

Exercise and Addition, February 28, 1712.

ANGER NOT TO BE SINFULLY INDULGED.

SERMON XXXIII.

EPHESIANS iv. 26, 27,

*Be angry, and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath;
neither give place to the devil*

THE apostle is now on some particulars of the old man that is to be put off, and of the new man which is to be put on. In the former verse he deborts them lying, and exhorts to the speaking of truth. In the text, he lays before us our duty with respect to anger. We may take up the words in three parts: 1. We have the passion kept within its due bounds. Commended say some: allowed or permitted rather, say others. "Be angry." 2. The inordinate passion simply condemned in its beginnings, as well as in its progress, "sin not;" namely, in your passion. It is condemned particularly in its progress and continuance. "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." 3. The reason why the inordinate passion is condemned: it is a giving place to the devil.

The first thing laid before us in the text is, anger kept within its due bounds: "Be angry, and sin not." Some will have these words token out of Psal. iv. 4, which we render, "stand in awe." The Hebrew word, some translate simply, *be moved*. It signifies to be moved, either with anger or fear. The septuagint reads it, *be angry*, &c. Thus our English *rage*, answers it both in sound and sense; and accordingly our translators render the same word *rage*, Prov. xxix. 9; Dan. iii. 13. Yet, on the other hand, it cannot be denied, but it signifies also to be moved with fear, Isa. xxxii. 11, "be troubled," &c.; Deut. xxviii. 63, "a trembling heart." But if you consider the scope of both places, they seem to be very different. The Psalmist proposeth that, "stand in awe," or "be moved," as a check to his enemies sinning in persecuting the godly man, whom God has set apart for himself. The apostle proposeth his "sin not," as a check on the passion of anger in ourselves, that it go not out of order. Therefore, I suppose, that if the apostle has any eye in this, to that of the Psalmist, it is not by way of citation, but at most an allusion.

I see little reason why these words should be taken rather as a concession or permission, than a command. It is nowise like that,

Gen. ii. 16. It is not left to our option, whether to be angry or not, when there is a just cause. Coldness in God's matters, is hateful stupidity. The passions in the soul, are as winds in the air. If the winds blow not at all, or too calmly, they leave the ship at a great disadvantage; though it is sad when they blow so violent as to dash her upon the rocks. And what though anger in itself is neither good nor evil? The same may be said of love and other passions which are not in themselves evil, as envy is; yet doubtless it is a command, "Love as brethren." The apostle here, is directing us in practice, not what to think of anger in the abstract; which is never found in a subject, but vested with its due circumstances, and then it is either holy, good and just; or else it is irregular and impious. Thus the meaning must be, be holily angry, but not sinfully.

As for what is merely natural in anger, depending upon the body only, we leave it to philosophers to explain it. As for what concerns the soul and conscience in it, I take anger to be a commotion of the spirit, with hatred of, and grief for an injury, and desire of revenge; or to express it more softly, a desire of the vindication of the injured party. Every one may consult his own breast, and find it so. I shall consider this as in holy anger. And there is in it,

1. A commotion of the spirit, which ariseth from the apprehension of a real injury; for if it be only imaginary it is sinful. This is necessary to stir up a man's desire to see the wrong rectified. All commotion of a man's spirit is not sinful. Whoever feels this holy anger in him, will find it answers the name, an anger, vexation, or trouble of spirit. As Lot, whose soul in his anger against the sins of the Sodomites, "was vexed with their filthy conversation." So did Paul encounter the stoics at Athens, not with stupid apathy, but "a spirit stirred in him," Acts xvii. 16. Cast into a holy paroxysm, as the word signifies. Yea, our Lord himself, vented this in his angry looks: "He looked round about him with *anger*, being *grieved* for the hardness of their hearts," Mark iii. 5. Nay, behold the holy height of it in the Holy One, when he said to them that sold doves in the temple, "Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise." It was good Eli's want of this zeal, which was the ruin, first of his sons, and then of himself, 1 Sam. iii. 13. He restrained them not, (Hebrew). Did not thraw his brows, or gloom upon them. Old age, it is like, had wrinkled them; but he had not as much zeal as to wrinkle them in holy anger against sin, and so he restrained them not.

