

FREE FROM ANGER

Proverbs 14:29–30; Psalm 32:8–9; Luke 10:38–42; Romans 5:5

Part of a series of sermons on what happens when we have been given a new heart: have believed on Lord Jesus; 'transgression forgiven, sin covered, Lord says we have no iniquity, no deceit in our spirits' (Psa. 32:1–2); 'justified by faith, peace with God through Lord Jesus Christ, access to grace, hope of glory' (Rom 5:1–2). Great place to be—are you there? Free—from pride, envy, and—today—free from anger.

Start:

Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding,
but one who has a hasty temper exalts folly.
A tranquil mind gives life to the flesh,
but passion makes the bones rot. (Proverbs 14:29–30).

Two different states.

I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.
Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding,
whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle,
else it will not stay near you (Psalm 32:8–9).

What is it that makes us angry? We get angry when things don't go the way we want them to, or are not the way we think they should be. Can take various forms: frustration is anger with the lid on a bit. Depression is anger with the enthusiasm taken out of it.

Not getting our own way—who ever thought we were meant to? Who really is in charge of the world, and decides the way things are going to be? God—'accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will' (Eph. 1:11). All decided to accomplish all things according to our own counsel and will. Will never match up with way things really are—so angry. And way I want things to go will clash with the

way you want things to go, so I will be angry with you. And you might get a little bit angry with me. Difficult to soar like an eagle when you are surrounded by turkeys. Even harder when you are one of the turkeys!

Seems the only way to peace is to be happy with the way God makes things to be:

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Because in our sin we've all gone that way, whole human race is in anger. Violence and drinking: cultural?—comes out. Friend wrote a book on anger, was being interviewed about it on talk back radio, 'most of us are angry people', woman rang in: 'I am not an angry person, but when I hear the writer say that we are angry people, then I get really angry'! Later said how book had changed her life.¹

Is there such a thing as righteous anger? Surely there are plenty of things in this world that we should be angry about? I think we can have righteous anger—for about two seconds, before it degenerates into something else! All have our own motives—not always pure. Only properly sustained righteous anger would be God's anger or wrath against our evil and sin. Will apply the 'bit and bridle'—and we may get angry at God for doing that! All our anger is, in the end, directed against God—God hasn't made it the way I want it to be, God's got it in for me.

Going to look now at an angry person—see if you can pick which one it is:

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. ³⁹ She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. ^{40*} But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by

¹ Geoffrey Bingham, *Angry Heart or Tranquil Mind*, NCPI, 1984, p. xxi.

myself? Tell her then to help me.” 41* But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; 42 there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:38–42).

Which one? Don’t usually think of Martha as an angry person—practical one, gets things done while others sit around. What does Jesus say about her?—‘worried and distracted’, ‘anxious and troubled’ about many things—not a good state to be in. Two different states side by side: Mary at peace sitting at the feet of Jesus, Martha anxious and troubled about many things—comes out in anger: ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me’! Anger at her sister, anger at the Lord. Jesus tells Martha: Mary has found the place of peace—don’t you try and take that away from her.

It seems Martha later came to that place of peace—free from anger. Let’s look at how that happened. Martha and Mary had a brother, called Lazarus. Lazarus got very sick. Mary and Martha sent a message to Jesus, who was over the other side of the Jordan river: ‘Lord, he whom you love is ill’ (John 11:3). We are told: ‘Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was’ (John 11:5–6)—with the result that Lazarus died before Jesus got there. To get to Lazarus, Jesus would have had to go back into Judea, near Jerusalem, where they had just been trying to get him killed, so it was dangerous, but that wasn’t the reason Jesus delayed. Jesus always did what God the Father wanted, and I guess the Father told him to stay put, so he stayed put. Good enough reason for Martha and Mary to be a little bit angry—with Jesus, and with God? We don’t know. Both of them said to Jesus when he came: ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died’ (John 11:21, 32). Wonderful statement of faith, but with perhaps an edge of rebuke there. People who have faith can still get cross, when their faith doesn’t work out the way they think it should. When Martha said that to Jesus, Jesus told her: ‘Your brother will rise again’ (John 11:23). What did Martha say? ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day’ (John 11:24). Bit like quoting the creed: ‘I believe . . . in the resurrection of

the dead, and the life everlasting, Amen.’ We can clothe our anger in some very pious-sounding phrases. That didn’t stop Martha from saying a little bit later, ‘Lord—he’s stinkin’ dead!’—which is what she really thought. But Jesus said: ‘Martha—I am here, and I’m the resurrection and the life! Do you believe that?’ If Jesus is the resurrection and the life, and he is present here with us, then even death isn’t really a good reason to get angry, is it? And something happened to Martha and Mary in all of that: Jesus was present, and ministered powerfully to that family. Some time later, when Jesus came back through Bethany, Martha put on a dinner for him and Mary and Lazarus, who was now alive, and she seems to be happy doing that.

