lay all that aside; you strip that off, and you become a truthful person. We looked at that a couple of weeks ago.

But let's come to verse 26, because this is a second sort of default sin in human fallenness. Men are

born liars; we said that: They're born liars. They start lying when they're tiny little kids, trying to deceive Mom and Dad, and you have to be trained not to lie. They also are angry. A six-month-old will scream and throw a tantrum if you take his toy truck away. This is a default position for human depravity: to lie and to be angry.

And that's consistent with what Jesus said about Satan: He's a liar, and he's a murderer. And murder is the end result of anger and hate. So we all come into the world as little liars and little haters, and discipline is to drive primarily those two things out of us, make us tell the truth, and to make us have affection and love toward others, and not hate and anger. So those are the default positions of humanity, and that's why verse 27 says they "give the devil an opportunity." Since the devil is a liar and a murderer, you're playing into his hands if you lie and if you are angry.

So let's talk about this second exchange. The first one is exchanging lying for telling the truth. The second one is exchanging unrighteous anger for righteous anger. "Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger." "Be angry, and yet do not sin." Now that indicates to us that there is an anger that is acceptable; there is an anger that is acceptable, or a level of anger that is acceptable.

"Be angry." It may seem strange to you that God says, "Be angry," but there's a kind of anger that is justified. And by the way, those words are essentially borrowed from Psalm 4:4, where it says that: "Be angry"—some translations say "tremble"—"and don't sin." In other words, there is a kind of an anger that you can have that's short of sin. What kind of anger is that? Anger in itself may not be sinful. It is certainly sinful on many occasions, if not most occasions. But there is a category in which anger is not sinful, and that would be defined for us by the sinless ones—God Himself and the Lord Jesus Christ. So let me take you back to Exodus 32 and show you sinless, holy, righteous anger, and what it looks like and how actually fierce it is.

Exodus 32:19. Now we're at the foot of Sinai, with the children of Israel coming out of Egypt, headed for the Promised Land. Moses has been up on the mountain getting the Ten Commandments. The people have been down below, and they have begun to worship a golden calf. Verse 19 has Moses coming near the camp, and "he saw the calf and the dancing; and Moses' anger burned, and he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain." He literally destroyed the tablets of stone on which God had written the Ten Commandments, his fury was so great. And then what he did is really interesting: "He took the calf which they had made and burned it with fire, and ground it to powder, and scattered it over the surface of the water and made the sons of Israel drink it." They drank the tiny pieces of the remnant of the calf that they had made to worship.

"Then Moses said to Aaron, 'What did this people do to you, that you have brought such great sin upon them?'"—"You were supposed to be watching them. What did they do to you, to allow you to make this happen?"—"Aaron said, 'Do not let the anger of my lord burn; you know the people yourself, that they are prone to evil.'"—This is the classic response, right? "Oh, it wasn't me, it was them."—"For they said to me, 'Make a god for us who will go before us; for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.'"—"He's gone; we don't know where he is."—"I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them tear it off.' So they gave it to me, and I threw it in the fire, and out came this calf."—Really?

"Now when Moses saw that the people were out of control—for Aaron had let them get out of control to be a derision among their enemies—then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said,

‘Whoever is for the Lord, come to me!’ And all the sons of Levi gathered together to him.”—“If you’re on the Lord’s side in this, come to me!” So the Levites came to him—and “He said to them,” verse 27, “Thus says the Lord the God of Israel, “Every man of you put his sword on his thigh, go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp, and kill every man his brother, every man his friend, and every man his neighbor.”” —“Go slaughter your family, your friends, and your neighbors.”—“So the sons of Levi did as Moses instructed, and about three thousand men of the people fell that day. And then Moses said, ‘Dedicate yourself today to the Lord.’”

The fury of God, the fury of Moses brought about terrifying wrath. That is righteous wrath. Because what is the commandment in the Ten Commandments? “You shall have no other gods before Me.” And there they were, worshiping a god of their own making while he was getting the Ten Commandments. This is righteous indignation, and Moses was entitled to it because God was entitled to it.

