

DELIVERANCE FROM ANGER, AND GRACE FOR FORGIVENESS

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Introduction

Today we are going to continue our meditation on deliverance from anger and grace for forgiveness. We have considered these particular areas in the last few weeks, through this significant season. I trust that you have been blessed in this season.

I want to take time to amplify some of the elements of the ministry that have been coming to us in recent weeks.

The fruit of sonship

It is helpful to note that it has been a season during which we have been considering how *the fruit of sonship is demonstrated* in our lives.

We have been given some real help in that we have received Christ's ministry to us.

Part of this meditation has been a growing awareness of the fallen propensities that hinder us in our growth and in our fruitfulness.

Judgement and unforgiveness

Today, I would like to focus upon two particular areas.

The first is our propensity to *judge our brethren*, which leads us to become 'angry without a cause', which is a familiar phrase to us. Mat 5:22.

The second area is our *inability to forgive* unless we receive grace from Christ.

Healing and deliverance

It is clear that, unless the Lord meets us with specific *healing and deliverance* in these two areas, we will be unable to fulfil the will of God, and we will be left stranded in His offer of salvation.

We know that those who are born of God continue to mature, across their lifetime, in the expression of God's life relative to their sanctification as a son of God.

We also acknowledge that the capacity to bear the fruit of sonship in our lives is contingent upon our *ongoing deliverance* from *our darkened perspective*, which is our fallen propensity to live and resource our lives from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The condition of our hearts; the issue of anger

The Gospel of Matthew Chapter 5 is a key reading for us today. This follows the verses regarding the Beatitudes. Jesus was preaching the Sermon on the Mount.

In His sermon, Jesus drew attention to the issue of anger, and it is particularly related to the sixth commandment

He said, in effect, 'You have heard that when we become angry with our brother *without a cause*, it will provoke the same penalty as murder.' Mat 5:21-22.

Jesus made these comments to a large crowd who had gathered. He was upgrading their understanding of the Law by presenting the commandments in their proper way.

Until that point, the Jewish teachers of the time taught that the law of the sixth commandment was applicable only to external behaviours and actions, and that it forbade nothing other than the literal act of killing a person.

They laid no restraint on the inward lusts.

At first, it seemed as though Jesus was making the already impossible task of keeping the Law even more difficult.

However, Jesus was coming to proclaim the gospel in its fullness; that is, that the sons of men could be *born* of the very same life and nature as Himself.

In this way, the commandments could be fulfilled both *externally* - in our actions and behaviours - and, more significantly, *inwardly* - in our thoughts and the intent of our hearts.

Jesus was coming to declare that He was focused upon the condition of our *hearts*.

We come under judgement when we are angry with a brother

So, let us consider why the attitude of our hearts is such a focus of Christ's ministry, and why we come under judgement when we are angry with a brother.

It is helpful to note that a person does not have to literally die for them to be 'dead' to us. We could even say it this way: murder does not necessarily mean that a crime has been committed or that a funeral need be planned. We are talking now about 'murder in the heart'.

For a Christian, the 'murder' of a brother can be the culmination of a series of judgements, which progress from a poor opinion to strong dislike, right through to murderous hatred.

These are strong things to say and strong things to consider.

The consequence of this sequence is that the object of my anger - and it is my 'brother' in the example that Jesus gave us - is severed from any sincere or substantial fellowship, thus preventing the blessing of God from flowing among the members of Christ's body.

The Lord is bringing our attention to our darkened perspective

Now, this is a dramatic example, but I want us to consider and focus on perhaps the more familiar examples of this same principle.

Let us consider the 'dead spots', or we can call them the 'no-go zones', that sit within certain relationships.

I want you to consider, even as you are listening here today, what are those 'dead spots' and what are those 'no-go zones'.

They may perhaps be with your husband or wife. Perhaps they are with your children and teenage children. Perhaps they are among your friendship group in the fellowship, or in your extended family.

There are 'dead spots' that the Lord wants to bring our attention to, and show us that it is the work of judgement that is at play, and that our darkened perspective still takes a view on matters.

The Lord is providing a new way to walk so that our families can be healed

The Lord is coming to us in this season with His word.

He is providing a new way for us to walk with one another, so that our families can be healed; our households can be healed.

And what a great blessing it has been for us to receive clarity on three generations walking together. We are looking forward to seeing and understanding more in this regard.

Anger in our lives

Some who are listening today may have presumed that such a focus that was ministered to us only recently, regarding anger, was not particularly relevant to them. They are refusing any suggestion that anger with their brethren is an issue.

