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OVERCOMING ANGER

When I minister in prisons, I ask the question, "How many of you have had a problem with anger in your life?" Usually most of the guys present raise their hands. Then I ask, "How many would say that anger is connected with your being in prison?" Again most of those present raise their hands.

ANGER CAN DESTROY YOUR LIFE! That is true regardless of whether you end up in prison. Anger can cause divorce, wounded and alienated children, depression, loss of jobs, and emotional and physical sickness.

Chapter 5 of Galatians lists the "Deeds of the flesh," or "The acts of the sinful nature" as follows, and I have highlighted those things that seem to be connected to anger: *The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; **hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.*** Note the terrible warning that follows this list: *I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.* Whoa! What does that mean? Some teachers say it means that they will not go to heaven. Others say it refers to the time when the saved will stand before Christ at the Bema seat, the place of judgment for the saved, where their actions on earth will be judged to be either "gold, silver, and precious stones, or "wood, hay, and stubble." (See 1 Cor. 3:10-15 and 2 Cor. 5:10) I'm not sure what it means, but I don't want to lose my inheritance in the kingdom of God.

Is anger a sin? Ephesians 4:26-27 says, *In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.* It says, "In your anger," or "When you are angry." Everyone gets angry! Anger is a part of our human nature. I'm not even sure that it is a part of our fallen human nature, for Jesus Himself got angry. When the Pharisees condemned Jesus for healing the man with a withered hand on the Sabbath, *He looked around at them in anger and was deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts.* (Mark 3:5) And in His anger, Jesus did not sin.

God says, "Don't let the sun go down on your anger." Satan works in darkness, so we are to conquer our anger so that we "don't give the devil a foothold." What happens when we give the devil a foothold? Following is the sequence that occurs when we allow anger to fester in our mind and heart: YOU SUFFER AN OFFENSE OR WOUND -- THAT RESULTS IN THE EMOTION OF ANGER (which is normal and human) -- WHICH TURNS INTO RESENTMENT -- BITTERNESS -- HATRED -- DESIRE FOR REVENGE -- SPIRIT OF MURDER.

Think about this sequence: **Offense - Anger - Resentment - Bitterness - Hatred - Revenge - Murder.** Anger is the root of murder! This is not an exaggeration. This is one of the reasons, I believe, that Jesus is so insistent that we not allow anger to fester in our minds. It will give the devil a foothold and pretty soon you will be hoping that the one who offended you, wounded you, victimized you, will die! You may even be fantasizing about ways you can assist him along the path. (If you can remember a time when you were really angry at someone, you may also remember that you genuinely hoped that he would die.)

So what is God's solution for this human problem? Forgiveness. Jesus teaches us in the Lord's Prayer: *Forgive us our trespasses, as we have also forgiven those who trespass against us.* (Matthew 6:12) St. Paul reiterates this commandment in Colossians 3:13: *Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.* Jesus emphasizes and reinforces the necessity of forgiveness again and again in His stories and parables, and supremely by His words from the cross: *Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.* (Luke 23:34)

But it is important for us to know that there is a godly purpose for anger, and that forgiveness is not all that God instructs us to do. **THE PURPOSE FOR ANGER IS TO SAVE OUR RELATIONSHIPS.** Jesus taught this truth to His disciples. Matthew 18:21-35 is called "The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant." It starts when Peter asks Jesus how many times we should forgive a brother when he sins against us, "As many as seven times?" Jesus tells Peter that we must forgive "Seventy times seven," in other words, an unlimited number of times. Then Jesus relates the parable of the King who forgave his servant a debt that was impossible for him to repay, say ten million dollars. Later, a fellow servant asked the first servant to

forgive him a small debt of a few dollars, but the "Unmerciful Servant" would not forgive him and had him thrown into debtors' prison. When the King (figurative of God) heard about this, he was furious and said, "You wicked servant!" The King called him "wicked" when he would not forgive. Then the King turned the unforgiving servant over to the torturers, for goodness' sake! It is clear that since God has forgiven you and me of a debt beyond our ability to repay that He demands that we forgive others for their offenses against us. God knows that this is difficult if not impossible for us to do in our weakness, but He will help us to do it if we ask Him.