God is angry with the wicked every day. God loves righteousness, so by nature He hates evil. Psalm 69:9, David said, “Zeal for Your house has eaten me up.” David meant that, “When You are dishonored, when Your house is dishonored, it is consuming me. Zeal for Your house has eaten me up,” he said. Then he said further, “The reproaches that fall on You, fall on me. When You are dishonored I feel the pain.” That’s a very, very legitimate kind of suffering, when you suffer empathetically with the dishonor being heaped on God. It is angering to a righteous person to see God maligned and blasphemed and scorned and mocked and ridiculed. It is a kind of zeal that consumes, that eats at us, because we love Him, and we want to defend His glory. And so the reproaches that are driven at God fall on us. Like Paul said, “I bear in my body the marks of Christ.”

So that’s the Old Testament; that’s just one of many illustrations where God unleashed horrifying anger. If you want a bigger one than that, go back to Genesis and read where He drowned the entire human race except for eight people. God has a right to be angry.

In the New Testament we know that our Lord Jesus Christ exhibited that. Look at John chapter 2. John chapter 2, verse 13, “The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; and to those who were selling the doves He said, ‘Take these things away; stop making My Father’s house a place of business.’ [And] His disciples remembered [Psalm 69:9] . . . ‘Zeal for Your house [has eaten me up].’” That was righteous indignation. And Jesus started His ministry in Jerusalem with a blast of that righteous indignation.

There’s an interesting account in Mark 3 that shows the anger of Jesus in a different way. “He entered . . . into a synagogue,” Mark 3, verse 1, “and a man was there whose hand was withered”—had some kind of deformity in his hand—and the Jewish people “were watching Him to see if He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him.” Now there was no law, of course, in the Old Testament that somebody couldn’t get healed on the Sabbath. But they were looking for some violation of their human traditions. They were watching Jesus.

Verse 3, “He said to the man with the withered hand, ‘Get up and come forward!’ And He said to them”—that is, the Jewish people—“Is it lawful to do good or do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or kill [it]?” But they kept silent. And looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of

heart, He said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately began conspiring with the Herodians against Him, as to how they might destroy Him."—destroy Him for healing a man on the Sabbath, destroy Him for violating some manmade tradition. Jesus was angry over their hard-heartedness. That's righteous anger.

Another illustration very similar to the one in John: At the end of our Lord's ministry, the same thing happened. He went back to the Temple, and not much had changed since He started His ministry there three years earlier. When you come back to Matthew chapter 21 and verse 12, "Jesus entered the temple"—this is in Passion Week, the end of His life—"drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. And He said to them, 'It is written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer"; but you're making it a robbers' den.'" That's righteous indignation. That's godly anger.

Righteous anger is that anger that is against evil, particularly that evil which strikes against the glory of God or some other person. In the case of Jesus' action at the Temple, He was defending the glory of His Father. In the case of the man with the withered hand, He was defending the right of that man to receive compassionate healing. Righteous anger is always in the cause of someone else. It may be God, or it may be someone else. It's not selfish; it's not self-focused or self-centered. Any evil, any sin directed at God's person or God's Word or God's will or God's kingdom, deserves and has the anger of God. God is angry with the wicked all the time—all the time. He's angry with injustice, He's angry with immorality, He's angry with ungodliness; and certainly He's angry with blasphemy, irreverence, scorn, mockery.

We have a right to be angry when God is dishonored or when someone else is mistreated; and that's what we see in Jesus. In the Temple, He's defending God's honor; and in the healing of the man with the withered hand, He's defending that man's right to receive compassionate care. Righteous anger is never selfish. In fact, we learn from the Lord Himself and His trial and His crucifixion that He never fought back. In fact, He didn't even pronounce judgment, hanging on the cross. He said, "Father"—what?—"forgive them, for they know not what they do." There, He is offering those revilers and those blasphemers, executing the very Son of God, forgiveness.

