

## About Angry Heart or Tranquil Mind?

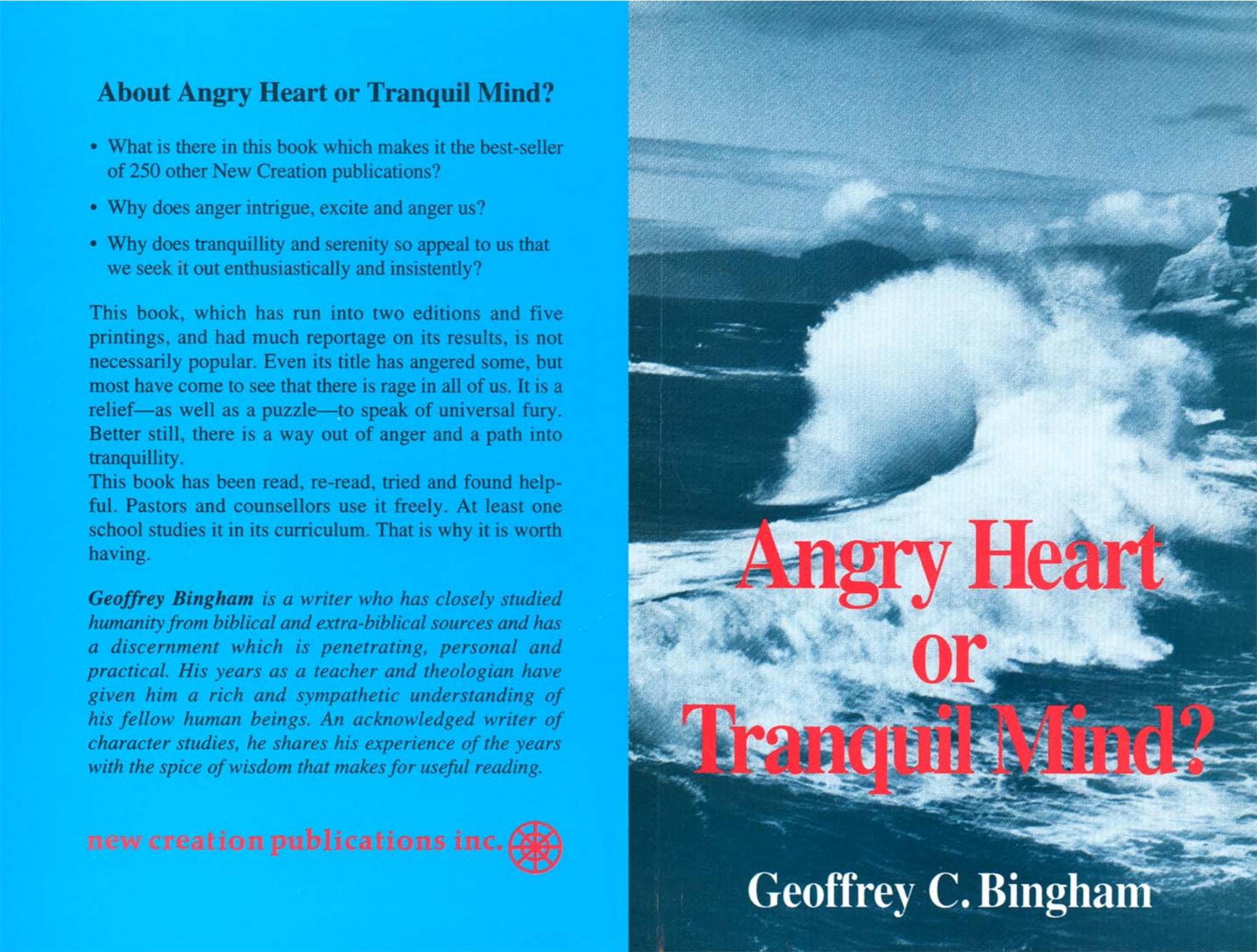
- What is there in this book which makes it the best-seller of 250 other New Creation publications?
- Why does anger intrigue, excite and anger us?
- Why does tranquillity and serenity so appeal to us that we seek it out enthusiastically and insistently?

