

REALITY CHECK

“Eradicating the Root of Anger”

Introduction – What, Me Angry?

Matt 7:1-5

- 1 "Do not judge, or you too will be judged.
- 2 For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.
- 3 "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?
- 4 How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?
- 5 You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. NIV

In dealing with anger, it is important that we pray to the Holy Spirit to reveal where we fall in this area of life. Our own irritations, bitterness, and anger tend to blind us to our own faults by some of the basest mechanisms of the old man nature. I have had to deal with my own anger since childhood. I believe that I have gained a great measure of victory by the blood of Jesus and the grace of God (Rev 12:11), but realize that I have a way to go yet and must remain vigilant (1 Cor 10:12). This teaching is as much an exercise in removing the beam from my eye as it is an attempt to remove the splinter from yours.

Before we proceed, I want to point out an aspect of anger that we will not be examining. This is what is commonly referred to as “righteous anger” or “righteous indignation.” I do not believe that anger in and of itself is as much a problem as its root (bitterness and self-will) or its expressions (wrath, malice, violence, murder and the like). It is an emotion provided to us by God, for we are made in His image and He certainly does get angry (though it takes Him a loooong time!). But to give any room for the expression of anger without dealing strongly with its negative aspects first and foremost is like giving a nuclear weapon to a terrorist state.

Most of us misuse anger so frequently that it is nearly impossible for us not to mix our fleshly passions into any anger God may want us to express. Even Moses, called the meekest man on earth, shot himself in the foot with this dangerous weapon. So, for now, let us put out of our minds and focus any anger we may feel “justified” in expressing.

James 1:19-21

- 19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath:
- 20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.
- 21 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness [NIV – moral filth] and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. KJV¹

I. Exposing the Root

A. Roots of Bitterness (going our own way)

¹ All references are from the King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

Eph 4:31-32

31 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Bitterness turns to wrath and anger which finds expression in unrest and evil speech and intent.

Rom 3:10-18

10 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:

11 There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.

12 **They are all gone out of the way**, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

13 Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips:

14 Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness:

15 Their feet are swift to shed blood:

16 Destruction and misery are in their ways:

17 And the way of peace have they not known:

18 There is no fear of God before their eyes.

As we shall see, bitterness results from going our own way instead of God's. In this sense, none of us are immune for at one time or another all of us have "gone out of the way."

Heb 12:14-16

14 Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:

15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;

16 Lest there be any fornicator [*Greek – pornos*], or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.

Bitterness springs up (puffs up) when we fail of the grace of God – we become either legalistic and judgmental or licentious and judgmental. Note the bitterness / lust correlation.

Deut 29:16-20

16(For ye know how we have dwelt in the land of Egypt; and how we came through the nations which ye passed by;

17 And ye have seen their abominations, and their idols, wood and stone, silver and gold, which were among them:)

18 Lest there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations; **lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood;**

19 And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, **though I walk in the imagination of mine heart**, to add drunkenness to thirst:

20 The LORD will not spare him, but then the anger of the LORD and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the LORD shall blot out his name from under heaven.

This bitter root springs up from the idolatry of men who walk after "the imagination of their own hearts."

Barnes' Commentary-

Deut 29:19

[To add drunkenness to thirst] The sense is probably: "Himself, drinking iniquity like water, (Job 15:16), he corrupts and destroys others who are thirsting for it or prone to it."

The sense of the whole passage from Deut 29:16 onward to Deut 29:20 may be exhibited thus: "Ye have seen the abominations of idolatry among the pagan. Do you therefore look diligently that there be no secret idolater among you; a root of bitterness to all about him. Let there be no one, I say, who when he hears the curses of the Law against this sin, flatters himself, saying within himself, 'All will be well, for I walk unmolested in my own self-chosen path;' and thus acting, not only takes his own fill of sin, but destroys likewise every tempted brother within his reach, for the LORD will not spare him," etc.

Isa 53:6

All we like sheep have gone astray; **we have turned every one to his own way**; and the LORD hath laid on him **the iniquity of us all**.

Of all iniquity, going our own way is the strongest and deepest. Going our own way is the bottom line cause of bitterness.

Acts 8:23

For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

A bitter spirit shows us to be bound to our iniquity. This bondage must be broken for us to be free from anger.

B. Adam and Eve

Bitterness and anger enter in because of broken relationships. If His creatures had never broken their relationship with Him, God would never have needed to express any anger.

The record of mankind's fall shows how bitterness entered the human condition through breach of relationship.

Gen 3:9-12

9 And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?

10 And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.

11 And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?

12 And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.

1. Who was responsible?

Ultimately, Adam is responsible for the fall of man. He was not deceived as Eve was by the serpent. The tree of knowledge of good and evil became something he desired and indulged in. He disobeys God and is guilty. Does he accept the responsibility of his guilt? No, he deflects it and exposes a bitter spirit.

2. The deflection of guilt

i. Hides – verse 10

ii. Blames God – “the woman thou gavest me” verse 12

iii. Blames wife (or others) – “she gave me of the tree” verse 12

3. The defilement of relationship

Gen 3:16

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

Gen 1:26

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

Gen 2:20

And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.