2. There is hatred in it, not at the persons but at their sins,

whether they be our own sins or others. In this respect it is called *indignation*, 2 Cor. vii. 11. This is most desirable, when it is kept purely on this object. That is not the part where we are in hazard of excess, seeing we are commanded to abhor that which is evil, as we would do hell itself.

3. There is grief in it, Mark iii. 5. This naturally follows on hatred of the thing, which likewise ariseth from a just apprehension of the evil of it in a gracious soul. And from both ariseth,

4. A desire of the vindication of the right and honour of the party injured. This is that which the word *ὀργιζέσθαι*, used in the text, most properly points at, being derived from *ὀργή*, which they say is from *ὀρεγομαι*. to desire. The vindication of the right and honour of the party injured, is that which naturally occurs as the object of this desire in anger. Now where that cannot be done but by punishment or revenge, there is an holy anger, an appetite after revenge, which in its due circumstances is a good thing, being an execution of justice, Rom. xii. 19. But seeing God has not appointed all to be ministers of justice, holy anger will not carry the man without his sphere, and therefore it is still but an appetite of revenge by the hand that has right, and power to inflict it, and not of that carnal revenge which may satisfy an exorbitant passion, but that which is in a way of justice necessary to vindicate the right and honour of the injured. But where the party angry has power to revenge all disobedience, this holy anger sets him on the work; as it was with Moses, Exod. xxxii. 19—29, and Phinehas slaying Zimri and Cosbi, and Jesus driving the buyers and sellers out of the temple. But seeing there are not a few cases in which holy anger is very necessary, and yet the humiliation of the party, or confession of the fault may salve the honour of the injured, and a soft answer may turn away wrath; in holy anger that desire will not proceed farther, and therefore I called it, in the general, only a desire of the vindication of the right and honour of the injured, and not simply a desire of revenge.

This we may describe holy anger to be a commotion of the spirit, arising from the apprehension of a real sinful evil, with hatred of it, grief for it, and a regular desire of the vindication of the right and honour of the injured, for the destruction of sin. Thus much for holy anger. I proceed to the

Second thing, which is sinful anger condemned. And,

I. We are to consider it in its rise, and the passion transgressing due bounds, which makes it sinful, however short, while it lasts.

Sin not, says the apostle. There is no door opened for sin in any case, but the particular here aimed at, is that we sin not in our

anger; that a fire from hell rise not in our breasts, instead of a fire from heaven. We must not suppose that these words import a power in man, by any grace given in this life, to order his anger in any case, so as to be sinless in the eye of the law. The most pure fire that ever burnt in the heart of any man but the man Christ, wanted not its smoke. But though the law of God is not the measure of our strength, yet it is the rule of our duty, and whatsoever in any case goes beyond the bounds of it is sin. It aims not at the extirpation of the passion of anger out of our hearts, but says unto it hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther, and here shall thy proud waves be staid. But if the passion break over the bars, and be as the letting out of waters, be in whom it will, the text shews them their transgression that they have exceeded; even meek Moses in his holy anger, breaks the tables. Though the defects in holy anger may be here condemned, yet sinful anger seems to be that which the apostle calls *παροργισμος*, and we render wrath, whereby he shews what he meant by his saying, sin not. He says not, let not the sun go down *επι τη οργη*, on your anger, but *επι τη παροργισμω*, upon your wrath; your unjust and sinful anger, which exceeds the due bounds of anger, as the preposition in the word imports. Now for clearing of what this sinful anger is, we must consider the due boundary of holy and just anger, and what is beyond these is sinful.

1. The grounds of holy anger are just and weighty, such as God's dishonour by our own sins, and the sins of others 2 Cor. vii. 11, Exod. xxii. 9. It must then be sinful anger, when it is without a just ground. "Whosoever," says our Lord, "is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment." Without a cause, *εικη*, that is rashly, without any cause at all, or vainly, upon a light or trival cause, which is indeed no just cause of anger. But the judgment is weak and yielding, and gives way to the passions: in both senses we are said to take God's name in vain.

2. The degree of holy anger is proportioned to the fault.. Thus God himself is angry at all sins, yet there are some sins to which he reserves the fierceness of wrath. When the anger then in respect of degrees, exceeds the measure of the offence, and men are carried so far beside themselves, as to turn about the cart wheel on the cummin that might be beat out with the rod, then it is sinful anger; and therefore good Jacob, when a-dying, curses the wrath of the brethren of iniquity, against the Shechemites because it was cruel, destroying a whole city for one's fault. Such was David's anger against Nabal, 1 Sam. xxv., to execute, which, though he had vowed himself by vow, yet when he comes to himself he breaks, and blesses God for preventing him.