This book, which has run into two editions and five printings, and had much reportage on its results, is not necessarily popular. Even its title has angered some, but most have come to see that there is rage in all of us. It is a relief—as well as a puzzle—to speak of universal fury. Better still, there is a way out of anger and a path into tranquillity.

This book has been read, re-read, tried and found helpful. Pastors and counsellors use it freely. At least one school studies it in its curriculum. That is why it is worth having.

*Geoffrey Bingham is a writer who has closely studied humanity from biblical and extra-biblical sources and has a discernment which is penetrating, personal and practical. His years as a teacher and theologian have given him a rich and sympathetic understanding of his fellow human beings. An acknowledged writer of character studies, he shares his experience of the years with the spice of wisdom that makes for useful reading.*

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# Angry Heart or Tranquil Mind?

Geoffrey C. Bingham

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*Geoffrey Bingham*

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## ***Angry Heart or Tranquil Mind***

### **An Introductory Essay**

To study anger is to come a little too close to home for comfort. There is safety in railing against the sins of others, but we all know anger, little or much, rarely or often. We live in an angry world in which violence and vandalism are obvious social examples. At the individual level, anger is thought to be a crucial element in many psychosomatic disorders, central in most marital conflict, and a key to understanding much depression. Whether we suffer from its expression or its repression, we know that anger is a powerful force in human nature.

It is common to find explanations within our own frustrations, in disappointed relationships, in the circumstances of our daily lives, the traumas of our past or the biological disturbances of the present. Without denying the relevance of such factors, Geoff Bingham goes behind such human explanations to set anger in a much more profound context.

By undertaking the unusual task of a theological exposition of anger, he is able to set our human words and emotions within the framework of God's purposes for us in creation and salvation.

By a series of contrasts we are shown the anger of sinful men set over against God's grace. The almost paradoxical 'righteous anger' of God shows that it can be properly experienced and expressed, yet most often we are most angry when least righteous.

***Summary of Contents***

The spiritual antidotes for anger are fully developed. While love is not the antithesis of anger, it nonetheless can serve to heal. So, too, the peace of God is set over against our warring nature. So we progress not only to *coping with* but on to *release from* anger. This is of course no clinical textbook written to provide cookbook solutions. Each chapter is firmly embedded in the great themes of Scripture, so that our petty anger with our neighbour is linked back to a more fundamental anger before God. A very full use of Scripture by way of illustration and explanation means that the text serves as a meditation in its own right. The final chapters turn away from anger to themes of peace and pleasure, that is, God's will for the whole person.

There is psychological and spiritual benefit to be derived from a deep understanding of the well-springs of anger, and even more to be gained from finding that our anger can be transformed into tranquillity.

*Dr. John H. Court, Associate Professor of Psychology,  
Flinders University of S.A.*

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***PREFACE*****ANGER FOR EVER**

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**AN ECONOMIC PREFACE FOR THOSE WHO WISH  
TO AVOID READING THE ENTIRE BOOK**

In these days of digest-thinking, writers should provide a précis of their books. If this were included in the preface or foreword, it would do a rich service to readers. Instead of reading the volume, they would simply read the preface. They could then put down the book.

Doubtless some people would object to this simplistic method of getting over the author's ideas. They would say, 'Why then write a book?' The writer's answer would be, 'To authenticate the preface, of course. How could you possibly have a preface without a book? It would be even more ridiculous than having a book without a preface.'

The advantage of such a preface would be that the reader could decide whether or not he cared to read the book. Perhaps the very preface would suffice, especially if the author were to cover most briefly the material which he had expanded in his book. Having obtained the essence of the matter, the reader could put down the volume with a sigh. His conscience would be clear, his mind informed, and his time saved. What a way to become informed!