This is probably because our modern-day depiction of anger is more akin to rage, and this is typically associated with outbursts of wrath, leading to regrettable and damaging words and actions.

It is important that we set aside these colloquial definitions and, instead, focus on the principle that Jesus highlighted for us.

The impact of our judgements on our relationships

The Lord wants us to see that there is something new here for each of us in this season. He is drawing our attention to the impact of our *judgements*.

Those judgements are present in our marriages, in our households and extended families, and they run right on into the church.

The Lord is drawing our attention to our relationships and the way in which we relate.

He wants us to see that some of our long-held objections and 'dug-in' perspectives on certain matters, which we have imposed upon others in the name of accountable Christian living, are indeed nothing more than the *pursuit of our own goodness*.

I want you to consider how, in the context of your marriage, of your family and, of course, in the places where you fellowship, these judgements have impacted upon you and those relationships.

How have these judgements silenced meaningful and important fellowship with your wife or husband on certain topics?

How have you 'handled' your extended family by imposing upon them ways in which they are permitted or are not permitted to interact with you?

And how have you allowed unresolved family hurts to come into the church, impacting upon the cohesion of the congregation?

Sometimes we refer to 'elephants in the room'. These are those awkward points of awareness that everyone holds and is conscious of, and yet no-one speaks of them.

This is what the Lord is wanting to come and address among us at this time.

The Lord is calling us to find repentance; His love poured into our hearts

The Lord is calling us *to turn from this way* of knowing and relating to each other.

And *He is pouring His love into our hearts*, allowing the change that He desires to bring to become a reality.

We are so thankful for the season in which He is walking with us, the ministry of His life that He is pouring out toward us, and the time that He is giving us to find *repentance* and *healing* so that we can walk in a new way, and be the people whom He is making ready and prepared for what is ahead.

'Angry without a cause'

Jesus said, 'He who becomes angry with a brother without cause will be in danger of judgement [or of coming under the judgement of God].'

I want to consider two points from this statement more closely.

The first is the term, 'without a cause'. This simply means 'to take a view on a matter *without any just provocation or good cause*'.

This provokes the question, 'What constitutes a good or just cause, in the sense of becoming angry?'

Of course, most of us, in 'the heat of the battle', will think that any reason that causes us to become angry is a just cause.

Christ's anger expressed when He yearned for the hard-hearted to turn in repentance

We are actually helped in the Scriptures when we consider Christ, who did become angry at certain points.

Importantly, however, He did not sin.

His anger was the communication of displeasure so that the ultimate judgement of separation from God for all of eternity would be avoided.

Christ's expression of anger toward any person was always in relation to their *proud and disobedient conduct*, and where *He yearned* for them to turn in repentance.

We see this response of anger conveyed in the example of the hard-hearted condition of the religious leaders of the day, who preferred to keep the Sabbath rather than to prioritise the healing of a man's arm.

The book of Mark recorded it this way, referring to Jesus, 'And He looked around at them with anger, *grieved* at their hardness of heart'. Mar 3:5.

In contrast, when we are provoked to anger, our only intent is to do harm to the one whom we have judged. This is where we are moved to punish the offender, rather than to address the trivial content of their offence.

'In danger of the judgement'

The second point that I want to refer to in this key passage is in relation to *becoming angry*.

I want to connect *being angry* to *the outcome of a judgement*.

In this regard, I want to highlight the point that we have no business in judging any matter before its time.

The particular 'time' that Paul was referring to is the time in which the Lord will return: 'who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the motives of men's hearts'. 1Co 4:5.

Until that time, Jesus is emphatic on the issue of judging one another. He said, '*Do not judge* and you will not be judged. For with what judgement you judge, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.' Mat 7:1-2.

Judging a brother brings us under judgement and severs relationship

In soberness, we must accept that the consequence of judging a brother, leading to anger, is actually two-fold.

The first point is that it *brings us under judgement*, and we know that the judgement that we come under is the first of *three* steps, where the eventual step will take us to the lake of fire.

It brings me *under judgement*, and then it plots a course for the destruction of my brother, *severing any effective relationship* or ministry from him toward me.

This fallen propensity to judge is in every person, and Jesus described a three-step model in which each step contains its own penalty with increased severity, leading to hellfire.

Importantly, when a person is mercifully *illuminated* to see the folly and fate of this mode of living, they will urgently heed Christ's instructions, and will seek to be reconciled with their brother, lest the penalty for judging their brother rebound upon them.

Our self-defined value system leads us to anger and unforgiveness

So, what does it 'look like' to live from the 'wrong tree' – the tree of the knowledge of good and evil – leading us to anger and unforgiveness?

