

“In your anger do not sin”^[a]: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry,”
Ephesians 4:26 NIV

A popular “catch phrase” today is the phrase “Anger Management”. It can apply to those folks to whom “anger” is their most frequently used emotion. If we know someone like that we either avoid them, or make sure we don’t get them started on what ever sets them off.

But on the other hand, anger is a valid emotion. Jesus showed anger when he overturned the tables of the money changers in the temple. So the question is how can we acknowledge the validity of anger, and not turn it in to a destructive force?

Perhaps one way is to follow Paul’s advice in Ephesians. First of all acknowledge it. We might say the “sin” in anger comes on how we deal with it, because it affects our relationship to God and neighbor.

We teach as Lutherans that we are not perfect people, “sinners in the best life” as Luther would say, so really the phrase “anger happens” would be appropriate. It’s always interesting when you can tell if someone is angry and ask “are you angry?” they will deny it, but their body language says something quite the opposite. Then when we get angry, we feel that it is not “Christian” to do so, so we deny it. Denial can add fuel to the fire and set the stage for a “blow up” later on that is not pretty. Worse yet, not dealing with it right away might cause us later on to be angry about an issue not related to the original “root” cause.

Secondly Paul tells his flock, “Don’t let the sun go down while you are angry”. Holding on to a long term angry grudge can not only hurt another person, but it can leave us with long term sadness and guilt that can’t easily be taken care of. I know the true story of a daughter (in a different community where I lived) who was completely distraught at her mother’s funeral. Her mom died relatively young (in her early fifties) of pneumonia. Her death was not expected. However the last contact the daughter had with her mom a few days earlier was on the phone and she got into a huge argument with her and ended the call with angry words. If only she had resolved it then, but it was not to be.

None of this is really easy. It is easier to get angry, use it as a “junk food” emotion (junk food in that it might taste good but have little long term value), than to understand why we are angry. It is easier to hold on to anger than let it go. Sometimes when we see the results of our anger we sadly regret it on the long run.

May our relationship to God by faith in Jesus Christ always keep us aware of our own imperfections, and as one person once commented “there but for the grace of God go I.” Then if anger gets the better of us, get to the root of it resolve it quickly for the only guarantee in life is the present, the future is in God’s hands.

May God by the leading of the Spirit help us to do it.