In fact the writer of this book is a trifle self-conscious about what he has done in writing a book on anger. He

searched in vain to find a similar volume.<sup>1</sup> This meant he had to do his own research. Bible dictionaries and encyclopaedia certainly yielded helpful objective material on the subject, but on the whole not a great deal has been written on the subjective experience of anger in man and the effects of wrath upon him, ie. God's wrath and his own. Hence the embarrassing fact is that most that is written in this book has come out of his own meditation; meditation, of course, which was aided by reading the Scriptures.

In non-biblical disciplines of psychology, psychiatry and psychotherapy there is no lack of material on anger. However, most of it is analytical and diagnostic. There is little prescription for its healing. The writer decided to treat the subject as biblically as he knew how.

This volume now written ought to have been slim—thin, in fact. The less one knows, the more one writes. Yet even this aberration has its value. It means that constant repetition (of which the writer is deeply self-conscious) may cause some vagrant penny (somewhere) to drop! A reader may even recognise that he is a man of anger. He may even discover he is a man of chronic anger. Doubtless he will not only be surprised, but also quite shocked. To discover one's anger may be traumatic, yet to find the way out of anger will doubtless be rewarding. Also it could be liberating.

The purpose of this preface is, sincerely, to save persons reading further. If they grasp the brief outline of the book, then they may be grateful for not having to read further. However, by the same token, it may encourage some to read all the book. They may even be angry with the writer's thesis, and set out—angrily—to disprove it. The writer, being a mild person, will not at all mind a disproof of his material. He would welcome it—if, of course, the disproof could be substantiated.

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<sup>1</sup> Since completing this volume the author has discovered a title, *Guilt, Anger and God. The Patterns of Our Discontent* (C. F. Allison, Seabury Press Inc., USA

Well then, let us get to the heart of the matter. It is as follows.

1. Rarely will a person be found who is not, at one time or another—and maybe habitually—prone to anger.
2. Anger is generally roused by realising that things are not as the person wishes them to be. (Cars, lawn-mowers and other gadgets are not, in fact, temperamental)
3. This anger will be either righteous (a rare species), because an injustice has been done, or wrong anger, because conditions have not been favourable.
  4. Man does not realise he is, as a sinner, out of kilter with God, with His creation, and (thus) with himself. *He thinks all things are out of kilter which do nor conform with his own ideal or image of what they ought to be*
5. Man in harmony with all things is the person of tranquil mind. He who is not in this harmony, but seeks to establish his own ideas, will end up with 'boiling bowels'.
6. Irrational anger will motivate (incite) to guilt, and so to further anger. Hatred, malice, jealousy and envy are all bedfellows in these situations. They compound themselves, by nature of the case. They increase anger.
7. Anger, we imagine, can be handled either by ventilating it or suppressing it. This is not so. Anger must be cleansed from w, and its causes must be destroyed, neutralised or cancelled. Only God can do this. He does it by the revelation and impact of his love. Love destroys guilt and fear, and so releases a human person into love. Love is cathartic of anger. When love fills, anger is expelled.

8. Positively, love not only expels, but acts as a prophylaxis against future anger. Human beings live in a world which brings its pressures and stresses to bear on the human spirit. Anger seems reasonable enough under such strains. However, union with God and his love relieves from undue tension. A person is quieted when his conscience is at peace.

9. Every believing person lives under grace, ie. the grace of redemption. There are also means of grace whereby he is kept buoyant in grace. Prayer, the sacraments, fellowship, service and worship—with such things as sharing life, fasting and meditation—help one to live continuously in grace. It is true that ‘the way of a man is not in himself’, but it is equally true that ‘the way of a man is in union with God’.

10. Liberation from anger brings peace and the ability to enjoy pleasure. It helps one to enjoy creation, God, and good humour.

Our conclusion, then, is that a man can be freed of anger, and kept from anger. Of course, he will have to work at it, but then he may habituate himself to live freely, and so free of wrong anger. The believer has been told that because of his Cross-and-Resurrection union with Christ (in baptism), he can put off, or put away, sin. Anger, clamour and malice have been nominated as elements of this sin.

