

Ephesians 4:31

Today's passage is somewhat of an expansion on some of the same ideas that were presented previously. Particularly in view here is the opposite of righteous indignation. Whereas Paul commends holy anger (v. 26), he very quickly admonishes the church to avoid sin. Today's passage describes the form that our anger might take.

1. Internal sin

- a. The first sin to avoid is "bitterness"
- b. Bitter people are easy to spot and hard to be around!
- c. Bitterness comes from an intense conviction that we have been mistreated or wronged
 - i. It is easy to become bitter, in part, because many bitter people are not wrong in their assessment of harm!
 - ii. Nevertheless, the admonition to avoid bitterness is not rooted in some utopian ideal
- d. A Christian can avoid bitterness by dwelling on these two points:
 - i. First, we are not only victims, we are also perpetrators!
 - 1. Every single one of us has harmed others
 - 2. This means that the very thing that draws our ire when others are guilty is present in us
 - ii. Second, we serve a Sovereign and Just God
 - 1. Some folks struggle because they are afraid that the people who caused their pain will get away with it
 - 2. This kind of thinking totally ignores the reality of a just and omniscient Judge!
- e. Christians avoid bitterness by contemplating the gravity of their own sin, thereby growing in humility AND trusting God to deal with the offenses of others

2. External sins

- a. The order is instructive... those who are bitter are likely to exhibit the behaviors that follow
- b. Wrath, anger and malice
 - i. I spent some time trying to discern the difference between wrath and anger as they are listed
 - ii. Frankly, I'm not sure there is all that much of a distinction as the terms seem to be synonymous
 - iii. This suggests to me that the repetition is intended to communicate the emphasis Paul desires to place on this command

- iv. It is totally unbecoming of a Christian to be characterized by wrath
- v. Whereas there are select moments where righteous anger is appropriate, we must understand that those moments are just that... moments
 - 1. We all know the difference between someone who can get angry when the occasion requires it and someone who LIVES in an angry condition all the time
 - 2. Those who are slow to anger are much different than those who rush to anger at any inconvenience or sign of trouble
- vi. Malice is like the offspring of wrath and anger
 - 1. It is defined as evil and vengefulness
 - 2. You could consider malice the result of harbored anger as it denotes the person who has contemplated and fixated on how to exact a pound of flesh
 - 3. We call people malicious when they are obviously hell-bent (pun intended) on harming someone
- c. Clamor and slander
 - i. This term “clamor” is interesting...
 - ii. It is used 6 times in the New Testament
 - 1. Sometimes, it simply denotes someone who is crying out (Matthew 25:6)
 - 2. In context, it means to shout or verbally brawl
 - iii. We live in a world of “verbal brawling” don’t we?
 - 1. Social media seems like one giant tussle
 - 2. “News” outlets host shows where one side yells at the other
 - 3. Whereas we should be bold in our proclamation and uncompromising in our declaration of truth, there is simply no reason to continually yell at those who disagree
 - 4. We should constantly share the truth but be very reticent to get into back and forths (that inevitably wander from the topic at hand) in order to score proverbial points
 - 5. Jesus warned us against casting pearls before swine (Matthew 7:6)
 - 6. I would argue that this is much of what happens in social media debates, long-standing personal disagreements and the like

7. People need to hear the truth, you should proclaim it but you should not be quick to jump into verbal wrestling matches with those who have demonstrated a lack of interest in the truth
8. The Spirit must convict, let Him do His job and remain on the topic of truth

iv. Slander

1. Slander is the overflow of malice
2. In fact, one definition of slander is “malicious” talk
3. Slander is the untrue degradation of another
 - a. We slander someone when we spread rumors and innuendos that are either exaggerated or outright false!
 - b. This is a chief weapon of our society
 - i. Cancel culture is much maligned today in speech but very much alive and well in practice
 - ii. We have learned that the quickest way to prevail in an argument is to slander the other side
4. This ought not be so with Christians
 - a. We are beholden to the truth and we are commanded to validate what we say before we say it
 - b. Furthermore, we must ask whether our revelation helps the people in the situation and whether it leads to the glory of God