

Suppressing Anger in Early Christianity: Examples from the Pauline Tradition

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COMMANDS CONCERNING HUMAN EMOTIONS in ancient Greek literature—for example, covetousness, anger, jealousy, and love—merit study in their ancient contexts, as well as in relation to theoretical approaches to the social sciences. This article has two main parts: a correction of William V. Harris's analysis of anger in the New Testament letters attributed to the apostle Paul, and an interaction with classic theories of the psychology of anger. The article brings competing theories of the psychology of anger to bear on the Pauline passages examined.

One question to be addressed is whether the suppression of anger is a necessary component in the theology or anthropology of Paul or any of the deutero-Pauline authors. If suppressing anger is indeed concomitant with fidelity to one or more expressions of Pauline Christianity, scholars can consider the potentially deleterious effects of such suppression on the human psyche. Alternately, perhaps Paul or the authors of Colossians, Ephesians, and/or First Timothy assume that the repression of anger is necessary for the existence of the Christian community, or that only God as "Father" is allowed to become angry. One might instead find in these letters commands against infantile or narcissistic rage. Furthermore, it can be asked whether anger is to be sublimated for the sake of a greater good—for example, human charity, the peace of the congregation, or escaping the judgment and wrath of God. This article will consider which, if any, of these theories of anger correspond(s) to the assorted passages in the letters attributed to Paul.

A brief word concerning the authorship of the undisputed and disputed Pauline letters will offer a framework for the

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analysis to follow. Among the thirteen NT letters attributed to Paul, I follow the longstanding scholarly consensus that his authorship of seven of them is undisputed and that he did not write Ephesians or the Pastoral Epistles.¹ Although some reputable scholars will argue for the authenticity of Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, or both, I do not count myself among them. Furthermore, the author of Ephesians reworked numerous materials from Colossians, apparently because s/he regarded Colossians as an authentic Pauline letter; this allows for assessing the development of statements concerning anger in the two (different) deutero-Pauline authors of Colossians and Ephesians.² Also in accordance with scholarly consensus, I assume for First Timothy yet another deutero-Pauline author, who is to be differentiated from the authors of Colossians and Ephesians. Accordingly, I analyze here, both individually and comparatively, four early Christian authors' statements concerning anger: (1) the apostle Paul (whose undisputed letters include 2 Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans); (2) the author of Colossians; (3) the author of Ephesians; (4) the author of 1 Timothy.

A second prolegomenon concerns the extent to which these four authors expect anger to be suppressed. The erudite 2001 monograph by William V. Harris offers an important reminder that the Pauline passages on anger to be examined here were hardly unique in Greco-Roman antiquity. He proposes four levels of restraint, based on two variables—"reining in" vs. "eliminating," and the suppression of "angry actions and speech" vs. "angry feelings." Together, these two variables offer four increasing levels of restraint:

¹ Passages from the seven undisputed letters of Paul (Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, Philemon) this article will discuss include 2 Cor 12:20, Gal 5:20, and Rom 1:18. From the Pastoral Epistles (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus), 1 Tim 2:8 will receive attention. For an excellent introduction to the points addressed in this paragraph, see, e.g., Udo Schnelle, *The History and Theology of the New Testament Writings* (Minneapolis 1998) 276–349.

² This article will consider the selective utilization and redaction of Col 3:5–8 (on God's wrath and getting rid of human wrath and anger) in Eph 4:22–32.

- (1) reining in angry actions and speech
- (2) eliminating angry actions and speech
- (3) reining in angry feelings
- (4) eliminating angry feelings.

Harris argues that “statements in favour of (2), (3) and (4) took some time to appear in classical antiquity” and that level 4 became “a standard aim of Stoic and Stoicizing philosophers under the Roman Empire” and not earlier.³

This article applies Harris’s apt distinctions and considers to which, if any, of these four levels each Pauline statement most closely corresponds.⁴ I will argue that whereas Paul’s undisputed letters and the epistle of James correspond to level 1, the deuteropauline authors of Colossians and Ephesians implore the attainment of at least level 2. Moreover, it is plausible, if not likely, that the author of 1 Timothy also calls for the elimination of all angry actions and speech (level 2).⁵ Such development within the Pauline tradition from the apostle’s undisputed letters to the later deuteropauline letters correlates with Harris’s finding that calls for greater and more complete suppression of anger begin in the Roman period.

³ William V. Harris, *Restraining Rage: The Ideology of Anger Control in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge [Mass.] 2001) 4, 5; cf. on the repression of anger in Stoicism, Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton 1994) 391–392, and 94–95 *pace* Arist. *Eth.Nic.* 1125b35–1126a8.

⁴ For the purpose of this analysis, Harris’s four levels are quite helpful. At times, however, an ancient (or modern) author or passage may not fall neatly into one of Harris’s levels to the exclusion of one or more of the others. In Eph 4:22–32, for example, there are characteristics of levels 1, 2, and 4, and, it is argued below, a measure of inconsistency within this passage.

