

We're talking about why unity matters. Why it's important and the things that seek to destroy unity. Here's a story about the power of unity and a sense of belonging.

"It's a horrible life. You don't eat. You don't sleep. Any money you can get goes on crack," says Felipa Drumont.

Drumont is 26, trans[gendered], homeless and addicted to crack. For the last four years, she has lived on the streets of an area of central São Paulo that has become infamous: Cracolândia, literally "Crackland".

For Drumont, despite her two months of sobriety, the allure of Crackland remains strong. She abandoned her apartment after taking up crack, and like many addicts, most of whom have little contact with their families, she says Crackland's main appeal is its community feel, however dysfunctional.

"We are like a family of the excluded," she says.¹

On the one hand, she claims living in Cracolândia is absolutely horrible: you don't eat, you don't sleep. But that horrible life of a crack addict still tempts her to return to it because of the family atmosphere. She'd rather live there and be accepted by others than live alone and free from addiction.

Obviously, this is a very dysfunctional "family" if you can even call it that but it illustrates the human need for a place of belonging. A local church like ours can never fulfill the full sense of belonging that we all seek. A local church is not intended to meet all of your relational needs but it can be a powerful place of belonging and wonderful Christian unity—unless you have one of these five unity killers in your midst.

²⁵ Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. ²⁶ Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on

your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil.²⁸ Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. ²⁹ Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Two weeks ago we spent our time on putting away falsehood and speaking the truth. Remember, most of these prohibitions have a corresponding positive solution. Let's keep working through the list, but first, let me bring us back to the first reason why unity matters. Remember, there are five prohibitions and four reasons why unity matters.

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. We are to put off falsehood and speak the truth—because we are members one of another. That's the first reason we are given that unity matters. We are members one of another. We are blood-bought members of Christ's family. Each of us have been brought out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of his beloved Son. Therefore, why would we lie to one another? Why would we do things that destroy unity? By the way, I believe that this reason for unity goes along with all five of the prohibitions. We are members of one another, therefore why would we lie to on another? Why would we be sinfully angry with one another? Why would we steal from one another?

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility (2:14)

Who has made us both one
Doctrine CHAPTERS 1-3

SEE who you are IN CHRIST

Put away all falsehood and speak the truth
Application CHAPTERS 4-6

BE who you are IN CHRIST

Please remember as well that these prohibitions are all gospel motivated. That's the overall teaching of Ephesians and of all Christian behavior. We put away falsehood because the gospel has made us one. The spiritual reality of our oneness in Christ ought to be demonstrated by the actual experience of our oneness in Christ.

2. ²⁶ Be **angry** and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil.

<i>Put off the old self</i>	<i>Put on the new self</i>
All falsehood	Speak the truth with one another
Sinful anger	

This verse has been debated a lot over the centuries. Be angry and do not sin. I have seen people rationalize their sinful anger by claiming this verse. Everyone thinks that their anger is righteous anger. The ESV translation is, might I say, a bit more bold than some other translations.

ESV—Be angry and do not sin
 NIV—In your anger do not sin

The ESV almost sounds like a command—be angry! But when you get angry, don't sin. This gets real sticky real fast. It's an unusual verse because our anger is almost always sinful in nature. And it's also unusual because you don't have anything else on this list of prohibitions being qualified in the same way. Paul did not say, lie and do not sin; or steal and do not sin; or be bitter and wrathful and do not sin. So then why does he say be angry and do not sin? The obvious answer is because lying, stealing and bitterness are inherently sinful but anger is not. I think it's safe to say that most often our anger is immediately sinful. Most angry responses are like a light switch. One moment you're not angry and the next moment you're blowing your stack. That kind of anger is probably sinful from the moment it appears. However, Paul is allowing for the possibility that some emotions of anger are not inherently sinful, or at least they don't start out as sinful.

But how do we reconcile this with passage such as James 1:19-20? "let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God." Anger does not produce righteousness. Anger almost always produces just the opposite in fact. But I don't think there is a contradiction here. Paul is allowing for some anger that is not sinful and James is saying that anger does lead to true righteousness. Both can be true at the same time.

There is a category for so-called righteous indignation. If you heard about Kate Steinle's killer being found not guilty² you might be angry about that. Anytime there is an absence of justice, it is normal to be angry about that. Very careful, measured anger can be constructive and can lead to change. When justice is ignored, something should be done about it. We can allow for the category of righteous anger but we must be so very careful with it. It's kind of like asking if you'd rather have a trained surgeon remove your appendix or a meat cutter? Both have skills with a knife but one uses a small scalpel and the other a large butcher knife. If we ever attempt to justify our anger as righteous anger, then we'd better be applying it with the skill of a surgeon who only cuts exactly where he or she needs to cut. Imagine a meat cutter instead of a surgeon removing your appendix. That's what most anger looks like.

This famous verse of Paul's is actually taken directly from Psalm 4.

