

Peace

BY THE

Holy Spirit

& HOLY ANGER

<sup>8</sup>The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra,  
And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den.

<sup>9</sup>They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain,  
For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD  
As the waters cover the sea.

- Isaiah 11:8-9\*  
(NASB 95)

\*Genesis 3:15; Numbers 21:9; John 3:14; Mark 16:18

PENTECOSTAL PEACE BY THE SPIRIT SERIES 2

Peace

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& HOLY ANGER

An Exegetical Study  
of Ephesians 4:26

RALF LUBS



PEACE LITERATURE  
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## INTRODUCTION

Ephesians 4:26 is one of the ‘problem passages’ in the New Testament. How do we have to understand what Paul<sup>1</sup> wrote in this verse? Why does he say, “Be angry” in verse 26 and in verse 31 of the same chapter, “Get rid of all anger”? Does Paul give an order to be angry here and say the opposite there? Is anger always sin or is it not sin “until the sun goes down”?

“<sup>26</sup>Be *angry* (*orgizō/ὀργίζω*), and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your *anger* (*parorgismos/παροργισμός*), <sup>27</sup>and do not give the devil an opportunity.”

🔍 Acts 18:24–26 (NASB)

A practical concern is that this verse has widely been understood as to imply that getting angry is not sin if it is ‘righteous’ or ‘holy’ anger. Thus, many conflicts caused by Christians in different daily life relationships, the church, the family, the workplace, have been justified by labelling anger as ‘righteous’ or ‘holy.’ On the other hand, identifying all anger as sinful has led to lots of frustration, even depression, projected anger, and other psychological effects of suppressed anger. This writer believes that a sound biblical exegesis of this text leads to an understanding of what Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, probably meant and therefore contributes to finding ways to avoid harmful attitudes and behaviour of Christians. This in turn works thus for the health of the church and the individual Christian in his social surrounding for the progress of the gospel and God’s glory.

## I.

# THE CONTEXT OF THE BOOK

### Sectional Content Overview of Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians

Before we come to the analysis of morphemes, words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs around Ephesians 4:26, we need to do what Paul's first readers did: following his flow of thought while reading the whole letter. Since Paul expected his first readers to do so, the success of decoding what he encoded would most likely be reached by putting ourselves into the Ephesians' shoes and trying to follow Paul's pen.

Paul begins his letter by praising God for his eternal plan of salvation, which is to choose first the Jews, then the Gentiles as his people (1:3–14). He then asks God to reveal the power of this salvation in Christ to the Ephesians (1:15–23) as the body of Christ at that place. Next, he reminds the Ephesian Gentiles that they were once under the power of sin, but by God's grace are now delivered for good works (2:1–10). This access to God through Christ brings them peace with God and peace with the Jews as the united people of God by faith in Christ (2:11–18). Maybe Paul had already the similar sounding *summetochoi/syμμέτοχοι* in mind, which means 'participants' (in Christ's heritage; 5:7), when he used *mesotoichon/μεσότοιχον*, which means 'separation wall' (2:14). Paul was probably thinking at the same time of the wall which separates the Jews from the Gentiles in the temple in Jerusalem. Of course, any enmity, while the separation of the Jewish people from the Gentiles was intended and ordered by God in order for the Jews to keep themselves pure from pagan idolatry, on a human level is due to anger, properly speaking not the emotion itself, but an entertainment of an aggressive anger-expression. Also, in the household, conflicts are due to a lack of correct anger management. The reconciliation of conflicting parties in Christ now also allows for the

## II.

### THE SECTION OF EPHESIANS 4:17–32 IN PARTICULAR

Ephesians 4:17–19: The conjunction ‘so’ (*sun/οὕν*) introduces the effect of what has just been said: Because we<sup>23</sup> have grown to maturity in Christ through right teaching, we must no longer live as Gentiles do. Right doctrine has the purpose of being applied to the life with the result of inner transformation. The Gentiles live in all kinds of immorality and lusts because they are ignorant. They lack the right teaching. This is the reason why God’s anger is upon them (2:3). Now that we have the right teaching, we cannot continue in this sinful way of living, we need to apply the teaching to our lives and that leads us to a different behaviour. Verse 17 introduces the general statement (17–24) to the following literary device of the vice and virtue list (4:25–32), thus building the compositional pattern of a generalisation, contrasting the old life in sin with the new life in Christ. Paul begins with the *hendiadys*, “I say and affirm together with the Lord,” that is *legō kai marturomai* (λέγω καὶ μαρτύρομαι; 4:17). Of course, both verbs do not have exactly the same semantic field but are very likely intended to be used as synonyms. Therefore, being a figure of speech, they reinforce the importance of the Ephesians to abandon a Gentile way of living, which includes constantly giving room to the auto- and hetero-destructive effects of anger for the individual and the community, and to surrender to the Spirit of God in order to adopt a holy way of living.

