

Anger, Contempt and Reconciliation, Jesus Lifestyle 4, Matthew 5:21-26

Titus 2:11-3:8, Matthew 5:21-26.

Holy Spirit, my teacher, as I dive into the Bible would you awaken my heart, expand my mind and shape my identity and life today...

Someone said: "Anyone can become angry... that is easy ... but to be angry with the right person and to the right degree and at the right time, and for the right purpose, and in the right way – that is not within everybody's power and is not easy."

That was Aristotle, writing three hundred years before Jesus.

A number of years ago, the English paper the Sunday Times reported that more than 80% of drivers say they have been involved in road rage incidents.; 64% of Britains working in an office, have experience 'office rage'. 71% of internet users admit to have suffering 'net rage' and 50% of us, have reacted to our computer problems by hitting our PC, hurling parts of it around, and screaming! Anger can be more common than we think.

Do not murder and 'anyone who murders will be subject to judgement.'

Is Murder only an action , which has no connection to the thoughts and character of a person? Is it not also important, what his or her view of other people are, (including their view of the victim)? Is there wrath, anger, contempt behind the deed?

Genesis 4. Cain kills his brother Abel. Just before this, God has looked with favour on Abel's offering but not on Cain's. It says 'Cain was very angry' ... God speaks to him: "Why are you angry? ... If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door, it desires to have you, but you must master it..." He did not master it and another suffered...

Jesus right from the start is saying that a murderer and someone angry with their brother – in this context meaning fellow believer – will be subject to judgement.

Righteous Anger.

Now at this point we often jump in – hang on Grant, I mean Jesus got angry. We will look at this but our instinct at this point – Jesus anger – can take us away from the power of his words.

Let's hear that again. Jesus is saying – like it or not – to murder, to be angry with another – it is the same...

Jesus and anger. He got angry at the silence and hard hearts in a synagogue when on the Sabbath he asked if it was right to heal someone; and he showed his anger when he cleared the temple courts at the start of Holy Week. He also said to the Pharisees – you blind fools – in Matthew 23.

Yes, there is a place for burning with anger against sin and injustice. When we look at the OT, the prophets and psalmists speak of the anger of the Lord. God described himself as 'the compassionate and gracious God, *slow to anger*, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.'" Exodus 34,v6.

Anger at human wickedness, is part of being in the image of God, anger at the moral evil we see. How can a person who knows about human trafficking or sexual abuse of children fail to be angry? It can inspire and lead people forward...
Abolitionist William Wilberforce, c18th, channeled his righteous anger against the slave trade into a constructive purpose to fight it.

But as DA Carson says: "Our problem is that we burn with indignation and anger, not at sin and injustice, but at offence to ourselves." Carson, p.46.

In none of the situations we mentioned, Jesus did not become angry because his personal ego was wrapped up in the issue at hand. Titus mentions. "Jesus Christ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness" Jesus was assaulted, illegally beaten, tried, spat upon, crucified publically, mocked – all this happened, yet he failed to become angry, for his ego to be involved. He did as Peter said: "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate, when he suffered he made no threats. Instead he entrusted himself to the him who judges justly." 1Peter 2:23. From his lips instead came words that cried out for reconciliation – 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing.'

Let's be really honest here. By and large our anger does not reflect Jesus'.

Let's not pretend it does. By and large, we are **quick** to be angry when we are personally offended or stopped in our plans.

AND ***we are slow to become angry*** when there is sin and injustice multiplying before our eyes in our nation or in our lands. Those times, we hum, we say it is 'tragic', and hope something will change, then forget about it usually.

The test as someone said: to consider if our anger is justified or without cause, is to ask ourselves - is our anger based on love for others or simply love for ourselves....

Anger

Jesus seeks kingdom goodness in our hearts. To eliminate anger and contempt is our first key step to a right heart.

What is anger? It seizes us – unexpectedly – we want to react to, perhaps even harm the one who has interfered with our will and our life. Anger has power. Even if I don't act it out, it injurys someone.