Positively, he has been told that the love of God has been poured into his heart. This love has cast out fear. The man comes to reconciliation with God, the creation, and with his fellow creatures, even if the latter do not always wish to come to reconciliation with him. No longer deliberately (or unconsciously) out of kilter with all things, a person can live at harmony with the truth, even in a sinful world. When such a person co-operates with God in his plan for creation, the

sense of well-being is enlarged. Sharing the suffering of the universe does not make for anger but for true peace of being. The reader of this preface must now make up his mind. Will he read further, and into the book, and pick up more details, or has he had enough, in this preface, to keep his mind on the matter? Of course, each must decide. Whatever the decision, let it be no cause for unnecessary anger!

Proverbs 14:30 gives the essence of the book:

*‘A tranquil mind gives life to the flesh,  
but passion rots the bones.’*

*Geoffrey Bingham, Coromandel,  
1981*

## **PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION**

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It is a pleasure to write a second preface. I was agreeably surprised at the reception accorded to the first edition. It sold remarkably well, yet it was the response to the message of the book which was pleasing. In fact I could write another volume on the negative reactions and positive responses. Listeners to a talk-back radio session were indignant at my statement that 'most of us are angry people'. One said, 'I am not an angry person, but when I hear the writer say that we are angry people, then I get really angry' ! Later the same person confessed that the book had come to change her life. Another said, 'When I read it I wanted to rush out into the middle of the road and shout to everyone, 'Stop! Listen! Everyone must read this book!' These examples of response are most gratifying.

What is clear to me is that the book scratched where people itched. I am sure the itch is universal. That is why I would like to rewrite the volume, especially because I have derived further insights, both from Scripture and the reading of articles which have appeared since the first edition was written. Unfortunately the pressure of time and circumstances have not allowed me to rewrite the book. I have simply inserted new material and changed or modified (and even qualified) material in the first edition.

In the couple of years interim between the publication of

the first and second editions, I have become convinced that no human being is without anger. Some, remarkably enough, appear to lack anger, but I am sure it is only because of the grace of God. Anger is primarily against God. In the order of things it is also against another (or others) and against oneself. For this reason I consider the rooting out of wrong anger from one's life to be of enormous benefit. When we examine the context of relationships which even one person has, then we can see the far-reaching benefits that will result from that one person putting off anger and putting on tranquillity.

What surprised me was the number of folk—including some fine clergy friends—who said to me, 'You could have dedicated that book to me.' Some of them had not consciously thought of themselves as having anger, much less being angry persons, but the book certainly revealed the facts to them. The richness of their confessions included their liberation from chronic states of anger. In one sense there is no conclusive and irreversible release from anger. The command to love is perpetual, both in its being given and being lived. Likewise, the putting off of anger is an imperative and not an option. Having had a definitive release from the tyranny of angry living, one keeps at it.

In re-reading the book I was surprised—and more than a trifle mortified—to find the complication of overmuch detail, especially in the area of maintaining oneself in continuing release from anger. I should have written it in less detail, and much more simply. Even so, I believe it will repay any persistent reader for the time given to studying it. More simple souls will lightly scan chapters fourteen to eighteen, read chapter nineteen, and then ask themselves whether they wish to read the section on living in pleasure and peace (chapters twenty to twenty-three). The final chapter, entitled 'Second Thoughts on Anger', may prove to be useful reading.

I trust, then, that this revised volume may prove to be helpful. Something in us feels guilty with anger, especially if it

is uncontrollable. Something, too, is powerfully attracted towards tranquillity. Tranquillity is by no means a sedative. It can be the source of dynamic and purposive action. It can be very creative.

*Geoffrey Bingham, Coromandel,  
1984.*

***The Anger***

There is the anger,  
Boiling inwardly, the seething  
Of the high outrage,  
The indignant scream  
Of the outraged spirit,  
The scandal of God  
Calling for the high indignation  
Of the noble human.