The metonymy ‘to walk’ (*peripateō/περιπατέω*; 4:17) for ‘to behave’ is a concept that parallels the Jewish *halakah*, the “authoritative legal decision of how one was to conduct himself according to the law.”<sup>24</sup> However, it is questionable that Paul just adapted his former rabbinic thinking to the new context of the church, as Ferguson and hosts

### III.

## PAUL'S USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

### Do we need to exegete Psalm 4?

Since Paul quotes LXX Psalm 4:5 in Ephesians 4:26, we need to know how he quotes this text and whether the meaning of Psalm 4:5 has any influence on Paul's meaning in his text. Neo-Marcionite scholars, such as Bultmann and others,<sup>56</sup> would say that this is not the case and would therefore not even bother to exegete Psalm 4. Decker for example comments,

“Probably not (*italics original*) intended as exegetical/prophetic, typological, or even analogical. Paul most likely simply uses the wording here (thus: allusion; no suggestion of fulfillment; no contextual relevance, etc.). If so, then the context, etc. of Ps.4 is probably not relevant to our understanding of Ephesians 4.”<sup>57</sup>

However, Childs correctly demonstrates that Barr's view to limit the role of the Old Testament to a testimony to the time before Christ's coming is not adequate, because it is also an “ontological and soteriological unity” with the New Testament.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, we indeed need to consider Psalm 4. It seems to this writer that Paul had an approach that comes close to the modern biblical-theological interpretation which “attempts to study a passage within its own original historical context, the *Sitz im Leben*,<sup>59</sup> a point precisely rejected by Structuralism.<sup>60</sup> For reasons stated further below, this writer's contention is that Paul's intended meaning is the same as David's in Psalm 4. In his view, this word is addressed to “the people of God and to each of its members.”<sup>61</sup> Therefore, we need to determine David's intent by using the imperative in v. 5 of the Septuagint text by looking at authorship, historical context and probable meaning of Psalm 4:5.

#### IV.

### THE GRAMMATICAL ANALYSIS OF EPHESIANS 4:26

A glimpse into a Greek grammar shows that the Greek imperative does not only express a command but can express a condition, a request, a permission, a challenge etc. But the first question is whether the verb form we find here is an imperative or an indicative.

#### The declarative indicative ... imperative

“You are angry, but do not sin.”

Although *orgizesthe*/ὀργιζέσθε may be an indicative, it is almost certain that it is an imperative because it is not usual for a *καί* to mark a shift from indicative to imperative. Furthermore, “the statement occurs in the midst of a hortatory section (surrounded by 10 imperatives and 2 hortatory subjunctives).”<sup>168</sup> This interpretation of the morphology would read, “You are angry, but do not sin.” In favour of this view could be that it seems that anger was indeed a problem in the Ephesian house churches. Against it speaks the above-mentioned odd syntactical construction, if it was an indicative, as well as the tone that David takes in Psalm 4. Since the Hebrew text makes a difference that the Greek does not, Hebrew imperative qal: *rīzdû*/רִצְדוּ; indicative (hiphil 3. pers. pl.: *rāgzû*/רָגְזוּ),<sup>169</sup> it can be assumed that the Septuagint translators did not intend the indicative form and therefore Paul either, the burden of proof lying with those who would argue otherwise. However, this does not yet mean that it is an order, since an imperative is a verbal mood, next to indicative, subjunctive and optative, having several functions, as found for example in Bornemann-Risch,<sup>170</sup> De Witt,<sup>171</sup> Burton,<sup>172</sup> and Boyer.<sup>173</sup>

## V.

### PAUL'S PASTORAL ADVICE

If our conclusions are correct, the cohesive argument would then run the following course: Paul seems to understand that Psalm 4:5 provides a pastoral advice for dealing with anger that is in danger of harming the people of God: We need to deal with anger in God's presence in order to repent from all aggressive purposes against members of God's people and be filled with the peace of God. Paul suggests forgiving based on Christ's forgiveness and love in order to solve the conflicts in a meaningful and edifying way.

The lack of dealing with anger in God's presence as soon as possible and nourishing thoughts of revenge and the desire to punish the person that dared to frustrate the expectations grieves the Spirit (4:30), an *anthropopathos*, and gives room to the devil (4:27), a metaphorical way of saying to allow the devil to destroy our inner man, which he can only do by sin (cf. 1 Peter 2:11).

