

13.05.07 Coromandel Baptist 10:00 a.m.

The Cure for Anger

Bible Readings = Eph. 4:25-32 and Matt. 18:21-35.

Introduction:

- (1) Last time we were considering the themes of Ephesians, we saw how we have put off the old man and we have put on the new man. This has happened in Christ, in whom the old man was crucified, and in whom we have been raised to newness of life by the grace of God.
 - a. Throughout the series on Ephesians we have noted the significance of the ascension of Jesus Christ. This coming Thursday (17 May) is Ascension Day in the Christian Calendar (40 days after Easter Sunday, therefore always a Thursday).
- (2) The goal of creation is to be filled unto the fullness of God the Father, through the Son. The means and goal of his action is love.
- (3) In the current action of life, we are called to live in conformity with who we are: a new man in Christ. We are to lay aside the things that belonged to the old man, and to walk in the things that belong to the new man.
 - a. In summary this means to walk in love: Eph. 5:1-2 cf. 2:2f.
- (4) The power and motivation for this is all in the word of Christ, which is why he has given the 'word' gifts to the Church, for the building up of the body in love.

The passage from Ephesians this week sets before us the destructive power of anger on the one hand, and the wonderful liberation that comes to us through forgiveness on the other.

1. Anger Has Large Family

- (1) Paul cites a number of things that need to be laid aside.
 - Falsehood; thieving; unwholesome speaking; bitterness; wrath; anger (two different words used *orgē* in v. 26 = persistent resentment which will not forget a wrong; antagonism; hatred; and, in v. 31 *thymos* = outbursts of temper, rage, violence); malice.
- (2) He also tells us what is to be the prevailing 'spirit of our minds' (Eph. 4:23): i.e. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you (Eph. 4:32). Where thieving has been a problem we are to work to have something to share (Eph. 4:28), as thieving is an attempt to live entirely for oneself by preying on the things that belong to others...so in practical ways we put off things that are selfish and self-centred, and put on those things that are related to others.
 - The idea is that such putting off and putting on is part of the renewal of the mind, as also in Romans 12:1ff.
 - This is what it means to be 'beloved children', who want to imitate their Father (Eph. 5:1-2).
 - By way of contrast, the other things belong to the 'father of lies' who is filled with anger, having been a liar and a murderer from the beginning (Eph. 2:1ff. cf. John 8:44; 1 John 3:12)
- (3) Anger lies at the root of most, if not all, the deeds of the flesh. E.g. if there were no anger there would be no envy, greed, jealousy, bitterness, slander, malice, murder...etc.

(4) Holding on to the one set of things (e.g. falsehood, bitterness, wrath, etc.) is at the same time the refusal to forgive, and this grieves the Spirit of God (Eph. 4:30).

- This is so because it goes against the nature of his work in the life of the believing community, especially with a view to the day of redemption. All that will be our experience then is the new community based on forgiveness for our sins, as in the fulfilment of the new covenant promise of Jer. 31:31-34.
- Grieving the Spirit is not 'making him feel sad', but in the same vein as Is. 63:10, where the Spirit is 'vexed' by the obstinate sin of the people of Israel.
 - In the New Testament the Spirit may be 'resisted' (Acts 7:51); 'grieved' (Eph. 4:30); or 'quenched' (1 Thess. 5:19).
 - The Spirit then, chastises and disciplines, so that his people might turn from their sin and find the fullness of his blessing among them.

2. The Roots of Anger and the Devil's Anvil

(1) Anger is not something that we can handle. While God may exercise his just anger, it is too simplistic to equate what we call our 'righteous' anger with his. Just like his love is not like our love, and his righteousness not like our righteousness, his anger is not like our anger. His anger is entirely the anger of holy love, pure in every part, just in every movement, and entirely free from every selfish and self-centred motive.

- Jesus' action of casting out the money changers etc. from the temple is sometimes quoted as an example of righteous anger, for us to imitate. But there is all the difference in the world between the attitudes and actions of the holy Son of Man, and ours, in whose hearts sin has taken up its home.
 - GCB 'righteous' anger becomes 'self-righteous anger' in a flash!

(2) Contrary to our understanding of the text, Eph. 4:26 is neither permitting (nor worse, commanding!) anger. This verse quotes Ps. 4:4, where a Hebrew idiom is used. In such cases it functions as the protasis of a conditional sentence, with the force 'If you get angry, do not sin' (Mitton, p. 168).

- The force of the construction is important. It is not granting permission to be angry, but saying that if anger does arise, it must not be given any quarter (see Lincoln, p. 301).
- This matches with many other biblical warnings: e.g. Ps. 37:8; Prov. 14:29-30; 15:18; 19:11; Eccl. 7:9; Matt. 5:21-26; Rom. 12:19-21; Col. 3:5-11; Gal. 5:19-21; James 1:19-20; etc.

(3) No time to prove the point here, but it has been clearly shown that all anger is ultimately against God. (see G. C. Bingham, *Angry Heart or Tranquil Mind; The Justice Men and the Great Rage*).

- Anger arises because we cannot get our own way; our progress is impeded; our plans scuttled etc.
 - Anger and pride are two sides of the one coin. Depth of anger is matched by the height of pride.