⁵ Unfortunately Harris, *Restraining Rage* 393, does not distinguish between the undisputed and deuteropauline letters. Thus his otherwise important and well-documented study is of limited value for assessing anger in the letters attributed to Paul. In addition, a more recent examination of “Anger in the Pauline Letters” suffers from the double misfortune of taking into account neither Harris’s work nor the distinction between the undisputed and deuteropauline letters. The resulting muddled discussion by Matthew A. Elliott, *Faithful Feelings: Rethinking Emotion in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids 2006) 219–229, makes a handful of promising points but ultimately fails to contribute much in the way of significant insight.

I. Pronouncements on anger in the Pauline letters

1. *Paul on anger in 2 Corinthians and Galatians*

Second Corinthians is probably the earliest⁶ of Paul's undisputed letters that call for restraining anger: "For I fear that when I come, I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish; I fear that there may perhaps be quarreling, jealousy, anger (θυμοί), selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder" (2 Cor 12:20). The term that Paul uses for anger, *thymos*, can, depending on context, connote "intense expression of the inner self, freq[ue]ntly expressed as strong desire, *passion, passionate longing*," or, much more frequently in early Christian literature, "a state of intense displeasure, *anger, wrath, rage, indignation*."⁷ Occurring in the plural in both 2 Cor 12:20 and Gal 5:20, θυμοί designates tirades or "outbursts of anger."⁸

Paul's statement on reining in anger in 2 Cor 12:20 occurs in the larger context (10–13) where he must address other Christian leaders' attacks on his authority as an apostle.⁹ Needless to say, the hypothetical absence of angry outbursts, among other undesirable interpersonal manifestations, would not by itself alleviate objections to Paul's apostolic authority in Corinth. Thus, what Paul offers in 2 Cor 12:20 is a brief aside, recalling his earlier attempts to admonish this congregation.¹⁰

⁶ A formidable argument for the priority of the Corinthian correspondence to Galatians is Paul's silence concerning the (presumably later) controversy over circumcision, which he addresses in Galatians and Romans.

⁷ *BDAG* s.v. θυμός 461. See further Luke 4:28; Acts 19:28; Heb 11:27; *1 Clem.* 45.7, 50.4; *Hermas* 5.2.4; *Mart. Pol.* 12.2; F. Büchsel, "θυμός," *TDNT* 3 (1965) 167–168; Harris, *Restraining Rage* 50–70; Nussbaum, *Therapy* 243.

⁸ *BDAG* 461; H. D. Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia 1979) 284 ("outbursts of rage").

⁹ For a survey of scholarship on Paul's opponents and the accusations he addresses in 2 Cor 10–13, see, e.g., R. Bieringer, "Die Gegner des Paulus im 2. Korintherbrief," in R. Bieringer and J. Lambrecht (eds.), *Studies on 2 Corinthians* (Leuven 1994) 181–221.

¹⁰ See further D. Dale Walker, *Paul's Offer of Leniency (2 Cor 10:1)* (Tübingen 2002) 252: "Confronted with a deteriorating situation, Paul hurried to Corinth for an unscheduled visit. During this second visit, Paul did not encounter a church willing to defer to him. Many rejected Paul's identi-

He chides his readers that since they have internal struggles they should be appropriately humble when weighing questions about his authority as an apostle.

As mentioned above, Paul uses the same term for anger ($\thetaυμοι$) in Gal 5:20. As in 2 Cor 12, the term again occurs in a list of vices, identified in Gal 5:19a as “the works of the flesh.”¹¹ In these two letters, Paul refers to $\thetaυμοι$, among other vices, in notably different contexts. Unlike in 2 Cor 10–13, Paul does not in Gal 5 need to defend his authority. Instead, he writes in opposition to the charge that the Pauline gospel leads to anti-nomian, or lawless, behavior: “For you were called to freedom, brothers; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another . . . Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh” (Gal 5:13, 16). In contrast to 2 Corinthians Paul does not accuse the Galatians of angry outbursts. Rather, Paul outlines the ethical capabilities (“fruits”) that flow from the regenerative power of the Spirit (cf. Rom 12:1) and the corresponding vices that the believer is expected to resist. Thus, if angry outbursts do occur among the Galatians he does not want such conduct to be blamed on his theology or ministry.

A formulation similar to those in 2 Corinthians and Galatians occurs in the epistle of James. Although not attributed to Paul, this letter is in dialogue with several Pauline concepts in Galatians and Romans and can be aptly described as indebted to the Pauline tradition.¹² The author of James expects his

fication of their behavior as sin and ignored his admonishments (2 Cor 12:20–13:1).” Cf. Frank J. Matera, *II Corinthians: A Commentary* (Louisville 2003) 299–300.

¹¹ Gal 5:19–21: “Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger ($\thetaυμοι$), quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

¹² The author of James objects to some type, or (mis)understanding, of Pauline theology on “faith and works” (Jas 2:14–26). On this point see, e.g., Matt A. Jackson-McCabe, *Logos and Law in the Letter of James* (Leiden 2001), esp. 176–185; Martin Hengel, “Der Jakobusbrief als antipaulinische Polemik,” in G. F. Hawthorne and O. Betz (eds.), *Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament* (Tübingen 1987) 248–278. Several theological differences

audience to be “slow to anger” (ὀργή), but not wholly devoid of anger: “You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for a person’s anger¹³ does not produce God’s righteousness” (Jas 1:19–20).