Be angry, and do not sin;
ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.

Even the second half of the verse in psalms is similar to what Paul wrote. Do not let the sun go down on your anger. Or to use the Psalmist's language, "ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent." If you ponder on your beds you will not let the sun go down on your anger. Do you see how that works? If your anger still lingers while you are in your bed—before the sun goes down—ponder that and work it out. Work it out before you go to sleep. By the way, that's how we know if our anger is righteous anger or sinful anger. If our anger lasts beyond the end of the day, then it is most likely sinful anger.

If you go to bed angry, what's going to happen in the morning? You're going to wake up angry, aren't you? Depending on what caused your anger, it may lessen a bit or sometimes we wake up

even more angry than before we went to sleep. And that's how bitterness works. What happens in the Spring when you plant a seed and go to bed? If the conditions are right, it will begin to germinate. It will take root. It will grow—slowly yes—but it starts to take root and grow. We'll talk more about this in a bit as it comes up later in this passage.

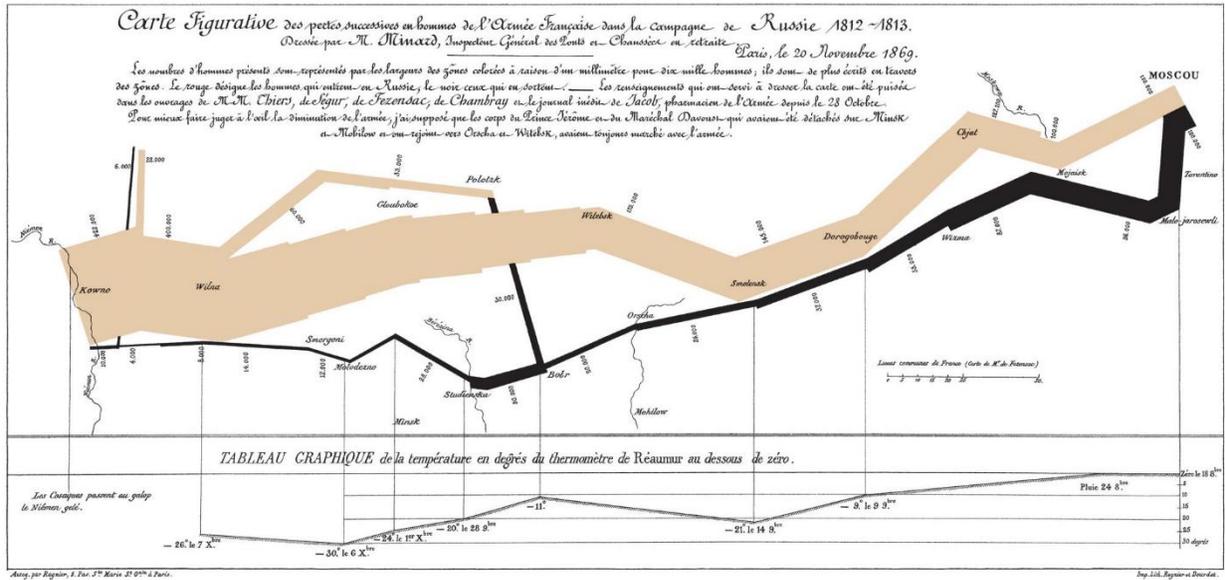
There are other passages that speak of the wisdom of not letting the sun set on certain behaviors. *You shall give him his wages on the same day, before the sun sets (for he is poor and counts on it), lest he cry against you to the Lord, and you be guilty of sin* (Deuteronomy 24:15). I think this is helpful because it makes an important point about the passage of time. We get paid every two weeks but in ancient times and in some poorer cultures still today, if you put in a day's work you got paid the same day. These were day laborers who always got paid at the end of a work day for two reasons. One, there may not be work for them the next day. They were only hired for that day. Second, if they did not get paid, they and their families would most likely go hungry that day. If you did not pay them immediately after the work was completed, that could be forgiven. Perhaps there were circumstances that delayed immediate payment. But if the sun set before you paid the workers, this meant that you were planning to defraud them. So a slight delay in settling accounts was fine but a long delay was sinful.

The same applies to our anger. We might like to think that our anger is justified. We might like to imagine that our anger is righteous anger. Maybe other people have anger issues but when we get angry, it's usually righteous anger. But here's the standard—do not let the sun go down on your anger. If you're still raging with anger when you go to sleep, then it is not righteous anger that you are feeling. It is something else.

This prohibition has a larger purpose attached to it, what I am calling one of our four reasons for why unity matters. Verse 27—*and give no opportunity to the devil*. Why would you hand your enemy a weapon? Jesus said that the devil “comes only to steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10). Our anger helps him to steal, kill and destroy. We are at war with the devil. This is why in chapter six we will take a close look at the armor of God. We are at war and we need to act like it.