Pull out the dossiers,  
Hold high the files,  
The computation  
Of righteous man.  
His keen gaze,  
His discerning spirit  
Has discovered the scandal,  
The scandal of the indolent  
God, the God of carelessness,  
Uncaring and indifferent,  
Whilst caring man  
Cares on.

So runs the theme.  
So, too, runs the deceit,  
The high hypocrisy,  
The unfathomable guile  
Of the human spirit.  
Counter to authority

Let the statistics run high,  
Let the *apologia* develop,  
Excusing man  
From unholy rebellion.

How high is God that man,  
Seething with the injustice,  
Sure of the evil, high-minded,  
Noble beyond measure  
Should indict the Eternal?  
Search if you will and discover  
What evil God has done  
And not man and devils  
And man with devils.

Uncensored spirit—  
Spirit of justice—  
Run wild in the veins  
And arteries of man.  
Man the unjust, the selfish,  
The cruel and avaricious.  
This is the man who condemns,  
Who mounts his heady rostrums,  
Pronouncing *mishpat*<sup>1</sup>  
And powerful panaceas  
To self-adoring man.

High is the humanism,  
Yet higher the statistics  
Of the judge, the *anthropos*  
Become god. He knows. He knows  
The good and the evil,  
The right and the wrong,

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Hebrew: righteousness, justice, true government.

## The Anger

The way the Deity should work.  
He knows, alone, the Way,  
And the things that should be.

Hold high the dignity,  
Reverence the ability,  
Marvel at the wisdom,  
And decry not the judgement.  
Give honour to man  
In his judgement of God.  
God is in the dock.  
Let all angels stand silent  
In the presence of man!

Down in the spirit,  
In the deep gut  
Bubbles and boils  
The unending anger.  
Father Cain has decreed  
The Abels must perish  
In the cause of justice.  
All prophets of God  
Must desist from their  
Foolish vindication  
Of the Eternal.

Hold high the cup  
Of man's passionate wrath.  
See the nobility of high man  
And wonder! Yet down in the gut  
The fearsome mess bubbles and Boils.  
Tranquil mind of the true man  
Gives way to perpetual turmoil.  
Become awry, the creature  
Battles the Creator in hate.

## Angry Heart or Tranquil Mind?

True that it is, that man  
Sees and mourns the endless evil,  
The deformed children, the brain  
That devises the torture,  
The racks of pain, the fiends  
Who gather the wealth  
Despising humanity, seeing only  
The glittering gold, the amusement,  
The pleasure and the giddy joy.  
Yet this is man And not God.

Hold high the Cross,  
See on it the man of peace.  
See on it the man of pain.  
See there him bearing  
The battles and the wars,  
The bitterness and the deformity.  
See there him battling  
The spawn of hell, devils and humans.  
See him reaching down  
To where the anger boils,  
The destroying wrath of man.

See then, and be at peace.  
No sorrow has passed him by, no war,  
No hidden rape, no cruel word.  
All he has seen, and all he bears  
And all he becomes.  
There is no hour  
Of man, but he has lived.  
See then, and know  
That God is love!

Geoff Bingham, 1981

I

## TRANQUIL OR ANGRY?

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An ancient writer said, 'A tranquil mind gives life to the flesh, but passion rots the bones.' By passion he meant any intense element like envy, jealousy, over-developed zeal, anger or venom. He meant that serenity is a helpful and healthful commodity. If a person has that, he is better off in life.

Anger, for its part, is a destructive element. Some anger, of course, is good, and even necessary to moral well-being, but on the whole, anger is dangerous to human health. It is not, however, easy to change a temperament which seems to live in anger, or at least tends towards habitual anger. What then do we do? The purpose of this book is to examine both anger and tranquillity, to see how we can arrive at more tranquil living.

There are some who will even get angry at such a suggestion. They will say—with anger—that this is not the kind of world in which one should live serenely. They point out, rightly enough, that the world is a sad place, full of cruelty and injustice, riddled with selfishness and greed, and to be at peace is to opt out of its needs. To be tranquil in such a world is to betray it, and give way to forces that would pacify us only in order to destroy our moral fibre.