From the two particular contexts concerning “outbursts of anger” in Paul’s letters (2 Cor 12:20, Gal 5:20), it follows that for Paul—and, by extension, the author of James—a single episode would be both a regrettable and yet not wholly unexpected aspect of human existence and interactions. In 2 Cor 12 the plural θυμοί designates a pattern of behavior that, Paul fears, should have been addressed long ago and now needs attention all the more as Christians in Corinth weigh questions about Paul’s legitimacy as an apostle. In Gal 5 Paul rejects θυμοί as inconsistent with the Pauline gospel of freedom and life through the Spirit.

These calls for restraint in 2 Cor 12:20, Gal 5:20, and Jas 1:19–20 correspond to Harris’s first level entailing “reining in angry actions and speech.” Unlike the more stringent calls for suppression in Colossians and Ephesians (see below), neither Paul nor the author of James approaches Harris’s second, third, or fourth levels.

2. *Colossians: prohibition of anger and fear of God’s wrath*

The author of Colossians uses the same term for anger (θυμός) as 2 Cor 12:20 and Gal 5:20. But in this deutero-Pauline letter it occurs in the singular: “But now you must rid yourselves of all such things—wrath, anger¹⁴ (ἀπόθεσθε ... τὰ

between these authors notwithstanding, James can be interpreted as not only opposing but also extending and refining several of Paul’s points in Galatians and Romans.

¹³ Lit. “[the] anger of a man,” ὀργή γὰρ ἀνδρός.

¹⁴ For the sake of consistency, this article departs from the NRSV and translates ὀργή as “wrath” and θυμός as “anger” in Col 3:8 || Eph 4:31. The semantic domains of the two Greek terms overlap (*BDAG* 720). At Col 3:8 || Eph 4:31, the NRSV translates ὀργή as “anger” and θυμός as “wrath.” See also Harris, *Restraining Rage* 53–54, who notes that ὀργή and θυμός, distinguished by Plato and Aristotle in the classical period, came to be mixed in the Hellenistic period by authors such as Philodemus. Consequently, the following distinction between ὀργή and θυμός, is no longer persuasive: “Where ὀργή is used thus [of human wrath], it is generally interchangeable

πάντα, ὀργήν, θυμόν), malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth” (Col 3:8). Compared with Paul’s formulations in 2 Corinthians and Galatians, Colossians offers a higher expectation that the Christian not express anger, and perhaps not even experience it. For one thing, *thymos* occurs first in a list of vices illustrating “all the things” of which believers must rid themselves. This is imperative because “the wrath of God is coming” (ἔρχεται ἡ ὀργή τοῦ θεοῦ, Col 3:6) to judge acts such as “fornication, impurity [and] passion (*pathos*)” (3:5).

Notably, the warning to believers in Col 3:5–8 stands in contrast to references to God’s wrath in the undisputed Pauline letters Galatians and Romans. For example, Gal 5:21b follows a list of vices (5:19–21a, discussed above) with the warning of not inheriting God’s kingdom. Yet Paul does not, as the author of Colossians does, connect God’s anger with believers’ need to suppress their own anger. Likewise, in Romans Paul warns that “the wrath of God (ὀργή θεοῦ) is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth.”¹⁵ That is to say, in Paul’s eschatology the wrath of God will come *against unbelievers*, not the faithful. This is because those who have been “justified by his [Christ’s] blood will be saved through him from the wrath of God” (Rom 5:9).

The author of Colossians is to be credited with synthesizing in a novel way two components of the apostle’s theology—God’s anger¹⁶ and believers’ need to get rid of anger. The

with θυμός. But θυμός is preferred for the passionate rage which boils up suddenly ..., even though ὀργή seems by derivation to be particularly well adapted to express this ... This term, however, contains an element of awareness and even deliberation absent from θυμός” (G. Stählin, “ὀργή,” *TDNT* 5 [1967] 382–447, at 419). See further on Philodemus: John F. Procopé, “Epicureans on Anger,” in Glenn W. Most et al. (eds.), *Philanthropia kai eusebeia* (Göttingen 1993) 363–386, at 366–377.

¹⁵ Rom 1:18; cf. Rom 2:5, 8; 3:5; 4:15; 9:22; 12:19; 13:4; 1 Thess 1:10; Harris, *Restraining Rage* 395; Jacob W. Elias, “‘Jesus Who Delivers Us from the Wrath to Come’ (1 Thess 1:10): Apocalyptic and Peace in the Thessalonian Correspondence,” *SBL Seminar Papers* 31 (1992) 121–132.