This is one of the most amazing infographics I have ever seen. This represents Napoleon's Russian Campaign in 1812-1813. The tan line shows the outgoing army. He began with 442,000 soldiers. It was the largest European army ever assembled in history. Even as they progress toward Moscow you can see that the number of troops were declining. By the time he returned to France only 10,000 soldiers remained. He lost 98% of his troops on the battlefield because the enemy always had an advantage. Napoleon gave every possible opportunity to his enemy and they were devastated.

This is the advantage that our anger gives to the greatest enemy in the universe. Other than God, there is no power greater than the devil and often multiple times per day we hand him a serious strategic advantage through our anger. It's like handing North Korea the launch codes for our nuclear arsenal. It just doesn't make any sense.



The devil is our enemy and he wants to take advantage of our anger but the devil did not make you angry. This is a notion that we need to dispel in the Christian life. Where does our anger come from? The first chapter of James is quite clear about this question.

13 When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death (James 1:13-15).

Those who know me best know my expertise with a fishing rod—or should I say, my lack of expertise. This photo shows the best fishing day of my life, which also makes it Ethan’s best day ever, thanks to Robert Storbakken who took us to a secret fishing hole. I’ll tell what we did not use to catch fish on that glorious day. It was a great day because even though I don’t like to fish, I do like to catch fish. We did not tie a tin can to the end of our line. We did not use a piece of broken glass on the line. And surprisingly, we did not use a bottle of ibuprofen to catch fish. Why? Because fish are not attracted to tin cans, broken glass and over the counter medication. They have no internal desire for such things. But when you stick a juicy worm on your hook and throw the line in a secret fishing hole, they literally jump onto your stringer. They are drawn away and enticed by worms but not by tin cans. No matter what I do, I don’t have to make them be enticed by worms but



no matter what I do, I will never make them enticed by tin cans. It's just not in them to be enticed by such things.

In the same way, when we get angry, we are drawn away and enticed to sin because that sin is already inside of us just waiting for an opportunity to rear its ugly head. That's why no one can make you angry. People and circumstances can entice to be angry—what Dave Hart calls a trigger—but they cannot make you angry. You are drawn away and enticed toward anger like a fish jumping after a juicy worm. People can't make you angry and the devil cannot make you angry but he can use your anger for own his evil purposes.

So why are we enticed to anger so easily? The answer lies at the end of this chapter.

³¹ *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.* ³² *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

<i>Put off the old self</i>	<i>Put on the new self</i>
All falsehood	Speak the truth with one another
Sinful anger	
Stealing	Honest labor to share with anyone in need
Corrupting talk	Words that build up to give grace
Bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, malice	Kind, tender hearted, forgiving

Anger is listed twice in this short passage? Why? Because when you let the sun go down on your anger, what starts to grow is bitterness, wrath, slander and malice. This is yet another reason why the vast majority of our anger is not righteous anger. Hebrews 12 says, “Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled...”

These deeper roots also explains why we are so easily enticed to anger. These roots which lie beneath the surface of our hearts are often unseen. We develop a “taste” for anger because it has been cultivated within us. If it wasn't within us it would never come out of us.

Here are some steps for working through your anger.

1. Admit your anger. Even if you feel like it's not that big of a problem, just admit that it is within you. I don't think anyone is free from its grasp at times
2. Don't make excuses for your anger. No one made you angry. That anger was lying within you waiting to rear up when the right people or circumstances enticed you to anger.
3. Realize the advantage you are yielding to the devil. It's a vicious circle. You are enticed to anger from within your own heart. But each expression of anger hands your enemy a strategic advantage. First you are tempted, then you are enticed and finally you become

trapped. Your power over the sin weakens over time and must be broken through honest and thorough confession.

4. The moment anger rears up:
 - Admit it immediately. See it. Call it what it is.
 - Apologize immediately to everyone involved. Thorough confessions will start to break the power over you.
 - Ask God to reveal why you got angry right then. You have a certain appetite for anger. There is a reason you are enticed to anger but you may not know the reason. It is probably not just one thing but rather a tangled mess of reasons.

Every single day more celebrities and politicians are implicated in past sexual sins. We are watching an unprecedented revealing of evil junk that seems to show no signs of slowing down. There is a lot of hypocrisy and double standards which is to be expected but in general, I think this is a positive movement. I think we have all been surprised at how many women have hidden their trauma for years. That's the nature of traumatic events. They can lie there unnoticed but growing like a cancer. And the trauma may have been quite small. Someone may have caused you some hurt but if you don't deal with it appropriately, it will grow into something much larger. You will—sometimes unknowingly—water it, care for it and help it grow.

The most powerful step of all is forgiveness: *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.* This will be our focus next week.

Rich Maurer
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¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/nov/27/inside-crackland-open-air-crack-market-sao-paulo>

² <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2017/11/30/kate-steinle-s-accused-killer-found-not-guilty-murder.html>