When I know you are against me – you are angry at me – I am ‘already wounded’ by you. Your anger or rage may already stop me in my plans. Or make me change my direction. It will raise the stress level of those around us.

And it may evoke my anger.

Why does it evoke my anger? Well. Your anger places a restraint on me – you cross my will, interfere with my good plans and ideas...

ANGER feeds on Anger.

Anger can be spontaneous.

It can also be something we choose to be. There are several Greek words for anger. The one used here means ‘long-lived anger’ – the image is of anger of a person who nurses wrath to keep it warm. The word means: “anger that broods, refuses to be pacified and seeks revenge.” (Gumbel, p55). We become an angry person. It is like we have a can almost full – and all it takes is one unhappy moment, minor in itself, which fills the can, and off pops the lip – and out pours our rage...

Why would we hold onto anger? Well it is to do with the human heart.

When we nurse anger we do so because of some self righteousness and pride in us. “Find a person who has embraced anger, and you find a person with a wounded ego.” We see ourselves and our will as so important. Anger embraced can become a low burning resentment ... or become a crusade of sorts to inflict harm on the person.

Anger takes mental and emotional resources from us. We dwell on, remind ourselves how we have been wronged. We are chained to the past. It shapes our actions, affects and can infect others.

Anger and contempt are two scourges of this earth. Add to this sexual lust and greed – two topics Jesus will later speak on. These four horsemen cause untold damage in lives and in our world... Look at many devastating moments in human history, in lives we know or our own lives.

Willard: “But there is nothing that can be done with anger that cannot be done better without it.” Our aim – to right the wrong in persistent love, not to nurse anger, and so we right the wrong without adding further ... wrongs...

And Paul warns us in Ephesians 4: To retain anger and to cultivate it – to let the sun go down on it – is to give the devil a chance. And he will take it...

Contempt.

Jesus also condemns saying Raca or You fool. 'Raca' an Aramaic word for contempt, particularly for their mind / intellect. The Bible talks about 'the fool' in Proverbs for example – someone who is arrogant, selfish, conceited, rebelling against God. This is much more than 'Samwise you fool' as Frodo is taken away. You fool – contempt for their heart / character.

Contempt is often shown in the words we say. The aim and effect of such words is to exclude, to put them away, to leave them out, to isolate them.

We can say such words because we mean it. We can say such words because we want to fit in – the teacher we mock about because we want to fit in the cool group; the work mate we talk about, because we don't want to eat by ourselves in the canteen... CS Lewis says we all face at some point the challenge of the desire to be 'inside the local Ring' and the terror of being 'left outside.' We desire to belong which leads some of us to do it.

Counselors say and see: family battles nearly always move from anger to contempt – in the form of nasty language – to physical brutality. And that contempt may begin with thoughts in the head, before they are expressed in actual words.

Bonhoeffer on contempt: "A deliberate insult ... we are openly disgracing our brother in the eyes of the world, and causing others to despise him."

Reconciliation

Jesus says 'Therefore' – he moves us from a negative prohibition to a positive regard for people

Reconciliation : Worship...

You bring your sacrifice. It is a holy moment. Maybe a key moment in your life or for you as a family.

The point of such a day – nothing should interrupt this ritual, except some more important worship matters which require such immediate attention.

Suddenly in the midst of it, you remember a brother or sister who is mad at you. You realize how important it is for their soul to find release – you are pained by the break between you – you stop the ritual. You walk out of it, you find him / her, and make up. That is the heart of Jesus teaching, the kingdom lifestyle.

Imagine it is your child's baptism, you are there, the responses are to be said, you walk out to seek reconciliation with someone who is not there.

Jesus describes what we hear in Hosea 6:6 For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings."

Willard: 'Now just think of what the quality of life and character that must be in a person who would interrupt sacred worship to pursue reconciliation with a human being?'