¹⁶ Of course, this is not new in Paul’s letters or Colossians but is prominent in parts of the Old Testament centuries before Paul. Cf. Bruce E. Baloiian, *Anger in the Old Testament* (New York 1992).

effect in Col 3:5–8 is that the faithful have assurance of being protected from God’s wrath, provided that they demonstrate their new way of life by refraining from the vices, including anger and wrath, listed in Col 3:8. Moreover, for the first time the Pauline tradition, as mediated through Colossians, mandates that *only God* has the right to express anger. Humans escape God’s anger, in part by suppressing their own. Going beyond Paul’s calls for reining in anger (2 Cor 12:20, Gal 5:20), the heightened expectation in Colossians certainly meets Harris’s second level of “eliminating angry actions and speech.” Col 3:8 may also prescribe reining in, or even eliminating, angry *feelings* (respectively, Harris’s level 3 or level 4).¹⁷

3. *Ephesians: redefining anger in light of Colossians*

Borrowing extensively from Colossians, the author of Ephesians picks up on several points in Col 3:5–8 and develops them in new ways. In particular, the command of Col 3:8 to get rid of anger and wrath appears in Ephesians with significant modifications and elaborations. The use of Colossians in Ephesians allows us to assess the development in the statements on anger in these two (different) deutero-Pauline authors:

Col 3:8:

But now you must get rid of all such things—wrath, anger (ἀποθέσθε ... τὰ πάντα, ὀργήν, θυμόν), malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth.

Eph 4:22–26, 30–32:

You were taught to put away (ἐδιδάχθητε ... ἀποθέσθαι) your former way of life, your old self, corrupt and deluded by its lusts, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. So then, putting away falsehood (ἀποθέμενοι τὸ ψεῦδος), let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin (ὀργίζεσθε καὶ μὴ ἁμαρτάνετε); do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil ... And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. Put away from

¹⁷ In my opinion, the brief reference to anger in Col 3:8 does not allow for a conclusive assessment of this author’s expectations concerning human feelings (Harris’s levels 3 and 4).

you¹⁸ all bitterness and anger and wrath (πάσα πικρία καὶ θυμὸς καὶ ὀργή) and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

Despite numerous similarities here in vocabulary (ἀποτίθημι, πᾶς, θυμὸς, ὀργή), two differences between Col 3 and Eph 4 merit particular attention. First, the expectation in Eph 4:31 for removing “all bitterness and anger and wrath” is more rigorous than Col 3:8. This is evident from the different uses of πᾶς in the two passages. Col 3:8 follows a substantival use (τὰ πάντα, “all things”) with five examples of what to get rid of—wrath, anger, malice, slander, and abusive language. In Eph 4:31, the adjective (“all”) now functions attributively, modifying πικρία καὶ θυμὸς καὶ ὀργή. Thus, according to Eph 4:31 one must put off “all bitterness, anger, and wrath,” among other undesirable traits.

In addition to meeting Harris’s second level of “eliminating angry actions and speech,” Eph 4:31 likely satisfies his fourth level of “eliminating angry feelings.” Yet Harris’s very brief treatment of the letters attributed to Paul does not differentiate between Paul’s authentic and disputed letters. Had he made such a distinction, he may have agreed with the present article that the heightened expectations in the later deutero-Pauline letters Colossians and Ephesians correlate with the emergence of calls for greater and more complete suppression of expressing—and even feeling—anger, beginning in the Roman period.¹⁹

A second modification of Colossians 3 in Ephesians 4 is the lack of any mention of God’s wrath (ὀργή). According to Ephesians, the time of believers as “children of wrath” (τέκνα ... ὀργῆς) lies in the past.²⁰ In this understanding of salvation, putting off one’s former way of life and “the old person” (τὸν

¹⁸ ἀρθήτω ἀφ’ ὑμῶν, lit. “let it be removed from you.”

¹⁹ See above on *Restraining Rage* 4, 5, 393.

²⁰ Eph 2:3. In addition, the redeemed, who were once “darkness” but now “light,” need not be concerned with God’s wrath, which “comes on those who are disobedient” (5:6–8).

παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον)²¹ has likewise already taken place. Those whom God has saved (cf. Eph 2:8–9) should now “put away all bitterness and wrath and anger” because they do not wish to “insult (μὴ λυπεῖτε)²² God’s Holy Spirit” (4:30–31). In contrast to Colossians, the believer does not fear God’s anger but should nevertheless be cautious against offending the Holy Spirit.

In addition to not grieving the Spirit, another rationale for putting off all anger and wrath stems from concern for the good of the community as a whole: “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you” (Eph 4:32). In contrast to Col 3:5, there is again in Ephesians 4 no mention of fear of God’s judgment. Accordingly, Eph 4:31–32 calls for sublimation: instead of becoming angry, one can experience the transcendent through noble acts of kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness. Extending this exhortation to kindness within the community, the author later denies fathers the right to anger their own children: “Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger (μὴ παροργίζετε), but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”²³ Twice then the author of Ephesians emphasizes the greater good of the community—whether the family (6:4) or the household of faith (4:32)—as reasons for suppressing anger. The disconnecting of two concepts novelly combined in Col 3:5–8—fearing God’s wrath and suppressing anger—is striking in Eph 4:22–32. Such a distinction corresponds to the separateness of these two ideas in Paul’s undisputed letters.²⁴

Eph 4:26a offers an additional correspondence to Paul’s un-

²¹ Eph 4:22; cf. Eph 4:25a (ἀποθέμενοι τὸ ψεῦδος); 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15.

