

Deliverance from anger

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In the verses that we are about to read, Jesus is speaking to Christians who are carrying resentment and anger against a brother or sister without a cause. He said that such an attitude was putting them in danger of being judged by God. Jesus said that when, within a congregation, a person actively despises a brother or sister by speaking against them, they may need to be addressed and adjusted by the presbytery. Mat 5:22. Those who proceed further, and impugn the Christian integrity of a brother or sister without a cause, put themselves in danger of hell fire. Mat 5:22. Let us now read Matthew 5:21-26.

‘You have heard that it was said to those of old, “You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgement.”

‘But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgement. And whoever says to his brother, “Raca!” shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, “You fool!” shall be in danger of hell fire.

‘Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

‘Agree with your adversary quickly, while you are on the way with him, lest your adversary deliver you to the judge, the judge hand you over to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. Assuredly, I say to you, you will by no means get out of there til you have paid the last penny.’ Mat 5:21-26.

The blessing of salvation

The beatitudes, outlined in the Gospel of Matthew, are Christ’s summary of the steps of salvation. Mat 5:3-12. The first foundation of salvation for those who hear and receive the gospel is that God grants to them repentance. 2Ti 2:25. Repentance is an amazing gift that enables us to empty ourselves of our fallen projections as we accept that they are nothing more than lies. This is the blessing of becoming ‘poor in spirit’. The kingdom of heaven belongs to those who are poor in spirit, because they are born to see the kingdom. Mat 5:3. Joh 3:3.

A person who has become poor in spirit sees their sinful condition, and mourns. This is the second foundation of salvation. Mat 5:4. We mourn for the injuries that we have caused the Son of God to suffer as a consequence of our sin; and we mourn for the loss of our sonship. Jesus said that comfort is the blessing that belongs to those who mourn. Mat 5:4. This is the comfort that the Holy Spirit ministers to us as He turns our mourning into fellowship in the travail of Christ. Joh 14:16. Rom 8:26-27. In this fellowship, we are being delivered from sin and the other law, and are able to fulfil the works of righteousness that belong to our sonship in Christ.

The desire to live in the reality of our baptism into the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to maintain an ongoing fellowship in the body and blood of Jesus, is the expression of

faith that belongs to those who are meek, and who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Mat 5:5-6. As we abide in Christ, and He abides in us, our heart is being changed, because the frailties of our spirit are being healed, and the other law is being removed from our life through the circumcision of Christ. Col 2:11-12. We are blessed because we are fulfilling the will of God for our life, and are obtaining the inheritance of our sonship. This is what Jesus meant when He said, 'They shall inherit the land.' Mat 5:5.

Continue in the light

What we believe, and how we live, are essential to having an assurance of eternal life. 1Jn 3:19. 1Jn 5:13. Those who have heard and received the gospel have accepted that salvation from sin and self-centredness is an essential requirement for entry into heaven. They are able to testify that this is being accomplished in their lives, because they are demonstrating the divine nature as those who have been born of God's life. Significantly, other members of the body of Christ are also able to bear witness to this life within them. Psa 116:18-19. Heb 13:17.

A person is able to walk on this pathway that leads to life as they continue to receive the counsel that proceeds from the presbytery. The apostle John revealed that this counsel addresses what is true and what is a lie; what is spiritual and what is carnal; what is illumination and what is self-deception; what is of Christ and what is of antichrist. 1Jn 2:27. 1Jn 1:7-8. 1Jn 4:3. Those who receive and walk in the light of this counsel maintain their fellowship with the presbytery, which is the fellowship of the Father and the Son. 1Jn 1:3.

Anger and the judgement of God

Following His proclamation of the beatitudes, the first issue that Jesus addressed in relation to the Christian pilgrimage was *anger*. Mat 5:21. He spoke of three grades, or levels, of anger. The *first* level is anger against a brother or sister '*without a cause*'. Mat 5:22. To be angry without a cause means that a person has no valid reason for their discrimination against their brother or sister. The motivation for their anger is, therefore, imaginary, sick or wicked. It is based on the judgements that they make of others from the basis of their knowledge of good and evil. Those who judge in this manner identify and communicate the reasons for their anger as though they are facts.

Anger without a cause develops into a *second* phase. The angry person speaks to, or about, their brother or sister with a humiliating tone, describing them as 'empty-headed and worthless'. This is the meaning of the Chaldean word 'raca'. Jesus used this term to encapsulate the way in which an angry individual speaks about the person they despise and have made their adversary. Mat 5:22.

On the basis of their judgements, the angry person believes that ending their relationship with their brother or sister is justified. This relational disconnection may involve limiting their interactions to superficial pleasantries, withdrawing from relationship with their brethren, and eventually leaving the fellowship of the church altogether. When a person isolates themselves from fellowship in this manner, they are being imprisoned by their own fallen, judgemental practices.

The *third* level of this same anger involves calling a brother a 'fool'. Mat 5:22. In this scenario, the word 'fool' has a specific application. It is used to describe the folly of wickedness. It is the same as saying, 'you rebel against God', or 'you apostate'. In so

doing, the fundamental motives and integrity of the person being spoken against are impugned, and they are maligned as being evil and wicked.

Jesus said that such behaviour springs from a murderous motive. Mat 5:21. Those who continue among us, maintaining this kind of behaviour, are putting themselves in grave danger. In fact, Jesus said that they were in danger of 'hell fire'. Mat 5:22.