The insight about anger that Jesus describes for us precedes the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant. It starts at Matthew 18:15 - *If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.*

Let me give an illustration. Two young men were members of the staff of a large church and they were friends. At a staff meeting, Bill told the whole staff of an incident that was embarrassing to Joe in order to get a laugh. Joe thought that the matter should have been kept confidential, and he was offended and became angry. What should Joe do? Should he forgive Bill and let the matter pass? What if it happened again? Should he again forgive Bill, and continue to forgive him, even 490 times? What would happen to their relationship if Joe continues to stuff his anger and go on as if nothing happened? What would happen is that Joe would forgive on the outside, but inside he might possibly move to that sequence mentioned earlier: **Offense - Anger - Resentment - Bitterness - Hatred - Revenge - Murder**. He might restrain the temptation to physically murder Bill, but it would eventually kill their relationship and Joe might have strong feelings of resentment and revenge inside. So what should Joe do?

Joe should ask God for help in forgiving Bill, then go to him in a spirit of reconciliation and say, "Bill, during the staff meeting you said thus and so, and frankly that offended me very much. I value our friendship and feel that if this is not resolved it will damage our relationship. Let's talk about this." What might Bill's response be? Bill might be dismissive and insult Joe further by saying, "Oh, come on! Grow up! Get over it!" Or something of that nature. Then what if Bill did it again? Joe should go to him with a mature leader and lovingly confront him again and tell him that this kind of conduct is not acceptable. If it happens still again, Joe should "Tell it to the church." Perhaps that means taking the matter to the Pastor or to the Board. While Joe should continue to forgive Bill, he is free to terminate their relationship and have nothing to do with Bill. Joe's hope and prayer is that eventually Bill will repent and they will be reconciled.

This is a very important principle for married couples. Many times a wife or husband is offended by her or his spouse, but "Since Jesus said we must forgive 70 x 7 times, the only Christian thing for me to do is to forgive the offense and repress my anger." This is a recipe for disaster. When we have been offended, it is human to become angry. It is essential that we forgive (for our own spiritual and emotional health, and so we will not block God away from our heart). But we should not let the sun go down on our anger. We should figure out how to tell our spouse, in a loving way, without blame and anger, that we have been wounded. Perhaps we misunderstood our spouse's words or misjudged his intentions. Perhaps he didn't realize how offensive his words or actions were. But now is the time to talk and pray the matter through, rather than to let the offense turn into divorce or murder. If you have not read the book, Boundaries, by Cloud and Townsend, I strongly recommend it to you.

Another related matter: Everyone is familiar with Jesus' teaching, "Turn the other cheek." It is in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:38 - *You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.....* But in John 18:22 - an *"official nearby struck him in the face and rebuked Jesus for the way He had answered the high priest."* So did Jesus turn the other cheek? No, he rebuked the officer for striking him - *If I said something wrong, Jesus replied, testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?* So was Jesus failing to live up to His own teaching? Of course not. He did the most loving and responsible thing to do in that circumstance. There were many occasions when the good and godly thing to do was to turn the other cheek, and in those times that is what He did. *When they hurled their insults at Him, he did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats.....*(1 Peter 2:23). Our problem is that many times we take Jesus' teaching literalistically rather than literally. We need the Holy Spirit to give us His wisdom.

I believe that many times anger becomes an addiction for some people. Anger releases endorphins, and it can be pleasurable for some men (and women) to go into a rage and explode with cursing and violence to torment their families. They can enjoy it.