²² With *BDAG* 604, which interprets this verb in terms of causing insult or outrage at Eph 4:30.

²³ Eph 6:4. Not causing anger in others would correspond to Harris’s level 1 or level 3. Cf. Stählin, *TDNT* 5 (1967) 420.

²⁴ See above on 2 Cor 12:20, Gal 5:20, Rom 1:18. This comparison does not, however, imply an argument that the author of Ephesians personally knew the apostle Paul. Yet perhaps he understood at least certain aspects of Paul’s theology better than scholars today sometimes acknowledge. Have scholars been too quick to dismiss this possibility because of Ephesians’ great indebtedness to the deutero-Pauline letter Colossians?

disputed letters on anger. The formulation ὀργίξεσθε²⁵ καὶ μὴ ἀμαρτάνετε assumes, as Paul did,²⁶ that human beings, even those who in Christ have put off “the old person,” sometimes experience anger. Accordingly, Eph 4:26a corresponds to Harris’s first level of “reining in angry actions and speech.” Anger is not tantamount to sin, but one must refrain from sinning when angered. This expectation stands in counterpoint to Eph 4:31 (discussed above), which calls for suppression of “all bitterness and wrath and anger.” It does not make sense to insist upon refraining from sin when one becomes angry (4:26a) and, in addition, to demand the eradication of all anger (4:31).

On the whole, Eph 4:22–32 reveals one deutero-Pauline author correcting another, not only modifying Col 3:8 in favor of even higher expectations for restraining anger (Eph 4:31), but also assuming that believers do sometimes become angry (4:26, without mention of God’s anger and corresponding to aspects of Paul’s theology). Within Ephesians 4, the apparent contradiction between 4:26a and 4:31 raises the question whether this author has an overall coherent theology of anger. For his part, Harris generalizes that the early Christians offered “an ambivalent message” on anger.²⁷ Such ambivalence, or inconsistency, may stem from formulations neither systematically presented nor wholly consistent. One thing this examination reveals is that anger was a living concept that attracted reflection and improvisation from Paul and, even more so, the deutero-Pauline authors of Colossians and Ephesians. The same can be said for yet another deutero-Pauline author in the letter 1 Timothy.

4. *First Timothy: suppressing anger for the unity of the church*

The deutero-Pauline author of 1 Timothy, as noted above, is to be distinguished from the authors of Colossians and Ephesians. This author desires “that in every place the men should pray (προσεύχεσθαι τοὺς ἄνδρας), lifting up holy hands without anger or argument (χωρὶς ὀργῆς καὶ διαλογισμοῦ)” (1

²⁵ Apparently citing Ps 4:5 (LXX ὀργίξεσθε καὶ μὴ ἀμαρτάνετε); cf. Col 3:21 (μὴ ἔρεθίζετε).

²⁶ See above on the plural θυμοί in 2 Cor 12:20 and Gal 5:20.

²⁷ Harris, *Restraining Rage* 399.

Tim 2:8). Elsewhere this letter reflects concern about a church divided over “heretical” teachings (1 Tim 4:1–6, 6:21–22; cf. 2 Tim 2:16–18, 3:8–9). In 1 Timothy the gathering of men to pray together represents the opposite of dissention characterized by anger, argument, and a plurality of viewpoints.

In 1 Timothy the rationale of suppressing anger for the benefit of the community as a whole is similar to that in Eph 4:31–32. The greater good of the community can be defined as mutual acceptance and forgiveness (Eph 4:32, cf. 6:4) or a unified and prayerful stance against “heresy” (1 Tim 2:8). Since these two deutero-Pauline authors assume that suppressing anger is concomitant with fidelity to their versions of Pauline Christianity, scholars can ponder the potentially deleterious effects of such suppression on the psyche in subsequent generations of the faithful who embraced these authors as authoritative leaders and/or their writings as scripture. In terms of Harris’s levels of restraint, 1 Tim 2:8 calls for reining in anger when gathering for prayer (level 1). It is plausible, if not likely, that the author of 1 Timothy desires the elimination of all angry actions and speech (level 2) in this community that must be fully prepared to resist “heresy.”

5. *Jesus’ anger in Mark 3:5 and its suppression in Matthew and Luke*

A reference to Jesus’ anger in the gospel of Mark omitted by the authors of two later gospels, Matthew and Luke,²⁸ merits a brief exploration in light of our analysis of these Pauline passages. Before performing a healing, the Markan Jesus “looked around at them²⁹ with anger (μετ’ ὀργῆς)” and “was grieved (συλλυπούμενος) at their hardness of heart” (3:5, cf. Eph 4:30).

Notably, Jesus’ anger disappears in the versions of this healing in Matthew and Luke.³⁰ In the Lukan parallel, it is the

²⁸ This analysis assumes Markan priority, i.e., that the gospel of Mark was a source incorporated and edited by the authors of Matthew and Luke.

²⁹ περιβλεψάμενος αὐτούς. In Mark 3:1–5, αὐτούς refers generally to some in the audience at a synagogue. Mark does not otherwise specify who “they” are.