3. The end of holy anger which it is directed, is the glory of God and the good of our neighbour, Prov. xiii. 24; John ii. 16, 17. Sinful then it must be, when it is a fire lighting on others, to make them sacrifices to cursed self, to satisfy the desires of a proud (Hebrew, a wide heart, Prov. xxvii. 25.) which will never think it gets enough from others. "Proud and haughty scorner is his name, who dealeth in proud wrath."

4. The effects of holy anger directly and indirectly, are just and good, for the man has rule over his own spirit, and no holy affection is inconsistent with another. It fits him for his duty to God and men, as may be seen in the case of Moses praying for the people, Exod. xxxii. The anger then must be sinful when its effects are hellish, as when it breaks out in clamour and evil speaking, Eph iv. 31. Even meek Moses fell into a fit of this sinful anger, "Because they provoked his spirit, so that he spoke unadvisedly with his lips." The anger is sinful also, when it leaves a man no more master of himself, and unfits him for duty, 1 Tim. ii. 8.

Hence it appears there is a twofold sinful anger: 1. There is an anger, which is originally, and in itself sinful; that, where there is no just ground at all to be angry, to which men's weakness of judgment and strength of passion often expose them. Such was Jonah's anger, at the withering of the gourd. This anger is like a river which hath quite left its proper channel, and so cannot but be very pernicious. 2. There is an anger accidentally sinful, where there is indeed just ground to be angry, but by reason of the corruption of men, is carried beyond the proper bounds. As a river which indeed still covers the ordinary channel, but so swells as to overflow all its banks. Such was David's anger against Nabal, 1 Sam. xxv. 21, 22. Each of these is a *προοργισμος*, a sinful anger, of which we must beware. But what if it arise in us, as it may in the best? Why then the flame must be quickly quenched, which is the second thing to be considered anent sinful anger. The progress and continuance of it is condemned. Let not the sun go down upon your wrath. There seems to be some emphasis in that your wrath; it points at the wrath of man, that worketh not the righteousness of God. It is that wrath of which Satan is father, and our own corrupt heart the mother. A hellish offspring that should be stifled in the birth, or be taken as soon as possible and dashed against the stones, and not be allowed to live till the sun go down. It is strange fire not brought from the altar, but from the common hearth of a proud corrupt heart, and must be quenched speedily. Let not the sun go down upon your wrath; which is not to be understood as if it might lawfully be kept up till the sun go

down for what is sinful in its rise, must still be more so in its continuance. But it is a proverbial speech, the import of which we may take up in these two things: 1. As the sun with his scorching heat hasteth to go down, so should we, whose passion sooner by far comes to its height than the sun, make haste to lay it aside. 2. As the sun going down brings on the night, which calls men to set themselves to the putting off their clothes, and going to rest; so should we set ourselves to put off the old man, and by all means to put off anger with our clothes, that we take it not into the bed with us, where it is most dangerous. For, whereas as the light affords variety of objects to us, and so is a friend to the diverting of wrath, the darkness of the night keeps these out of our sight, and so leaves the very spirit to feed on that chiefly which first raised it, and so it gets leave to range through the several methods of revenge; and so it is said of the wicked "that he deviseth mischief upon his bed." This I take to be the main thing aimed at in the expression.

Lastly, We shall consider the reason. "Neither give place to the devil." That is, and give not place to the devil. It is a general precept, but is here particularly aimed at, the matter of sinful anger. Some read it, to the calumniator; thereby understanding the occasion given to the wicked to reproach piety, because of the sinful passions of professors, and the effects thereof. This is a sad truth indeed, but we take it rather as our translation reads it, to the devil; who must needs have a particular love to sinful anger: it is so like hell, wherein men are on fire with a scorching heat, but in gross darkness. It refers, 1. To the rise of sinful anger. To give place to it, is to admit the devil. He will strive to have place, and so tempt us to it; but our yielding to the temptation is to give him place. 2. It refers to the progress and continuance of it. The more it is harboured, the devil is the farther admitted. He loves to fish in muddy water. When he has got the fire kindled, he employs his bellows to blow it up, and always to make the flame greater and greater, to the destruction of ourselves and others.