Let us consider this in a very simple example. We typically begin with a casual observation about a brother, following some kind of interaction. Perhaps it is at a dinner party, a social event, some kind of church activity; and we have reason to remember the interaction, which elicits a 'simple and harmless' opinion in us.

A silent thought forms in our mind, which designates a person to a particular 'ranking' within our self-defined value system.

It is probably worth nothing that this value system is established according to *our* notion of what we deem to be good and what we deem to be evil.

Now, most of us working with this internal value system will be generous, giving plenty of room and space for people to recover themselves if they happen to receive a 'poor' initial ranking.

Equally, we make room and give time for all things to right themselves in case someone has landed too 'high' on our ranking system – after all the system is designed to identify good and to expose evil.

Moreover, we have formed this value system in the vain belief that it will assist us in fulfilling the will of God.

Over time, such opinions are confirmed or corrected and, eventually, they reveal patterns

and traits about people that, 'helpfully' inform us regarding the manner in which we interact with them.

If a person repeatedly fails our various tests of good character, which can include trivial measures concerning their personal hygiene, conversational proficiency, fashion sense, social graces, general knowledge, employment status, marital status, parental adequacy, home-making skills, as well as their general aptitude for life, then it is likely that our opinion of them will *proceed* in further assessment and intensity.

Living according to our own darkened perspective - an enemy of God

Jesus described to us these three steps – *anger*, considering another as *raca* (or empty-head) and, finally, referring to one as a *fool*.

When we live according to this way, we are living in keeping with our own darkened perspective, believing in our own inherent goodness, and trusting our own assessments.

We have, in fact, become a law unto ourselves and, importantly, we must understand that we have become *an enemy of God*.

So great can be the delusion of this perspective that some of us might even be snared and taken captive by the Devil to do his will. 2Ti 2:26.

The account of Stephen, as recorded in the book of Acts, described how the ready ears of those who were eagerly listening became the lawless hands that took his life. Act 7:54-59.

It is sobering to think that, at the time of the end, the *love of most believers will grow cold*. Mat 24:12.

Their love will grow cold because they will prefer their own understanding, and they will trust in their own darkened perspective.

How grateful we are that the Lord is coming to us at this time. He is coming specifically to minister His love in this way.

Jesus made it clear that the very formation of an opinion about a brother is the outcome of a *judgement* from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

It is helpful for us to register that we are hopelessly addicted to this practice because we *believe that it leads to life*.

In reality, our eyes have become darkened, and we do not see as God sees.

This is not how *new creation* life works.

Seeing what is in our heart

We are told to evaluate no one according to the 'flesh', or according to our human point of view. 2Co 5:16.

We must allow this word of present truth to break in upon us, and we must not convert this word to being simply another lifestyle resource.

Rather, we must let it come so near as to allow His eyes to show us what is in our heart. I believe that the Lord, in His mercy, will show us where we have severed or silenced our brethren, and made them redundant to us, as though they are dead to us.

Mechanisms used to 'manage' relationships according to our judgements

These are the dead spots; these are the no-go zones. These are the areas and limitations that we place on our relationships, which we 'manage', and keep in place.

This is because, somewhere in the journey of life, these ones have disappointed or failed us according to our self-defined expectations.

This is not necessarily even to the point of trading harsh words or causing relational tension. Rather, it may be a simple 'note' hidden in our hearts, warning us in any future dealings with this one or that one.

We remain affable without trusting; cordial without any cost to us.

There may not be a hint of anger, and yet we are in complete breach of our sonship *accountability* to be diligent in *keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace*.

How it must grieve the Father when He sees His children living in this way!

The Father's invitation to turn from our perspective

The Lord is coming to us in this season, inviting us to *turn*.

He is inviting us to *turn from our darkened perspective*, and He is giving us *a pathway* upon which we can walk.

It is a pathway of healing; a pathway of transformation.

He is ministering His love and His faith to us at this time.

Seeking reconciliation; knowing forgiveness toward others

Where we have caused injury and damage, He is causing us to remember our offence so that we might urgently *seek reconciliation*, and that He might bring *healing* from our lameness and from any residue of our offensive ways.

Where we have been hurt, betrayed or abused, He is inviting us to cry out for grace so that we might *know the miracle of forgiveness* towards those who have abused us; and that He might bring *healing* from our lameness and from the residue of the abuse.

Compelled to love with His love poured into our hearts

The key that Jesus highlighted is that our self-righteous judgements about any brother will always run in opposition to His *love*.