³⁰ See further Bart D. Ehrman, “A Leper in the Hands of an Angry Jesus,” in A. M. Donaldson and T. B. Sailors (eds.), *New Testament Greek and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids 2003) 77–98, who argues persuasively that Matthew and Luke have likewise suppressed Jesus’ anger in their source Mark 1:41

scribes and Pharisees—not Jesus—who are “filled with fury” (ἐπλήσθησαν ἀνοίας) after Jesus performs this healing (Luke 6:11, cf. 6:7).

Matthew likewise deletes the reference to Jesus’ ὀργή in Mark 3:5 and substitutes for it an illustration of a shepherd helping a sheep out from a pit on the sabbath.³¹ In effect, Matthew replaces an angry Jesus with a shepherd exemplifying both common sense and compassion. Perhaps for Matthew, whose Jesus elsewhere warns that “everyone who becomes angry (πᾶς ὁ ὀργιζόμενος) with his brother will be liable to judgment,”³² it was objectionable to allow Jesus to express the anger that Mark 3:5 attributes to him. It may be possible to explain the motivation for Matthew’s and Luke’s different strategies for omitting Mark 3:5 by reference to the unambiguous commands to suppress anger in the assorted Pauline letters.³³ With their redactions of Mark these two gospel authors rein in Jesus’ anger just as certain Pauline letters call upon the faithful not to express anger. If nothing else, it is fascinating to observe parallel developments suppressing anger from the earliest gospel (Mark) and letters (Paul’s undisputed writings) to later gospels (Matthew and Luke) and two deutero-Pauline authors (Colossians and Ephesians, possibly also 1 Timothy).

II. Summation and theoretical reflections

We have seen that anger attracted both reflection and reformulations in a variety of early Christian literature. The un-

(arguing for the reading ὀργισθεῖς, “becoming angry,” instead of σπλαγγνισθεῖς, “feeling compassion” as attested in numerous manuscripts).

³¹ Matt 12:11–12: “He said to them, ‘Suppose one of you has only one sheep and it falls into a pit on the sabbath; will you not lay hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a human being than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the sabbath.’”

³² Matt 5:22a. This teaching of Jesus is peculiar to the gospel of Matthew. Cf. Harris, *Restraining Rage* 391–392.

³³ In addition, there may be other, complementary rationales, such as suppressing the humanness of Jesus in general, in order to avoid possible comparisons of Jesus with other miracle workers. See further James A. Kelhoffer, *Miracle and Mission: The Authentication of Missionaries and Their Message in the Longer Ending of Mark* (Tübingen 2000) 335–336; Harold Remus, *Pagan-Christian Conflict over Miracle in the Second Century* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1983).

disputed letters of the apostle Paul name “outbursts of anger” (θυμοί) among the unflattering characteristics of a congregation that ought not to criticize his apostolic authority (2 Cor 12:20), and “the works of the flesh” and antinomianism (Gal 5:19–20; cf. 5:13–16). Paul rejects θυμοί but nowhere demands the eradication of all θυμός (cf. βραδὺς εἰς ὀργήν, Jas 1:19). Nor does he mention God’s wrath against unbelievers in connection with believers’ need to suppress anger (Rom 1:18, cf. Gal 3:21b). Three deutero-Pauline authors urge that anger be suppressed, because “the wrath of God is coming” (Col 3:5–8), because the faithful should not grieve God’s spirit but instead be forgiving toward others (Eph 4:22–32), and because a gathering of men praying “without anger or argument” will protect the community from “heresy” (1 Tim 2:8). As compared with Paul’s undisputed letters, the heightened calls for suppression in Colossians, Ephesians, and 1 Timothy correlate with Harris’s finding of calls for greater and more complete suppression of anger, beginning in the Roman period.

Classic, Freudian psychological theory would recognize different schools of thought reflected by the various Pauline authors.³⁴ Paul’s formulations in 2 Corinthians and Galatians correlate with commands against infantile or narcissistic rage (cf. Jas 1:19–20, Eph 4:26a). The author of Colossians seems to presuppose that only God as “Father” is allowed to become angry and that for this reason God’s children must thus suppress anger (Col 3:5–8; cf. 3:21 || Eph 6:4). Ephesians and, especially, First Timothy imply that repression of anger is necessary for the sustenance, if not the very existence, of the Christian community. Unknown in the Pauline letters is the Neo-Freudian concept of venting anger or aggression as a healthy form of catharsis.³⁵

³⁴ My reason for interacting with Freudian theory is not to claim that such theory is “true,” whether for most therapists or literary critics today, but because I find it helpful in forming salutary questions for interpreting these Pauline texts.

