

EPHESIANS 4:25-32 – IN REPONSE TO THE NEW SELF

Part 2

INTRODUCTION

First, we must maintain an understanding that those addressed are expected to or are known to be mature believers. The walk of the believer is not the means to maturity. Truth and identity always precede action.

In picking up the instructions of Ephesians 4:25-32, it is vital to remember that this information is in light of the doctrinal and mental foundation.

REVIEW PUTTING ON THE NEW SELF (4:17-24)

These believers have learned, heard, been taught in Jesus Christ and truth resides in Jesus Christ.

They are charged with putting on the new self, but that is preceded by “be renewed in the spirit of your mind.” The activity of putting on the new self is not possible if the mind is not first engaged.

Just like the old self is first mental then behavioral, the new self is first mental then behavioral.

Renewing the spirit of the mind is first knowledge-based. Information must be absorbed, considered, and firmly implanted in your mind. This is not simply content but interaction with the doctrines so that it can be readily available.

Renewing the spirit of your mind is to learn, relearn, remind, perpetually think about, and interact with the truth of God’s message, the doctrines of God, and the attitude of Jesus Christ.

When we have a renewed mind, the behavior is more natural and easier to accomplish. The new self is “in the likeness of God.” The mind that has been made new and the spirit of our mind is to be renewed by means of the Word of God. It is this spirit that has been created in righteousness and “undefiled by sin” that interfaces with our mind.

The question that is perpetually asked in this section is:

If the futile mind leads to sin and sin is the reason we needed to be saved, then why return to that mindset and behavior knowing that we have been created in Him in accordance with His righteousness and truth?

EPHESIANS 4:26-27

Literal Translation – You all be angry and stop sinning, the sun is not to set upon your anger and stop granting a place for the devil.

BE ANGRY

Three words are used for *anger* in the extended text; one is a verb and two are nouns.

ὀργίζω *orgizō* is defined as to make angry, provoke to anger, irritate. The verb is in the Second Person Plural Present Passive Imperative. The imperative is unusual; this is the only time this verb is used in the imperative mood. This is also the only time Paul uses this verb. The verb outside the epistles is either used in a parable or a matter of fact, but once it is used in a warning (Matthew 5:21-22).

παροργισμός *parorgismos* – This is being provoked to wrath (Eph 6:4).

ὀργή orgē – this is the typical word for wrath. This is the root word for the other two. It is used three times and none of them is used in a good way (2:3, 4:31, 5:6).

In the Bible, the wrath of God is justified and performed in righteousness in order to demonstrate God's truth to those who are in rebellion (Romans 1:18).

Wrath is not seen as a good quality for man but is to be reserved for God alone (Romans 12:19; Colossians 3:8; James 1:19-20). Why then would we be commanded to “be angry?”

POSSIBILITIES

When we are dealing with a passage like this we deal with possible interpretations and test them to see if they fit in the context of both the particular letter and the Bible as a whole.

1. Paul is being realistic with the proclivities of man; people struggle with anger.
2. Paul desires the people to become angry about their failure in the Christian walk.
3. The verb “orgizō” is misunderstood in this context. This is a quote from Psalm 4:4.

Possibility #1

People are prone to anger, and Paul, recognizing this, uses a form of the verb to be angry that is unique. The imperative form should not be understood as “go and find something to be angry about.” Rather recognize your anger and stop sinning.

This is why the NIV and NLT ignore the imperative form: “in your anger do not sin” and “don't sin by letting anger control you.”

The imperative to “stop sinning” is vital in dealing with anger, even to the point of echoing this principle in verse 31, “let all wrath be put away from you,” and even later when fathers are told not to provoke their children to anger.

In context, the believers are being told to put off the old self and put on the new self. The old self in this context is living in anger, which is sin. Instead, we are to deal with sin and not let the sun go down upon our anger. This is a principle that I have used throughout my adult life, many times failing, but always returning to this—to not remain in anger.

In verse 27, Paul reiterates the necessity of dealing with anger by saying that letting the wrath of man remain overnight grants a place (room, quarter) to the devil.

The problem with this interpretation is that it ignores the imperative mood.