Anger is also used by some of those in authority (husbands, fathers, mothers, bosses, military leaders, dictators) to control those under them. Remember, control is the essence of witchcraft. That is to say, it is demonic. When a spouse

controls his family with anger or manipulation, the devil is involved in that situation. Christ never controls His followers. He never enslaves us against our will. But Satan does those things. He seeks to make slaves of us for our destruction.

A couple of other observations about anger: Be careful about entering into law suits if you can avoid them. Many people sue others to enact revenge, and law suits stir up anger and bitterness. The Bible tells us to avoid them.

Beware of feeding your anger. I will not listen to certain people on radio or television, such as Rush Limbaugh, Michael Savage, Keith Olbermann, Ed Schultz, Rachel Maddow. These people spew poison and vitriol. They don't pretend to be loving and compassionate. They are part of the problem in our society. We need to know that God is not a Republican or a Democrat, and the right political party is not going to bring the Kingdom of God to our nation. Jesus refused to allow the Jews to make him their earthly King, but many Christians have the notion that political power is the answer to our problems. The problem is with the church, with believers. Let us all meditate on 2 Chronicles 7:14. ***If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.***

Anger is an emotion. Rightly used, it is intended to heal our relationships. The wrong kind of anger is to be repented of. Colossians 3:8 tells us, *Rid yourselves of anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.* We are to crucify the flesh and suffocate these sins. When we feel anger start to rise up, we can pause and say "No! I will no longer fall back into those destructive patterns."

Anger is sometimes a spirit, a demon. Satan can attach himself to any of our human emotions and start to control us. That is his nature and his strategy. In these cases the demonic spirit of anger, hatred, revenge and murder is to be cast out by the authority of Christ. Two years ago at the Dream Center in Hollywood I ministered to a lady who told me she had been married to a pastor for 30 years. He was a bitter man who was filled with anger and who exploded into rage and cursing at the least provocation. He died at age 48. Two years before he died she had a dream. She saw a demon sitting on a wood stove and her husband was regularly putting wood into the stove. (He was feeding the anger, feeding the demon. He was controlling the situation.) The lady shared the dream with her husband. He deeply repented and they commanded that spirit of anger to leave. She said her husband became free and the last two years of his life were beautiful.

This is an extremely important subject, and I suggest a time of reflection and prayer.

COUNTRY PREACHING

I heard about a long-winded country preacher who got carried away one Sunday and went on and on. He paused to take a drink and looked at his watch. A man in the back said, "Preacher, if your watch has stopped, there is a calendar on the wall over here."

GOOD SHEPHERD VISIT

I was super blessed to attend a missionary get together on the week of February 20th at Good Shepherd Church in Loveland, the church I formerly pastored (or pestered).

Once every three years they bring "home" their missionaries from all around the world for a week of fellowship, prayer, good food, and fun. Among those who attended was Marcel Destine, who is a pastor and apostle in Haiti. He has started 12 churches and 8 schools. He invited me to come and hold a seminar with his leaders during this coming September, and Lord willing I am planning to go.

Another of the missionary couples serves in a Muslim country in Asia. They have beautiful spirits and a beautiful family. They could at the whim of their government be put in prison, or worse, at any moment. Jacob (not his real name) told us an amazing story: This past September he and two other pastors, one American and one African, went to hold a big meeting of pastors in Nigeria. There is much witchcraft there, and they heard that many curses were being placed against them and their meeting. They stayed in a hotel, and when they looked in their closet there were six huge snails, each as big as your fist. Someone told them that these were "snails of death" that had been placed as a curse on them. Yikes! The snails of death! The African pastor, Pastor Daniel, pointed at them and cursed them, and after a few hours they looked in the closet again and the snails had fallen over and were shriveling up. (I want that guy on my team!)