³⁵ For a critique of this therapeutic approach, see Shahbaz Khan Mallick and Boyd R. McCandless, “A Study of Catharsis of Aggression,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 4 (1966) 591–596; cf. Dennis L. Okholm, “To Vent or Not to Vent? What Contemporary Psychology Can Learn from

Perhaps Freud himself would have acknowledged in Ephesians and 1 Timothy exhortations to transcend the *ego-libido* and embrace the *object-libido*, that is, to move beyond narcissism out of love for the religious community now held to be indispensable for the *ego's* happiness and preservation.³⁶ Despite Freud's characterization of "the religions of mankind" as "mass delusions,"³⁷ he may even have admired these authors' exhortations, given his recognition of the inherent tension between human instinct and the demands of membership in civil society: "The essence of it [civilization] lies in the fact that the members of the community restrict themselves in their possibilities of satisfaction, whereas the individual knew no such restrictions."³⁸ If the human being is inclined to aggression,³⁹ including narcissistic tirades, these must be repressed for the society—or, by extension, any community—to survive.⁴⁰ Such issues represented more than a hypothetical quandary to Freud. Writing in 1931, he had doubts about humankind's ability to thus evolve and, in particular, to restrain aggression in Europe after the First World War.⁴¹

Ascetic Theology about Anger," in Mark R. McMinn and Timothy R. Phillips (eds.), *Care for the Soul: Exploring the Intersection of Psychology & Theology* (Downers Grove 2001) 164–186, at 177; Lester K. Little, "Anger in Monastic Curses," in Barbara H. Rosenwein (ed.), *Anger's Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca 1998) 11–35.

³⁶ See Sigmund Freud, *On Narcissism: An Introduction*, in Peter Gay (ed.), *The Freud Reader* (New York 1989) 548–550; and Fred Berthold, Jr., *The Fear of God: The Role of Anxiety in Contemporary Thought* (New York 1959) 60, who refers to Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (Garden City 1953) 424; cf. Peter Homans, *The Ability to Mourn: Disillusionment and the Social Origins of Psychoanalysis* (Chicago 1989) 122–124.

³⁷ Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (New York 1962) 28.

³⁸ *Civilization and Its Discontents* 42; cf. Homans, *Ability to Mourn* 287–290.

³⁹ So Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* 59–63: "It is clearly not easy for men to give up the satisfaction of this inclination to aggression. They do not feel comfortable without it" (61).

⁴⁰ Freud, *Repression (Verdrängung)*, in Gay, *Freud Reader* 570–571; *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, in Gay, 627–628.

⁴¹ See the conclusion to a paragraph that Freud added in 1931 to the end of his *Civilization and Its Discontents* (92): "And now it is to be expected that the other of the two 'Heavenly Powers', eternal Eros, will make an effort to

The tentative character of the remarks in the previous paragraph is intentional, as the goals of this article are focused and therefore limited.⁴² An additional reason is that Freud never addressed the subject of anger systematically.⁴³ Of course, Freud's quandary was hardly new in the twentieth century.⁴⁴ Any Pauline author who characterized members of the community as parts of Christ's "body"⁴⁵ would likewise need to address the responsibilities of the individual to the community as a whole. The suppression of anger belongs to this larger concern, which the final pages of this article will explore.

III. Paul's anger toward Peter in Antioch (Gal 2:11–14)

A few remarks are in order on an occasion when Paul himself evidently became angry— an occasion which has implications

assert himself in the struggle with his equally immortal adversary. But who can foresee with what success and with what result?"

⁴² See Lauri Thurén, "Was Paul Angry?: Derhetorizing Galatians," in Stanley E. Porter and Dennis L. Stamps (eds.), *The Rhetorical Interpretation of Scripture* (Sheffield 1999) 302–320, who prudently differentiates between "the *pathos* appeal of the text" of Galatians and Paul's "actual state of mind" (306). Likewise, Mary W. Patrick, "Autobiography and Rhetoric: Anger in Ignatius of Antioch," in Porter and Stamps, *Rhetorical Interpretation* 348–375, at 375, distinguishes the methods and goals of rhetorical analysis from those of historical reconstruction. Historical reconstruction is a necessary prerequisite to ascertaining the expression or experience of actual emotions (instead of rhetorical depictions of them). Given the difficulties of ascertaining the various *Sitze im Leben* of pseudonymous letters attributed to Paul, I do not think there is sufficient information to infer how much anger may actually have been expressed in these authors' communities.

⁴³ See Carol Tavris, *Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion*² (New York 1989) 38–41, at 39: "Although Freud, like Darwin, regarded aggression as an ineradicable part of the human biological heritage, Freud emphasized the destructive, violent aspect of aggression, whereas Darwin saw aggression as self-defending and adaptive. Curiously, neither scientist paid much attention to anger. If they wrote about it at all, it was a subcategory or weaker expression of the basic aggressive drive."

⁴⁴ The Freudian theorist Heinz Kohut would touch upon several related points in his seminal essay, "Thoughts on Narcissism and Narcissistic Rage," *The Search for the Self: Selected Writings of Heinz Kohut* (New York 1978–91) II 615–658.