Note who is teaching us. Jesus. The one to whom all worship is due. He says, what is more important than worship – reconciliation? That is the cross speaking. The one speaking through whom God reconciles things in heaven and things on earth to himself, the one who has reconciled us to himself. It kind of becomes obvious when we think about it, how important this theme is to Jesus...

In practice it may all sounds unlikely. Pastor John Wimber told a story that made a big impression on me. He had a difficult argument with his wife Carol, and left home. He went to the church. Sung worship. Got up to preach. After a few minutes. He stopped saying he had to go back home. And he left the service, the church, and went home. The next week, he explained what happened – to be reconciled to Carol. And he next week he picked up from where he had been. Since I heard that testimony, it shaped me and I have sought to live it out – I will make sure I am reconciled with Jolanda if we have had an argument etc, before I go to my meeting or lead a service. Sometimes I have gone out the door and walked back in again to sort things out...

Again. Our instinct can be – questions! What if they don't want to be reconciled, what if I cannot contact them do I go to church. This misses the point. The point. Is reconciliation. We cannot control outcomes – how they react; we are responsible only for our own contribution to them.

Does our heart long for reconciliation? Have we done what we can? Honestly?
Do we refuse to substitute ritual / worship behaviours for acts of love?
Do we mourn for the harm that our sister's anger is doing to their own soul, to us and those around us? That is how we surpasses the righteousness of Pharisees – the right heart then gets the externals right. Our actions can become a testimony of what God can do, of love for fellow believers, "even opposition from others, can be an opportunity", as Corrie Ten Boom says.

Reconciliation : Courts.

We have someone who wants to sue us. You are in debt to them.

Our bibles say 'settle matters quickly' or 'come to terms quickly'. It says in the Greek 'make friends'.

Try to resolve the matter Jesus says. This is much more difficult if you hold anger or contempt towards them. We love our adversary and we want to be reconciled. To be kind, to seek to be reconciled does not mean we are to what they asked. "It means to be genuinely committed to what is good for them, to seek their well being. This may mean we do not give in to them. But with people there are many ways to hold the line – some of God, others not."

This passage is not about do not go to court. It is again about reconciliation.

Worship & Forgiveness

Paul says 'devote ourselves to doing what is good.' John reminds us 'those who say we love God but hate our brother is a liar.' Our worship with God is affected, damaged, by our attitude to others. So to be reconciled with others, is the worship the father seeks. We see that in the OT – when our conduct is right, we are in the right place to worship God...

Jesus sets an incredibly high standard in these words. This is certainly because it is a fundamental issue.

The first area of kingdom living. Yet we fall short, we know. We come back to the cross, to ask again for forgiveness and mercy.

The forgiveness we receive gives us strength to forgive others and to seek reconciliation. If we consider what our offences have done to Jesus and how he responds, it is hard to be angry with our brothers and sisters. To deal with anger, we receive and give forgiveness, through the cross of Christ. We have to make a choice to deal with anger and root it out from our lives. We can only do that in the strength that Christ supplies through being within his kingdom, through his Spirit within us.

A well known Corrie ten Boom story. The guard after she preached in Germany. He approached her. He did not remember her. He had become a Christian he shared. He asked her to forgive him. His hand reached out.

Corrie stood there. She says "I knew forgiveness not only as a commandment of God but as a daily experience. Since the end of the war I had a home in Holland for victims of Nazi brutality. Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able also to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter the physical scars. Those who nursed bitterness remained invalids. It was as simple and horrible as that.'

She said stood there.

'with coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion. I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. 'Jesus help me' I prayed silently. 'I can lift my hand I can do that much, you supply the feeling.' So woodenly mechanically I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me.

And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes. "I forgive you brother!" I cried, 'With all my heart' For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then."

Prayer.

Our closing prayer – is an ancient one...

“Thanks be you thee my Lord Jesus Christ,

For all the benefits and reconciliation thou has given to me

For all the pains and insults and anger thou hast borne for me

O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,

May I know thee more clearly

Love thee and others more dearly

And follow thee more nearly,

Day by day. Amen.