The next day they went to the big conference. There were 2,500 pastors there from all over Africa. They were from many denominations, and a few were in robes and big hats, like the Pope. There were also television cameras from many news stations in Africa. This was a big deal! Pastor Jacob and his friends felt under a lot of pressure. On the first day, only an hour or so into the meeting, a woman screamed. A big man, named Charles Chejma, had stood up, grabbed his chest, and fell over dead. There were medical people in the meeting who examined him and confirmed that he was gone. They carried the man to a room downstairs and laid him out on a table.

One of the pastors on the platform came over and whispered to Pastor Jacob, "This is very bad. This is going out to the whole nation, and we are going to look bad. It looks like the witches have ruined our meeting." He also said he was afraid there might be a riot of some sort and they had better be ready to get out of there fast. In the meantime, Pastor Daniel went downstairs and started praying for the man. After about thirty minutes the man opened his eyes, sat up, and asked what had happened. Pastor Daniel led him by the hand upstairs and onto the platform. The congregation erupted in shouts of praise and joy to God. Hundreds of pastors rushed forward in tears, cast themselves on the floor, and started repenting. The preachers in big hats also came forward and said they wanted to accept Jesus as their Savior.

That's what I call church!

WAYS GOD SPEAKS (Quoted, in part, from Robert Morris)

Listed below are some of the ways God speaks:

1. Through the Bible.
2. Through circumstances. (Jonah and the storm.)
3. Through counsel. (Book of Proverbs, and other Bible passages.)
4. Through peace. (Phil. 4:7, Col. 3:15)
5. Through prophets. (Acts 21:11)
6. Through other people. Think of Joab, David's army commander..
7. Through dreams and visions. (Solomon, Joseph in the OT, Joseph in the NT, Peter, John, Paul, etc.)
8. Through thoughts. (Amos 4:13, Matt. 1:20) But beware; the devil can also put thoughts in one's mind, as well as dreams.)
9. Through natural manifestations. Thunder, water, rainbows.
10. Through super manifestations. Burning bush, fleece, bright lights.
11. Through miracles, healings, signs and wonders.
12. Through preaching, teaching, witnessing.

It takes HUMILITY to hear God speak. Jesus warned, *Take heed how you hear!* We must be teachable, meek, and submissive. If there is pride in your life, God will stop speaking. God always speaks to build His Kingdom, not our kingdom. In Genesis 37 God spoke in a dream to Joseph when he was a young man. The dream was from God, but Joseph's reaction, boasting about his father and brothers bowing down to him, was not from God. God apparently did not speak to Joseph for many years after that, until Joseph became meek and submissive.

Sometimes people say, "I haven't heard from God for a long time." Examine your life. Go back to the last thing God said to you and see if you obeyed him. Why should God speak to you if you are going to ignore Him or disobey Him? In both Mark and Luke, Jesus said (paraphrase): "If I speak to you and you do what I say, I will speak more to you. If not, I won't speak any more to you." You may need to ask God to forgive you and start obeying Him.

Jesus said that all His followers could hear His voice: *My sheep hear My voice.* Value His voice. We can instantly recognize the voice of our spouse or a good friend. Can you instantly recognize His voice? Set aside a time, read and meditate on the Bible, and practice listening. Make your relationship with your Lord Jesus Christ and with your Heavenly Father your highest priority! We are not just seeking information from God, we are seeking Him! Seek His presence. He created us for this.

RECOGNIZE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WORDS IN THE BIBLE

Types of the church: Israel, Zion, Daughter of Zion, City, God's people, Mother, Daughter, Woman, Judah, Jacob, Bride.

Synonyms for Demons: Adversary, thief, lion, beasts of the field, birds of the air, scorpions, serpents, darkness, Chaldeans, wolves, mighty men, fowlers, eagles, foxes, arm of the flesh.

Manifestations of the demonic or of works of the devil: Terror, calamity, distress, violence, roar, waves of the sea, floods.

Every story in the Bible is multi-dimensional: (1) Natural (2) Nation (3) Church (4) Present (5) Future (6) End times.

Blessings to you all,

Glenn

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