⁴⁵ Rom 7:4, 12:4; 1 Cor 12:12–27; Col 1:18, 24, 2:19, 3:15; Eph 1:22–23, 3:6, 4:12, 16, 25, 5:30.

for addressing this larger problem of individual expression within a religious community.⁴⁶ In Gal 2:11–14, Paul recalls his confrontation with the apostle Peter (Cephas) in Antioch.⁴⁷ Peter had previously eaten non-kosher food among uncircumcised Gentile Christians but subsequently refrained from doing so when a delegation sent by James the Lord’s brother arrived from Jerusalem. Paul regarded Peter’s reversal as inconsistent and a rejection of both Paul’s apostolic calling to the Gentiles and of the justified status of those Gentiles within the church.

To be sure, one should proceed with caution, since Paul does not describe his emotional state at the time.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, it seems safe to assume that Paul had been furious when he confronted Peter.⁴⁹ This allows the question whether in angrily opposing Peter “to his face” (Gal 2:11) Paul was consistent with his expectations of others in 2 Cor 12:20 and Gal 5:19–20. My response to this hypothetical question is: probably not, since Paul never disavows occasional expressions of anger—espe-

⁴⁶ These remarks are indebted in part to Peter Richardson, “Pauline Inconsistency: I Corinthians 9: 19–23 and Galatians 2: 11–14,” *NTS* 26 (1980) 347–362; cf. Barbara E. Bowe, “Amazing Grace: Beyond Anger,” *BibToday* 42 (2004) 235–240, at 239.

⁴⁷ Gal 2:11–14: “But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned (κατὰ πρόσωπον αὐτῷ ἀντέστην, ὅτι κατεγνωσμένος ἦν); for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction. And the other Jews joined him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, ‘If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?’”

⁴⁸ This article’s purpose remains comparative, not a speculative attempt to reconstruct Paul’s psyche. See further Betz, *Galatians* 105–112; James A. Kelhoffer, “The Struggle to Define *Heilsgeschichte*: Paul on the Origins of the Christian Tradition,” *Biblical Research* 48 (2003) 45–67, esp. 55–61.

⁴⁹ Later Christian interpreters of Paul would differ on whether Paul had actually become angry with the apostle Peter (so Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine, and Cyril of Alexandria) or not (so Origen, John Chrysostom, and Jerome). The interpretations of these late antique authors merit attention in their own contexts with reference to each author’s overall treatment(s) of expressing anger.

cially if coming from an apostle for some greater good, such as the future legitimacy of Pauline Christianity in Syria or Galatia. As Paul defines the rhetorical situation years after the fact in his letter to the Galatians, the precursors for his expressing anger in Antioch were Peter's and others' "hypocrisy" (Gal 2:13: συνυποκρίνομαι, ὑπόκρισις) and, as a result, Peter's diminished status as "self-condemned" (καταγινώσκω, 2:11). For Paul, these beliefs preceded, and therefore justified, his anger toward and confrontation of his fellow apostle.

One can further ask how Paul's later pseudonymous admirers might have responded to the apostle's angry opposition to Peter in Antioch. Ephesians assumes that "the household of God [is] built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone" (Eph 2:19b–20). This deutero-Pauline author would most likely have been baffled by the controversy among church leaders reflected in Gal 2:11–14. In addition, the expectation of putting away "all bitterness and anger and wrath" (Eph 4:31a, cf. Col 3:8) would seem to preclude Paul's conduct in Antioch.

First Timothy likewise presumes that Paul had long ago established a unified church.⁵⁰ This author's current concern for protecting that one church from "heresy" is why men need to gather without anger to pray (1 Tim 2:8). Psychologist Harriet Lerner notes a correlation between the level of anxiety in any social system and the repression of individual expression: "The higher the anxiety in any system, the less tolerance people have for inclusiveness, complexity, and difference. When you live in a culture of fear, you will likely want to huddle in a little family or village where everyone is just like you."⁵¹ One need not (necessarily) accuse the author of 1 Timothy of inspiring a "culture of fear" to infer a correlation between his angst over "heresy" and call to repress not only anger but also women's leadership in the Christian community (cf. 1 Tim 2:9–15).

Yet perhaps these same deutero-Pauline authors would have

⁵⁰ 1 Tim 1:12–16, 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6–7, 3:10–11a; Raymond F. Collins, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: A Commentary* (Louisville 2002) 13.

⁵¹ Harriet Lerner, *Fear and Other Uninvited Guests* (New York 2004) 134.

tolerated the apostle Paul's anger if it served to establish and protect the church against outsiders perceived as attempting to destroy that church—or at least these authors' understanding of the Pauline instantiation of the church. One fear (concern for the church's well-being) takes precedence over another fear (individual expression of spontaneous emotions such as anger). This article, which began with anger in the Pauline letters, has now drifted into community formation and the collective consciousness resulting from competing attempts at self-definition. None of the letters attributed to Paul resolves the ethical and existential dilemma posed by the expectations of repressing anger and of expressing outrage when defending the well-being of the community, however construed. Instead, these letters present suppressing anger as a categorical imperative without reflecting on possible limits or exceptions to its implementation. An exploration of this dilemma in ancient Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian literature would be a fascinating topic for future scholarship.⁵²

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⁵² An earlier version of this study was presented at the November 2005 Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting in Philadelphia. The author's thanks are due to Robert Matthew Calhoun, Dereck Daschke, and Clare K. Rothschild.