The love that He pours into our hearts is the same love that the Father poured into the heart of the Son, which is utterly *compelled to love* this sin-sick world; to love even our enemies.

In this sense, every action that has the potential to unsettle and to offend us - from the mildest and most trivial, through to heinous abuse and betrayal - will never justify the relational 'amputation' of any member of Christ's body, despite their charge.

Rather, we acknowledge that He will 'teach us of His ways'. He will teach us of His ways, so that we learn how the love of God poured into our hearts works in us and through us in every circumstance.

This kind of love is found only among *the sons of God*. It is the hallmark of those who are Christ's *disciples*.

The topic of becoming angry as the product of our judgement connects us then to forgiveness, noting that unforgiveness is itself a judgement.

The worldly pursuit of vengeance for 'healing'

Recently, we considered the difference between the fallen approach of healing that is promoted in

the world, and the mercy and grace of God that is obtained in Christ.

The simple pursuit of the world is that closure is promised to a victim when they pursue vengeance and utilise the justice system, the media and the social media platforms to publicly humiliate their abuser.

Overcoming evil with good

In Christ, we have no permission to avenge ourselves, as this kind of response only demonstrates that we are overcome by evil.

Rather, Paul exhorted us to *overcome evil with good*.

He offers this example. 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him a drink.'

In Christ, there are no victims

But the most significant contrast is that, in Christ, *there are no 'victims'*.

This doesn't mean that Christians are shielded from tragedies, from abuse and betrayal, or from treacherous dealings.

Rather, it means that these events in our lives never become our *definition*.

Joined to His offering and sufferings, we receive His resurrection life

This is because we are *joined to His offering* and *sufferings*, and are crucified with Him daily.

We are *putting off* 'the old man' with the old responses, and are *putting on* Christ, who is being formed in us daily.

Thus, we are *learning to love as He loves*.

In this faith, He connects us to the wounding events that He suffered. And, as we suffer as an obedient son of God, His resurrection life is given to us.

In this way, as we suffer in fellowship with Him, we know that Christ is progressively *healing* us.

Withdrawing in unbelief brings us under judgement

When we *withdraw from His offering in unbelief*, and attempt to regain control of our lives, we risk defining ourselves as a victim of abuse.

When we do this, we revert to our own *darkened perspective*, and begin to view our circumstances from the point of view of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

If we revert to this former way, we will again *judge* the circumstances that *were* actually ministering life to us.

Additionally, we will see them as being unjust and as unfair, which brings us back under judgement.

The book of Galatians recorded that 'the just shall live by faith'. Gal 3:11.

We know that faith comes by hearing, and that hearing comes by the word of Christ. This is the result of living according to the truth of the tree of life.

But, if any man draws back from the way of faith; if any man draws back from being sustained by the tree of life, Christ's soul has no pleasure in him. Heb 10:38.

Christ took our abuse and suffering upon Himself

It is only *the word of the cross* that can set us free from *this perspective*.

When we come to Christ, we must acknowledge that He took all of the abuses that we would suffer across our lifetime, and He made those abuses to be His abuse.

He also took all of the suffering that we would cause others, and He made those to be His sufferings.

Furthermore, He *forgave* all those who trespass against Him; and, of course, that was us.

Our salvation, then, is dependent upon every person looking upon Christ and being illuminated to know that He was crucified *for* us, and that He was crucified *by* us.

When we think of His being crucified 'for' us, we know of His great *healing*.

And when we consider His being crucified 'by' us, we see the demonstration of His great *forgiveness*.

The love of God poured in

This is the love of God being poured into our heart, and enabling us to love our enemies just as He loved us while we were still enemies.

The same miraculous love is, of course, the example we see demonstrated by Ananias in his ministry to Paul.

Illumination, and our response to seek reconciliation

Let's consider the example of a person in the church who has offered themselves to serve in one of the church programs, according to their gift from Christ. They have a job to do, and there is a clear witness that this is true, but it must be according to their *sanctification*.

As this brother sets out to begin this work, bringing his gift to the altar, the Lord mercifully illuminates his heart to remember that he has committed a crime, causing deep and profound damage to a person in the church - a 'brother'.

He has sinned against this person, and so his brother has something against him.

Jesus explained that the proper response in this matter is to leave his gift at the altar, motivating his ministry, and to go and be reconciled to that person, according to an accountable pathway of genuine and considered care for the person.

At a practical level, the offending brother will report himself to the appropriate authorities.

This is because he has accepted that there are consequences to his actions and that, with a heart for *reconciliation*, he will need to abide by the laws of the land as they relate to his breach in relationship.