The judgement seat of Christ

Speaking about life after death, the apostle Paul said that 'while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord'. 2Co 5:6. He then said, 'We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.' 2Co 5:8. Because this was Paul's attitude toward life, he testified that, whether present or absent, his one ambition was to be well-pleasing to the Lord. Paul said this, knowing that we all will be scrutinised before Christ's judgement seat.

When we appear before the judgement seat of Christ, our true character will be revealed, and we will reap the results of the life that we have lived in the body - whether good or worthless. 2Co 5:9-10. To the reprobate, Christ will say, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.' Mat 25:41. They will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous will enter into eternal life. Mat 25:46.

Knowing the implications of the judgement of the Lord, and having received the fear that is inspired by the Lord, Paul endeavoured to win people to his position. 2Co 5:11. Paul's position was to know Christ and Him crucified. 1Co 2:2. This meant being born of God and being joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings as a member of His body.

Leave your gift at the altar

Although we may be aware of the anger of others towards us, it is important that we heed the instruction of the apostle Paul who said, 'Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts.' 1Co 4:5. It is the Lord Himself who comes to judge matters at an hour that we do not expect. Mat 24:44.

That said, Jesus did address those who were angry, saying, 'Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.' Mat 5:23-24.

Jesus was addressing the person who presumes to exercise some spiritual gift in the church, while harbouring anger in their heart towards a brother or a sister. Even though the brother or sister heeds Paul's instruction and does not judge the matter themselves, they will be aware of the anger that is directed towards them. They will know that they have been called 'raca', or 'fool'. In this regard, they have something against the angry person that they can bring before the Lord, who is the Judge. Mat 5:25.

Jesus was clear that the angry individual needs to restore relationship with those who have something against them; otherwise, the exercise of their gift in the name of the Lord will be nothing more than dead works. We note the words of Jesus, 'Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your

name, and done many wonders in Your name?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practise lawlessness!" ' Mat 7:22-23.

Jesus said that if an angry person 'remembers', or is illuminated to see, their anger towards a brother, they are to leave their gift at the altar and first be reconciled with their brother. Mat 5:23-24. He said that this will involve *agreeing* with their adversary *quickly*. Mat 5:25. The beginning point for their recovery to fellowship is to humble themselves and to accept that their own perspective, from which they are judging others, is not the truth. It is in darkness. This is the reason for their disagreement with those who are in the light. 2Co 6:14.

A person who humbles themselves in this regard is *granted* repentance so that they may not remain a captive of the devil. This was Paul's point when he wrote, 'A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.' 2Ti 2:24-26.

The example of Paul

The conversion of the apostle Paul provides a helpful example of deliverance from anger. Prior to his conversion, Paul exemplified the anger spoken of by Jesus. His judgements of Christians were based on his own knowledge of good and evil. His murderous endeavours were his attempts to extinguish what he viewed to be an evil sect within the religious Jewish society. Php 3:6. Act 8:3. Act 9:1-2.

Paul was travelling to Damascus with the intention of jailing all those who were 'of the Way'. Act 9:1-3. However, after he met Christ, when the light shone around him and he heard Christ speak to him, his true condition was revealed. When he arose from the ground, he was blind; his true condition was a prison of darkness.

In his prison house, Paul was in torment. We know this because Jesus said to Paul that it was hard for him to kick against the 'goads'. Act 9:5. The goads were the word of the cross that was proclaimed to Paul when he persecuted Christ's disciples. Through their fellowship in the sufferings of Christ, as members of His body, Christ was being portrayed as crucified before the eyes of Paul. Gal 3:1. The increasingly unhinged rage, and the murderous threats that he made against Christians, were expressions of the psychological pain that Paul was experiencing under the judgement of God. He was in darkness, and under judgement, because he rejected the word of truth that was being ministered to him through their testimonies.

A person who rejects the word of the cross that is proclaimed by the messengers of Christ, and leans on their own understanding, chooses the way of darkness. 1Jn 2:11. Pro 3:5-6. They find no forgiveness or deliverance from sin, yet believe that they are without sin. 1Jn 1:8. For example, Paul said that, prior to his conversion, he considered himself to be blameless in relation to God's Law. Php 3:6. John explained that because of a person's deluded presumption in relation to sin, they make God a liar, and His word, which is proclaimed from the presbytery, is not in them. 1Jn 1:10.

Their rejection of fellowship with those who proclaim the word, and with those who are receiving this word, reveals their true predicament - *they are in captivity*. They have become prisoners of their own fallen judgements of the word and of the messengers who

have the word of the cross in their mouths. This is the word that, when received, can set the captive free. Luk 4:18.

The sinful passions, or emotions, that are aroused within them when they hear the word reveal that they are in the flesh. Rom 7:5. John said that these emotions, particularly the angry dismissal of those who minister the word of truth, demonstrate that they hate their brother. They remain in darkness, walking on a pathway that leads to eternal destruction under the judgement of God. 1Jn 2:11. This was certainly Paul's experience.

Even though Christ had personally spoken to Paul, Paul's deliverance from this prison house would only be through the word of a messenger - a person whom he had intended to jail! Act 9: 6. Ananias knew that Paul was coming to bind all those who called on the name of the Lord. In this regard, he had something against Paul, and was bringing the matter to Jesus, the Judge. Mat 5:23. However, the Lord said to Ananias, 'Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.' Act 9:15-16.

Ananias addressed Paul as a 'brother'. He laid hands on Paul, connecting him to the fellowship of light from which he was speaking, and he prayed for Paul. Immediately, scales fell from Paul's eyes and he received his sight. He was baptised into Christ and began to do the works that belonged to his sonship as a member of the body of Christ. Act 9:17-20.