Gen 2:23

And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

Refer to table.

C. Cain and Able

Gen 4:3-8

3 And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD.

- 4 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering:
- 5 But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.
- 6 And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen?
- 7 If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.
- 8 And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.

Instead of offering a blood sacrifice as required by God, Cain decided to “go his own way” and offer farm products instead. His perceived rejection by God (God rejected Cain’s methods, not Cain) caused envy and bitterness toward his brother. Jesus shows us that this murder had its basis in anger.

Matt 5:21-24

- 21 Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:
- 22 But I say unto you, **That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment:** and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.
- 23 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;
- 24 Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

If our brother has offense against us, we are to be reconciled to him before we offer sacrifice.

II. Anger Is Iniquitous – Acts 8:23

Acts 8:23

For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

A. Jacob

1. Reaction to past failures – Gen 30:1-2

Gen 30:1-2

- 1 And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die.
- 2 And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?

Because Jacob lacked discernment, he wound up marrying Leah first. Then, to top it off, his favorite wife can have no children. Instead of praying for his wife

like his father Isaac did in the same situation (Gen 25:21), he responds to her in anger – and then goes into her handmaid.

2. Reaction to false accusation – Gen 31:36-37

Gen 31:36-37

36 And Jacob was wroth, and chode with Laban: and Jacob answered and said to Laban, What is my trespass? what is my sin, that thou hast so hotly pursued after me?

37 Whereas thou hast searched all my stuff, what hast thou found of all thy household stuff? set it here before my brethren and thy brethren, that they may judge betwixt us both.

This is essentially the pot calling the kettle black. “How dare you call me a thief and a cheat,” Jacob is saying. While it is true that he hadn’t stolen the house idols, the accusation touched on a character flaw he did have and he reacted to it in anger.

3. Reaction to unjust treatment – Gen 31:38-42

Gen 31:38-42

38 This twenty years have I been with thee; thy ewes and thy she goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten.

39 That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee; I bare the loss of it; of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day, or stolen by night.

40 Thus I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes.

41 Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times.

42 Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen mine affliction and the labour of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight.

I wonder if on any of those cold nights, Jacob ever told himself, “Yeah, I’m cold, but at least Esau can’t kill me here.” Jacob here shows his false expectation. I am not saying that Laban was fair or treated him justly. But Jacob seems to forget that he came into Laban’s household a pauper and a fugitive.

4. Unintended consequences – Gen 31:32 with Gen 35:18 and 1 Sam 15:23

Bitterness, anger, and wrath inevitably lead to harsh speech. In anger and arrogance, Jacob spoke unwisely.

Gen 31:32

With whomsoever thou findest thy gods, let him not live: before our brethren discern thou what is thine with me, and take it to thee. For Jacob knew not that Rachel had stolen them.

Though Jacob pronounced a death sentence in curse form over his wife unintentionally, it had its affect nevertheless.

Gen 35:18

And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Ben-oni: but his father called him Benjamin.

The word for oni, sorrow, is translated iniquity in I Samuel 15:23.

1 Sam 15:23

For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as **iniquity** and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king.

This word was spoken to Saul, a descendant from Benjamin!

B. Levi

Gen 34:25-26

25 And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males.

26 And they slew Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went out.

Gen 49:5-7

5 Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations.

6 O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall.

7 Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.

C. Moses

Ps 106:32-33

32 They angered him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes:

33 Because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips.

When Moses gave expression to the iniquity of anger in his life, it ultimately cost him the Promised Land. We need to bear this in mind.

1 Thess 5:9

For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,

III. Cutting the Root

A. Confession

1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Matt 27:34

They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with **gall**: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.

Ex 12:7-8

7 And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it.

8 And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and **with bitter herbs they shall eat it.**

Jesus has bought us out of the bitter bondage of sin. We need to confess our iniquity of bitterness and anger and have His blood wash us clean.

B. Forgiveness

Eph 4:31-32

31 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

How does what anyone has done to us compare to what we have done to God? And He forgave us. Forgiveness is non-optional!

C. Being Loosed by Being Bound (Acts 8:23)

Acts 8:23 describes a sorcerer being in the bondage of iniquity. To be loosed from this bitter gall, we need to be bound by the Spirit to the Head in love.

1. By the Spirit in peace – Eph 4:1-3

Eph 4:1-3

1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,

2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

2. To the Head in discipleship – Col 2:18-19

Col 2:18-19

18 Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,

19 And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.

3. In Love for completeness – Col 3:12-15

Col 3:12-14

12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;

13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

14 And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

Conclusion

To be free from bitterness, we cannot follow after our own lusts and desires and allow them to consume us. We need to die to our own way and follow His. As we confess the sin of bitterness and anger, He cleanses us by His blood. Once forgiven by Him, we have the basis to forgive others. Recognizing that we are called to peace in one body by His Spirit, we can walk in love and be thankful.

Amen.