And Peter tells us that when He was reviled, He reviled not again. And that word means "to be abused." When He was abused, He didn't give back abuse; He committed himself to a faithful Creator. He left the retaliation to God; He left the vengeance to God; He left the anger to God to bring about whatever execution of divine justice was appropriate. We don't have the right to be angry at things that come at us. It's very hard to be righteously angry about that because we get our own egos and self-protectiveness caught up in it.

In Matthew chapter 5 we have some straightforward instruction with regard to this. Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:21, "You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.'"—This is a common teaching: "You shall not commit murder."—Jesus said, "But I say to you" the law goes a lot deeper than that. "Everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court"—you're just as guilty as a murderer if you're angry with your brother. "And whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell." You don't have to kill somebody to go to hell; just be angry at them. That's the same as murder. Just like Jesus said, "You've heard it said that you shall not commit adultery, but I'm telling

you, if you look on a woman to lust after her, you've commit adultery in your heart, and it has the same consequence."

We don't have a right to be angry, to revile back to people, even when they falsely accuse us. Romans chapter 12 speaks to this very practical reality. Listen to what Romans 12 says, verse 14: "Bless those who persecute you." Did you get that? "Bless those who persecute you . . . and do not curse." "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse." Again, go down to verse 17, "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone"—never. "Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. 'But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." So when evil comes at you, don't let it overcome you; you overcome that evil with good.

People have recently been saying to me, "You're getting pretty hammered on the Internet, people attacking you and assaulting you. Are you going to respond?" Yes. The only thing I can say is, I want to bless those who persecute me and not curse. I never want to pay back evil for evil to anyone. As much as is possible, as far as it depends on me, I want to be at peace with all men. So you can't pick a fight with me; I'm not going to fight.

"But what about the wrong they're doing?" "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord." You think God doesn't know? You think somebody's getting away with something? Guess again. God keeps those accounts. I don't need to deal with that. I don't need to seek revenge, I don't need to retaliate, I don't need to curse back; I just need to do what Jesus said and "commit [himself] . . . to a faithful Creator."

In Colossians 3, again, we have very similar instruction. Colossians 3:5 talks about, "Consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is because of these things the wrath of God will come on the sons of disobedience." God's wrath will be exacted with perfection—perfect justice. You used to walk in them, but you don't do that anymore. "Now," verse 8, "put . . . aside: [all] anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth." You don't need to do that; you don't need to retaliate. There is a righteous anger, but it's not going to be a self-defensive anger; it's going to be in defense of God or someone else.

Back to Ephesians. If you allow yourself to lie or you allow yourself to cultivate anger, verse 27 says you gave the devil an opportunity. You threw the door wide open and said, "Come on in, devil, and take over territory in my life."

As I said two weeks ago, lying and anger are the default postures of fallen humanity because Satan, John 8:44, is a liar and a murderer. So there's nothing more devilish than lying and hating—anger.

But the anger of the Lord is always righteous. The anger of the Lord is always righteous. Listen to Numbers 25:3 and 4: "So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor"—that was the god of the Moabites and Midianites; in other words, an idol—"and the Lord was angry against Israel. The Lord said to Moses, 'Take all the leaders of the people and execute them in broad daylight before the Lord, so that the fierce anger of the Lord may turn away from Israel.'" God's anger could only be

ameliorated in the execution of idolaters on that occasion. This is what Jeremiah, in Jeremiah 4 and Jeremiah 12, calls “the fierce anger of the Lord.” And it is always measured appropriately; it is always just; it is always right. Vengeance belongs to the Lord.