(4) It is triggered by our sense of justice and fairness being assaulted. That this sense is often wrong is not an issue for us when we are angry! We are convinced that we are right and that we do well to be angry (cf. Jonah 4:9).

- Refer to a conversation with someone from this congregation re a radio interview. The nun being interviewed worked with victims of crime in the USA. Sometimes

accompanying family members and others to the viewing chamber to watch the lethal injection being administered to the perpetrator the talk would be of justice at last being served, now being able to find closure etc. Then on the way out, 'Is that all...he did not suffer...too easy...what about what he did to my daughter...etc.'

- Refer to text from the transcript of the perpetrator of the Virginia Tech, below.

(5) Anger gives the devil an opportunity: it allows him to manipulate the heart, mind and actions of people who, if free from anger, would experience the liberty and joy of the fullness of the Spirit.

- 'In all these civil wars among the saints [e.g. in relation to the bickering among the disciples about who would be the greatest, to which Gurnall has just referred as an example], Satan is the great, unseen, instigator...he fights in disguise, playing first on one side, then on the other, aggravating every petty injury, always provoking to wrath and revenge. For this reason, the apostle warns, "Neither give place for the devil" (Eph. 4:27). In other words, "Do not fall out among yourselves unless you long for the devil's company. He is a soldier of fortune and therefore runs to any place there is hope of war." He is attracted to the heat of our anger like a moth to a flame. He cannot work well without fire, so he himself is a kindle-coal. He lays himself upon any embers of contention he finds among the saints, and fans them until they glow white hot. These he uses at his forge to heat our spirits into wrath. Then we are malleable, easily hammered as he pleases.' (Gurnall, *Christian in Complete Armour*, Vol. 1, p. 138-139)

3. The Cure for Anger

(1) There are two sides of a picture painted in Eph. 4:25-32. On the one side are the things that belong to the 'anger' family: falsehood, thieving, malice, bitterness etc. On the other side are the things that belong to the life of the Spirit of God.

- The key, quite simply, is forgiveness, and this, as God in Christ has forgiven us.
- How has he done this? He loved us before we loved him, he came to us while we were his enemies, and he overlooked his 'rights' for our welfare. He bore all our sin in his body on the tree.

(2) The parable of the debtors in Matt. 18 is important.

- The size of the debt is incalculable: a 'talent' was worth more than 15 years wages for a labourer. 10,000 x 15 years work = 150,000 years of earning power!! The other debt was small...100 denarii = 100 day's wages.
- Both have an inability to repay, but note the human pride of Matt. 18:26! The same response of both men in Matt. 18:26 and Matt. 18:29 is met with different responses from the one to whom the money is owed: mercy in the first case and unforgiveness in the second.
- The parable emphasises not just the size of the debt that we cannot pay to God, but the stubborn 'raw material' of the human heart! And God has forgiven us freely in the action of the Cross!

(3) To retain hurt, unforgiveness, bitterness, to remember a wrong suffered, to refuse to let go of an angry heart, is to block out the forgiveness of God from our minds.

‘Anger, along with hostility, has been called “the chief saboteur of the mind”, “a significant factor in the formation of many serious diseases” and “the leading cause of misery, depression, inefficiency, sickness, accidents, loss of work time and financial loss in industry...no matter what the problem – alcoholism, marital conflict etc. – elimination of hostility is a key factor in its solution.”’

“Anger, openly expressed, deliberately hidden from others, or unconsciously expressed is at the basis of a host of psychological, spiritual and physical problems.” *Idem*

- As quoted in G. Collins *Christian Counseling* 1987, p. 100

They talk to us so of an imminent God
As if men were the true Transcendent;
As if men were the Judge of all the Earth,
And God the poor defendant.
As if God were arraigned with a very black case,
On the skill of his bar dependent.
And “I wouldn’t like to be God”, says one,
“For his record is not very resplendent.”
P.T. Forsyth *The Cruciality of the Cross* 1948, 59

"In the beginning, the universe was created. This made a lot of people very angry, and has been widely regarded as a bad idea."

-- [Douglas Noel Adams \(b. 1952\)](#), British author, "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy"

Excerpts from video recordings sent to NBC News by Cho Seung-hui - the student who shot at least 30 people at Virginia Tech university on Monday 16 April 2007.

“

You had a hundred billion chances and ways to have avoided today. But you decided to spill my blood. You forced me into a corner and gave me only one option. The decision was yours. Now you have blood on your hands that will never wash off. ”

“Your Mercedes wasn't enough, you brats. Your golden necklaces weren't enough, you snobs. Your trust funds wasn't enough. Your vodka and cognac wasn't enough. All your debaucheries weren't enough. Those weren't enough to fulfill your hedonistic needs. You had everything. ”

“You have vandalized my heart, raped my soul and torched my conscience. You thought it was one pathetic boy's life you were extinguishing. Thanks to you, I die like Jesus Christ, to inspire generations of the weak and the defenseless people. ”

“I didn't have to do this. I could have left. I could have fled. But no, I will no longer run. It's not for me. For my children, for my brothers and sisters that you (expletive). I did it for them. ”

“When the time came I did it. I had to.