Possibility #2

In the immediate context, Paul is being very harsh with the saints in Ephesus. Challenging them to put off the old self which is being controlled by the futile mind and put on the new self which is renewed by the Word of God and controlled by the new mind in Christ can sting very sharply.

Paul wants them to become embroiled, impassioned, angry about their failures and stop sinning. Notice that there is not an object for anger. Be angry (at what?). In this command, it is self-reflective.

Believers will also see rebellion and obstinate sin in others. Perhaps Paul is instructing believers to challenge both their sin and others, being justified in anger because it is rooted in the righteousness of God. This context (25-32) is all about relating to one another, so it stands to reason if we are instructed to be angry and stop sinning, it would be an instruction of how we interact with one another.

However, one should not let this anger and frustration last longer than a moment. We do not remain in the past, in our failures, or in the failures of others. Rather we recognize failures as opportunities, and we stop being angry and move on in the love and grace of God.

Regardless of where the anger is directed (self or others), permitting it to remain grants a place for the devil; deal with the anger immediately and stop sinning.

The problem with this possibility—is the command to be angry with yourself or one another? I cannot find consistency in Scripture with this directive. The closest I can find is Hebrews 12:4. But the obviously hyperbolic language of “shedding of blood” is not the same as being angry.

Possibility #3

In my NASB 95, the first part of the verse is in all caps. The translators are indicating that this is quoting the Hebrew Scriptures. This is said to quote Psalm 4:4.

In the LXX, this is an exact match to “Be angry and stop sinning.” The use of this word in the LXX is very interesting. This verb is used 61 times and translated from 15 different Hebrew words. (picture)

Most of the time, this verb is used to be angry. But it is also translated for “rgz” which means to be agitated, quake with fear, become excited. The LXX translators chose 6 times to translate “orgidzō”

Genesis 45:24; Exodus 15:14-15; Exodus 19:27-28; Psalm 99:1-5; Proverbs 29:9

Read Psalm 4:1-8. The context of Psalm 4 is David challenging the people in seeing David and the righteousness of God in contrast to their sinful worldview.

Is that what Paul is saying to the saints at Ephesus? To understand God and the ways of God? Often, if a verse is referenced in the New Testament, the entire context of the Old Testament verse is understood.

Paul would be placing himself in the place of David and challenging them to stop relying upon what the world says about the righteousness of God and put off the old self by hearing the truth of God’s word. Meditate upon this truth and offer to God the sacrifice of righteousness and trust in the Lord.

In this understanding, the quote would be parenthetical to the rest of verses 26-27. The use of reference would be to challenge the thinking of the saints in Ephesus in the middle of instructions. This is evidenced by the phrase stop sinning. Many issues are being discussed in the instruction section of this letter, is anger the only sin? The only other time any cognate of sin is used is in Ephesians 2:1, but the verb is only used this one time in Ephesians.

The problem is that the use of various forms of wrath in this text alone indicates that Paul is introducing a theme that is consistent in many other passages. Lay aside all wrath. Also, at times Paul seems to be quoting an Old Testament passage but is not. Just because a four-word phrase is

used that matches a phrase in the LXX does not mean that Paul is quoting Scripture. On the other hand, this phrase is very recognizable, ignoring Psalm 4 would be an error.

One of the recognizable qualities that Paul uses in his letters is playing off words, wordplay. He uses alliteration, common prefixes, common suffixes, etc. It is possible that Paul uses the reference to Psalm 4 and then borrows a cognate of “oridzō” to talk about wrath after using it in the Psalm 4 understanding.

CONCLUSION

The possibilities in Ephesians 4:26 are amazing to ponder. Oh, the riches and depth of your truth, O Lord, we can learn the basics quickly and for a lifetime ponder your Word.

The debate of the meaning of “be angry and stop sinning” is not settled in my mind. All three possibilities are viable, each with its evidence and holes. I cannot settle on one and my leanings go back and forth.

If we put aside the debate, there is one consistency between all possibilities that is validated in many other sections of Scripture. The anger of man does not lead to the righteousness of God. Anger, wrath, frustration is a problem and cannot be allowed to linger in the mind. It gives the devil a place in your life and only leads to destruction.

How do we get past the problem of anger?

1. Understand the grace of God
2. Replace anger with grace