DOCTRINE I. Men not only may, but ought to be angry where there is just ground for it. We know no just ground for anger, but the things which are sinful. As for the injuries done to us, or our fellow creatures, they are not real injuries, if they be not sins against the Lord; for no man can break in upon the second table, but he must break through the first.

REASONS. 1. Because in that case, the love and respect which we owe to God, who is dishonoured, require it.

2. The love which we owe to ourselves or others who are injured, requires it. For in that case, it is as it were said, who is on the Lord's side, and on the side of souls that are in hazard.

Use I. Let us then be filled with holy indignation against ourselves, because of the sins of our nature, hearts, lips, and lives.

2. At the dishonour done to God by others. Alas! we are very quickly set in a flame, if but a word seem to reflect on us; but how cold are we in matters that dishonour God. O! that we could spend these arrows, firebrands, and darts, of which we are otherwise liberal enough on our own and others sins.

DOCTRINE II. Men should beware that the fire of sinful anger kindle not in their breasts.

REASONS. 1. Because it is evil in itself, and dishonourable to God; being the vomit of a proud heart and an unmeekened spirit.

2. Because it is not only evil, but a mother of evil; and is not only an inlet to many mischiefs to ourselves and others, but drives men to them to act with vigour. An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression.

USE. Guard against sinful anger; against being angry without just cause. Let judgment always lead the way to your passion. He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding; but he that is hasty of spirit, exalteth folly. Exalts, hangs up a sign of folly at his own door, that every one may know that a fool dwells within. Again, when you are angry on good grounds, be on your guard lest your anger degenerate into a sinful passion. We may be easily carried too far, and when the furnace of the heart is hot, if we take not heed, it may soon come to that to scorch and burn up ourselves and others too, instead of consuming their, or our own evils. Self is most ready to creep in, and jumble out all respect to the honour of God, and have sad effects. Even in anger upon a just cause, we are like man standing on the edge of a steep rock, the ground is firm, but the head is ready to grow giddy, and he to fall headlong.

Consider the evil of sinful anger. 1. It is a degree of murder. "Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment." It is a sword that stabs two at once, the angry man and the party against whom he is angry. 2. It is a fit of madness, in which a man hath no rule over his own spirit, till he come to himself, for he goes out of himself in anger. 3. It makes a man most unlike Christ, who was meek and lowly. 4. It has most bitter effects. It mars our access to God in prayer; makes us most unmeet for divine communications, as the troubled water cannot receive the image of the sun. It exposes us to Satan, as a city that is

broken down and without walls, to the enemy ; and makes men intolerable to others, if they be not all the more masters of patience.

DOCTRINE III. If sinful anger do enter our breasts, we must endeavour to extinguish it quickly, and beware of nourishing it.

It reproves those, who when once that devil is raised in them, can hardly be got laid again ; men of an implacable temper, whose anger is like fire in iron or other solid matter, long ere it be laid aside. If once it get unto them, it must go to bed and rise with them too. Yea, many who will not only let the sun go down on their wrath, but keep it up weeks, months, and years. Once do them an injury, they will never forget nor forgive. Be not then hasty in thy spirit to be angry, for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.

Let us learn then, to quench this spark quickly, when it falls on us. This may be enforced from

DOCTRINE IV. That the admitting and lodging of sinful anger in our hearts, is a giving place to the devil. For remedies,

1. Let us consider our own vileness and unworthiness, and how often we are provoking the Lord, and so turn our anger against ourselves. "For we ourselves also, were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived ; serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy ; hateful, and hating one another.

2. Let us consider these things with which we are so ready to be hurried away, are the trials of our patience, and we are on our trial for heaven.

3. Let us propose to ourselves the example of the meek and lowly Jesus. "He suffered, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps."

Lastly, Out of a sense of our utter inability to resist the least temptation, look to Jesus for strength, and by faith draw strength from him. When the temptation is like to catch us, let us lay hold of the promise, and of Christ in the promise. Without this, nothing will avail, acceptably to prevent or suppress it ; and this is the reason, why sometimes Christians bear great affronts and injuries better than small ones. For in the latter, they trust to themselves ; in the former to Christ. No wonder all goes to wreck, when men instead of the golden shield of faith made by the true Solomon, they like fools think to do with the brazen ones of their own stock. Amen.