The anger of the Lord is always righteous, always righteous. But our anger is not always righteous, so that’s why it says, “Be angry, but don’t sin.” Don’t be angry in an unrighteous way. But even more than that, an explicit statement is made in verse 26: “Do not let the sun go down on your anger.” What is that meaning? Don’t go to bed mad; don’t go to bed angry. This is the first impulse toward murder. It doesn’t matter what offended you; it doesn’t matter what hurt you; it doesn’t matter what injustice came your way, what inequity came your way, what cruelty, what harm came your way.

That’s life in a fallen world. I mean, we’re living in our culture and looking right down the barrel of a deadly gun called critical race theory, that is nothing more than people cultivating massive amounts of anger, much of it over something that was done to previous generations and not even them. It doesn’t take much of insight to see the devastating effect of that kind of anger. You don’t want to cultivate that. You don’t want to start a movement built on anger. You don’t want to live that way. You don’t want to be always angry with someone or some group or some politician or something in the culture.

Now I said that this verse is drawn from Psalm 4, so let me go back there. Listen to what is in that Psalm. Psalm 4, verse 4, “Tremble”—or “be angry”—“and do not sin,” “and do not sin.” Then the psalmist wrote—and this is where Paul got the idea of not going to bed angry: “Meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still.” Lie down, and settle down, settle down.

Verse 8, “In peace I will both lie down and sleep, for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.” What’s that to say? “My enemies can’t hurt me; I’m going to sleep. I don’t need to fight those battles. I don’t need to retaliate; I don’t need to fight back. I don’t need to curse; I don’t need to revile. I’m just going to go to sleep; I’m going to sleep like a baby. I’m not going to have a root of bitterness. I’m not going to have my life destroyed because I’m so mad at somebody, so angry with people who falsely accuse me and lie about me or are messing with my world.”

I love that, verse 8: “In peace I will both lie down and sleep, for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.” Resentment, grudges, bitterness, unforgiving attitudes, just devastate you, not somebody else, and they are sinful. So be angry if it’s righteous anger, but shut it down and be at peace, understanding that the resolution for that, the equity, is not going to come in this life; it’s going to come from the hand of God in His time.

Now that’s right. Psalm 97:10 does say, “You that love the Lord, hate evil.” We can hate evil. Evil is something that we profoundly resent. I’ll show you an illustration: James chapter 1. James chapter 1 and verse 19, “This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to”—what?—“to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.” When your anger is still on a human level, you achieve nothing with regard to the righteousness of God. The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God; what the anger of man does is give Satan a foothold. If you’re an angry person, you have just invited Satan to come in.

In 2 Peter chapter 2—you’ll identify with this; it talks about Lot. And it says in verse 7 that God

“rescued righteous Lot,” who was “oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men.” Does that sound familiar? Don’t you get sick and tired of it—whether there are these lesbian predators in the classroom of your five-year-old kindergartner, trying to groom them for future homosexuality, or whether they’re politicians ruining the culture from the top down. We understand how Lot felt.

Where did he live? He lived in—where?—Sodom. What marked Sodom? Homosexuality. That’s where the word *sodomy* comes from. If he was a righteous man, then of course he was “oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds).” We understand that. It is tormenting.

But what do you do about it? Well strange as it seems, you love your enemy, you don’t curse your enemy, right? You bless your enemy; you pray for your enemy. If you stay angry, then Satan will just take a place in your life, and all of a sudden you’ll be angry out of self-pity, pride, self-righteousness; hatred will develop, and you’ll want personal vengeance, which does no good for anyone. Shut it all down when you go to sleep.

So what should we be angry about? All the things that anger God, right? But there’s no sense of staying awake because the Bible says, “God never slumbers or sleeps.” So if He’s going to be awake, we can go to sleep.

God is holy, perfect, pure, and righteous; His anger is because of that holiness. He is angry at anything and everything that violates His perfect holiness. So there’s a sense in which God is angry all the time, angry over evil. And His anger will result in judgment; and it does throughout redemptive history. We see all kinds of cataclysmic judgments throughout the Old Testament.