The Christian must not just calm down his anger and repress it, because of its destructive effects,

“A repressed feeling of anger that smolders and seeks revenge (...). The common pattern among Christians is to create resentment by denying the existence of angry feelings and pushing them down inside. This pattern inevitably leads to tension and a subtle but concrete attack on others. Anger generates much physical energy, which resentment turns against one's own body. This is energy that should be used to correct basic causes of anger.”<sup>204</sup>

Indeed, anger can be exploded or imploded.<sup>205</sup> Paul's suggestion is certainly not to repress it, but to be delivered from an immature an-

## VI.

### ANGER IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

We now need to see how Paul's teaching on anger in Ephesians 4:26 fits in the NT theology context in respect to anger. Therefore, we need to address briefly God's anger, Christ's anger, the unbeliever's anger and the believer's anger.

#### God's anger

As the OT, the NT depicts God's anger as his holy and just response to man's sin (Genesis 2:17; Exodus 34:7; Ezekiel 18:4; Romans 1:32; 2:8f.; 2 Thessalonians 1:8), first of which is his unbelief (John 3:36; Romans 2:8; Hebrews 3:11–12), particularly in the sense of refusal of God's offer of salvation (Luke 14:21). Since man is his creature, God, the sovereign and holy governor of the universe, has the inherent right to require obedience and a positive response to his revelation. In fact, "God cannot make a law, establish a penalty, and then not follow through if the law is disobeyed. When the law is violated, punishment must be meted out."<sup>209</sup>

Not only did God reveal himself through nature (Romans 1:18–21) and man's conscience, which is not infallible but able to recognize parts of God's general revelation to act upon it in a positive and obedient way (Romans 2), but also specifically through his verbal revelation beginning in the OT (Romans 4:15), in addition to the miracles, especially as signs (*semeia*/σημεία).

Jesus is the fullest and clearest revelation of God (John 1:14). However, men preferred the darkness and did not receive him (John 1:10). God's righteous reaction to this sinful behaviour is expressed by wrath, which D. H. Dood has called an anthropopathism in the 1930s. This view of "the impassibility of God, developed by early Christian apologists, such as Justin Martyr, sought to distinguish the

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The author of this book assumes Pauline authorship.
- <sup>2</sup> See for example Paul Robert, *Petit Robert* (Paris: Le Robert, 1988), 334; Gerhard Wahrig, *Wahrig* (München: Bertelsmann, 1991), 1470; Merriam-Webster, *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster Inc, 1990), 85; F. Marca, dir. *Planeta* (Madrid: Editorial Planeta, 1991), 488.
- <sup>3</sup> See Helmuth Benesch, *dtv-Atlas zur Psychologie* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1987), 229.
- <sup>4</sup> Norman Rohrer and S. Philip Sutherland, *Facing Anger* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1981), 16–17.
- <sup>5</sup> Mark P. Cosgrove, *Counseling for anger* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1988), 26–28.
- <sup>6</sup> Less frequent Hebrew synonyms that the Septuagint translates by ὀργή include חֵמָה, זַעַם, רָעַף (Edwin Hatch and Henry A. Redpath A concordance to The Septuagint, vol. II [Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck-und Verlagsanstalt, 1954], 1008).
- <sup>7</sup> Cosgrove, op.cit., 29–30.
- <sup>8</sup> The KJV New Testament Greek Lexicon, available at <http://www.biblestudytools.net/Lexicons/Greek/grk.grk.cgi?number=3709&version=kjv>, accessed 12 October 2002.
- <sup>9</sup> Friedrich, Gerhard, *TDNT*, (Stuttgart : Kohlhammer, 1990), 5:410.
- <sup>10</sup> Peter T.O'Brien, *Philemon*, WBC 44 (Waco: Word, 1982), 187.
- <sup>11</sup> F. Büchsel, “θυμός” in *TDNT* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer), 3:168.
- <sup>12</sup> “the fury of his wrath”
- <sup>13</sup> Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 64–65.
- <sup>14</sup> Wilhelm Gemoll, *Griechisch-Deutsches Schul-und Handwörterbuch* (München: Freytag, 1954), 583.
- <sup>15</sup> “do not let the sun go down on your anger”
- <sup>16</sup> See Blomberg, etc., op.cit., 117–118.
- <sup>17</sup> James Barr, “The Literal, the Allegorical, and Modern Biblical Scholarship,” *JSOT* 44 (1989): 9.

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