That was just six days before Jesus, in a vast act of love, went to the cross, carrying us with all our sins in himself, and died, coming under the righteous anger and wrath of God against all evil and sin, and was buried, and dragged us down into the grave with him—and fair enough too—and then he rose from death himself on the third day, and—amazingly—brought us out with him, leaving all that evil and sin back in the grave where it belongs—free of it all. And the first word he said to us was ‘Peace’. Peace be with you. Everything you thought you had good reason to be angry about—in yourself, and in others, and in the world around you—it is all gone. It has been taken away. All you have now to replace it is my undying love.

Try getting angry about that!

Trouble is, if we want to, we will get angry, even about that. Remember what God said to Jonah, after Jonah had been saved by God from death, and had experienced god’s tender loving kindness—and yet he was angry—angry that God had forgiven the Ninevites when they had been so evil, and let them go free. Angry that the plant God had made to shelter him from the hot sun had now withered. God said to Jonah, ‘Do you do well to be angry?’ And Jonah said, ‘Yes I do—angry enough to die!’ We can go angry to the grave, if we want to. but now we don’t have to. Let me tell you about how I was freed from anger. I was a sweet placid little child—but I can remember nearly trying to murder my younger brother, a couple of times. You get over that. Then I got married and had children. You

know the saying? ‘I used to think I was a nice person—until I had children!’ They can bring out the worst in you. My kids may have forgotten it—or maybe they haven’t—but I can remember loosing my temper and getting pretty angry with them—doing my block—on numbers of occasions. All the time, there was this great big cross. And I found that my anger was directed against that. Why did he have to die? Why was he so damned complacent about it? How does that take away the sins of the world? What’s it got to do with me, anyway? That great big cross has a way of getting under your skin. Once someone was talking about how Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, they don’t know what they are doing!’ And I found myself thinking: ‘Why did he have to say that? I haven’t got anything that really needs forgiving’. But then, when it was being said that Jesus took all our sins away, so they were gone, I found myself thinking, ‘Hey—my sins can’t be taken away, just like that! They’re too important for that—some bigger fuss needs to be made about them than that!’ Crazy, isn’t it? See how I was contradicting myself? One moment I was saying I haven’t got any sins worth bothering about; the next moment I was saying that some big deal needs to be made about my sins! And both of them just an expression of my stubborn self-concerned little pride.

But somehow, in all of that, it came through: he ‘loved me, and gave himself for me’ (Gal. 2:20). The judgement of God, that he bore, destroyed my sin and every evil thing, on that cross. As I later wrote in a little song:

There I was drawn to Him
On that dread tree.
The curse He suffered there
Was due to me.
In Him my judgment came:
In Him I died.
I on that cross with Him
Was crucified.

I heard Him speak to me:
‘Be born again;
The Spirit wash you clean

From every stain.
Come, know the Father’s love,
So strong and free;
Belong to Me and join
His family.’

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That’s the antidote to anger. God’s righteous anger has justly judged you and every human being and every evil thing in God’s good creation. So our self-concerned unrighteous anger has no place here any more. Listen to what the New Testament says:

Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice (Eph. 4:31).

Just like that! What a statement! it is possible now for human beings just to put all that away! Because there is a place where it has gone and been dealt with: that great big cross. Not only that, but what has replaced it? ‘God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us’ (Rom. 5:5). So the apostle can go on to say:

and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Eph. 4:32–5:2).

Or this:

But now you must get rid of all such things--anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth . . . you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator . . . As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the

peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful (Col. 3:8–10, 12–15).

Because Christ has grabbed hold of us, and we belong to him, we can now do all this! I don't know how long it is now since I really lost my temper. Sure we feel the surgings of anger rising up from time to time—usually when we have been hard done by—but we can say, No—put it away. The world has only two ways of coping with anger: repressing it, or venting it. Neither are very helpful. We don't have to do either—we can just let it go. And it's gone. If you become angry—do not sin. And certainly do not let the sun go down on your anger. (Story of married couple).

We can let anger get the better of us, if that's what we want. We can be angry enough to take it with us to the grave. But, given where we have been placed in Christ, and the love that we have there, that would be a very stupid thing to do.

Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding,
but one who has a hasty temper exalts folly.
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but passion makes the bones rot. (Proverbs 14:29–30).

Two different states. We now have a choice between them:

Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding,
whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle,
else it will not stay near you.

I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you (Psalm 32: 9, 8).

That is the place of true peace. It is good to be kept there by God.