There was cataclysmic judgment even in the New Testament era at the destruction of Jerusalem, in which thousands of Jewish people died under the slaughter of the Romans, which was an act of judgment on the part of God; Jesus even said that. And in the future, we read in 2 Thessalonians 1, “God’s righteous judgment” is coming in which He will “repay with affliction those who afflict you.” He will “[deal] out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power.” Nobody’s going to get away with anything. God’s hatred of evil has led to judgment in the past. There is ongoing judgment even in the present, as His judgment is always at work in the world. And there is coming a final, eschatological judgment in the future.

God is angry with sin. But there’s an amazing reality attached to that, and I want to show you that as we draw it to a conclusion, in Psalm 103, Psalm 103. This is just a magnificent psalm of hope and encouragement, Psalm 103. We can look at verse 6 to start. Psalm 103, verse 6, “The Lord performs righteous deeds and judgments for all who are oppressed”—so you don’t need to retaliate; that’s the Lord’s business. Again, Romans 12, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay”—which is drawn out of the Pentateuch.

Then verse 8 says—this is the amazing thing: “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness.” That’s the Old Testament word for “grace.” While God will judge all sin—and I mean all sin, all evil—at the same time, He is “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness”—*hesed*, which is essentially grace. “He will not always

[fight] with us,” He will not always be angry forever. “He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.” You mean you can escape His anger? You mean you can escape His wrath? Yes.

Verse 11, “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His lovingkindness toward those who”—what?—“who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. For He Himself knows our frame; He’s mindful that we are but dust.”

This is the most incredible news. God is angry with the wicked every day; no sin will go unpunished. Every sin will be accounted for and adjudicated by God in a just fashion. But God has compassion that is infinite. So how is it possible that we can tap into that compassion and that grace and that lovingkindness and that forgiveness? How do we tap into that? By fearing Him, which is just another way to say believing in Him, trusting Him, committing our lives to Him. And that’s the message of the gospel, isn’t it? But the anger will still be punished; the difference is it won’t be punished in the person who was angry, it’ll be punished, and has been punished, at the cross.

If you’re a Christian, all your anger was laid on Christ, and He was punished for all of it. That’s all the anger and all the lying before you were ever converted. And the times when you lied and were angry since then, He died under the full weight of divine wrath for those sins. This is the wondrous reality of the gospel.

Now since God has mercy in His anger, even His righteous anger has mercy on those who fear Him. We’re instructed to be slow to anger like Him; and our anger, even at a righteous level, should be tempered with mercy and lovingkindness. He is so gracious, so compassionate, as to not deal with us according to our sins at all, not to punish us for our iniquities. In fact, to remove them “as far as the east is from the west”—and that’s infinite—because He loves us. And so we say what Jesus said: You’re never more like God than when you forgive your enemies, because that’s what God does in Christ.

So as we think about the practicalities of the Christian life, those of us who are new creatures in Christ, we need to be reminded that the transformation means we have shifted in the spiritual transformation. We’ve gone from lying to telling the truth; we’ve gone from being angry in an unrighteous way to being angry in a righteous way, but only if we can shut it down and if we can expend more mercy, more grace, to those who may deserve judgment.

Our Father, we thank You for Your Word; so practical. We thank You that You give us not only the commands to do what is right, but You have given us a new heart and a new spirit; we’ve been born again. And then You’ve placed Your Holy Spirit in us to strengthen us, and to dispense in us the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control. May it be obvious to everyone around us that we are different, that we have been totally transformed. May we be marked by forgiveness and grace, lovingkindness, compassion, tenderheartedness, mercy; for these are the things that mark even Your holy nature.

When You have every right to punish us, You have been so merciful as to punish Your own Son for all our lies and all our anger and everything else. And You laid all of that on Him because You loved

us and desire to bring us home to glory. May we live in a way that is consistent with that new creation. May we be the people who speak the truth and who are righteous in our passions, always tempered with compassion and forgiveness. Work Your work in every heart, we pray for Your glory. Amen.

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