Importantly, when a son of God is illuminated to the harm that they have caused, their deep desire is to remain a participant in the communion meal in a worthy manner.

'Worthiness' for this offender is to be *reconciled* with every member of Christ's body, including those who have been injured or defrauded by their actions.

We have been instructed by Christ to seek reconciliation with our brother *urgently*. The term 'urgently' means that there is no need for discussion about the offence. There is no dispute needed, because we have already been illuminated to see our accountable contribution, and so are able to *confess our fault* in the matter.

In this regard, we have faith to participate in the reconciliatory process, which does not involve merely an apology; it is, in fact, *a confession of faith*.

The process of reconciliation and healing

In writing to the church in Ephesus, Paul instructed, 'Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labour, working with his hands doing what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.' Eph 4:28.

When an offender seeks reconciliation, they will be *illuminated* to see the need to do so, and will be *motivated* to appropriately meet that need - be it a paid debt or the receiving of a penalty, which is exemplified in the response of Zacchaeus.

Jesus said that this response also addresses the likelihood of the offender coming under judgement or, worse still, being imprisoned because of their offence.

The matter now rests with those who are injured by the offender's actions.

The first thing to note is that the victim *will not be healed* by the jailing of the offender.

The victim will only be *healed* as they bring the matter to the Father to *find grace to forgive the offender* his debt.

Otherwise, the victim themselves will be captive to and defined by this abuse for the rest of their days.

Forgiveness, not retribution

We said before that the media and popular culture promote a secular narrative that pursues *the humiliation of the offender*, including the exacting of justice as a means to finding healing.

Such an approach is simply *retribution*.

This approach also *celebrates the victim*, provides them with a voice, and gives them their day in court, with the presumption that the conquering of the offender in this way will provide healing.

The pursuit of 'an eye for an eye' will never bring closure or true healing.

Jesus taught His disciples that the only response that will bring healing is *the action of forgiveness*.

'Forgive us our debts as we forgive those who trespass against us.' Mat 6:12.

Unforgiveness

It is clear that, unless the victim receives these difficult circumstances as being from the hand of the Lord, they will be further damaged as they persist with the judgement of the offender.

The damage associated with *unforgiveness* can be understood in two ways.

Either the victim will internalise their unresolved anger, which will very likely lead to depression and significant emotional, and even clinical, distress; or their anger will be converted to a cynical and defensive mindset, which results in the 'biting and devouring' of those who come too close.

Both responses are in fact the judgement of God already running on the matter. This is because the sin of unforgiveness is itself unforgiveable, being sourced from the wrong tree.

This is not an option for a son of God. Thus, in love, God will bring us under judgement in the hope that we might humble ourselves and turn in repentance to the Lord, so that we see as He sees and love as He loves.

Being joined to Christ's suffering

How does this work?

Christ comes to take our suffering.

Christ says to us, 'It's now Mine; all of your pain is Mine; I am suffering it. All of your suffering is now with Me. It's now My suffering. You are sharing it now with Me.'

As we are joined to this suffering, His life is being poured out upon us, and we learn to overcome sin in this way.

In this example, it means that we will learn to overcome the anger, the fury, the vengeance; in fact, we can overcome everything that is a reaction to the abuse, noting that all of these reactions are, in reality, sin.

None of us are justified in any way to maintain these reactions, because none of these reactions are 'righteous anger'. Left unaddressed, these sinful reactions will take us out into the lake of fire.

These are sober considerations.

Abuse - our reproach against the Father

While professional counsellors may be able to provide help to the individual to talk about the matters, and to support and teach them how to re-engage in certain parts of their life, it will never provide them with complete healing.

We heard last week that Christ has joined the abused person, noting that the offender who abused them is actually abusing Christ.

These abuses describe the *reproaches* that are all against the *Father*.

Importantly, Christ gathered up these reproaches as part of His offering journey.

As the soldiers were nailing Him to the cross, Christ said, concerning all of these abuses - both the abuses that we have received, and the abuses that we have put upon another - 'Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.'

This is what Jesus is saying right now among us.

Learning and knowing forgiveness

Once He has joined you in your suffering, He asks the Father to forgive us all. This is the work of the Advocate, and He is doing that with each of us right now.

Jesus wants each of us to join Him so that we can learn to relinquish our perceived right to maintain our opinion. To let that go is the key regarding how we are forgiven.

The key to our forgiveness is that *we learn to forgive*.

Any residual unresolved anger and offence then becomes an abuse of Christ because, in the end, our anger is against God.