There is, of course, a truth in such an observation. One

should not be insensitive or indifferent in a world in which there is so much evil. At the same time one must not rot away through useless anger. The one who can be of help to others is the one who is not so emotionally swayed that his thinking cannot be fully rational. We want others to enjoy life. We wish ourselves to enjoy life. A balanced mind and temperament makes more for healing the sorrows of the world than does irrational anger.

It seems that we know tranquillity is what we ought to experience. It is something of a birthright. Perhaps we are angry because we have had tranquillity denied to us.

### **A SIMPLE ASSESSMENT**

If the reading of this book is going to prove of value to us, we ought to discern ourselves, at least to some degree. It would be good to ask the question, 'Am I a serene person, on the whole, or am I more angry than calm?' It certainly comes as a surprise to many to discover that underneath a seemingly calm exterior they are angry people. It seems, for many when they think about it, that all their lives they have been angry. They appear to have hidden their anger, even to themselves, yet all the time it has been burning like a slow but steady fire. Every so often the anger suddenly surfaces, and sometimes in surprising, or even shocking, fashion. Some of us become horrified or depressed at the seemingly unmovable nature of our anger. We will stick by it, as one man once said, 'even unto death'. In fact it might cause just that—our death. That is, if it does not first cause someone else's death.

What then are the sources of tranquillity, and what those of anger? This study will seek to discover the answers to this question, but first there must be honesty on the part of the reader. He or she must discover whether anger is habitual or not, and must desire to find tranquillity even in a world of strife, conflict and injustice. If a healthful heart means

healthful living, and passion actually rots the bones of a person, then serenity is an indispensable element for true human living. It is the calm person who can be of help to others. Only a calm person can be truly objective.

### **LIFE IS A MATTER OF RELATIONSHIPS**

When relationships are good, life, generally speaking, is also good. When relationships are bad, then so, generally, is life. Anger and serenity have to do with relationships. Anger is most often against persons, and serenity both derives from, and gives to, relationships. Sometimes persons get angry with circumstances. They react to their environment, the weather, social problems, physical elements. Yet behind this anger there may be causes other than the immediate happenings which occur about them.

We relate, then, to both persons and things. We may respond to persons or things, or react against them. We are all familiar with such amusing comments as, 'This lawnmower's temperamental' 'Why does this car always refuse to stall when I'm in a hurry?' And so on. The truth is that we seem to have an attitude to people and things which is dictated by deeper feelings. Sometimes these feelings are so deep and concealed as to startle us by what we do and say. We are surprised that we can feel so deeply. That we should react strongly to weather and circumstances, hate things, and despise people, seems to us quite baffling. There must be more in us than meets the eye, or is felt on the level of ordinary consciousness.

Think also of the people with whom we identify. They are often angry people. Think of our extended sense of justice. Think of how many things in a day irritate, aggravate, and rub us up the wrong way. They are so many. Few people remain calm in the pressures of life. Few have fully satisfying relationships. As we have said, not only people but things

irritate us.

Finally, let us consider the yearning most of us have for a fully satisfying life. We really long for serenity. We admire true tranquillity and covet it for ourselves. We regard serene people with some admiration and envy, even if, occasionally, we are highly suspicious about such types, thinking them too good to be true.

It would be good, therefore, to examine the origins, causes and nature of both anger and tranquillity, and to discover, if possible, how to lessen our anger and increase our serenity. Is such possible? This we will endeavour to discover.

**2**

## **ALL ABOUT ANGER**

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### **LOOK AT THE ANGER!**

We rarely pause to consider the fact of anger. When we do, we are surprised at the amount of anger that is in the world. Whilst some cultures frown upon the expression of anger, even those cultures express their anger in concealed ways. In most cultures people become angry with those in authority, whether in families, clans, local government or central government. Those in power are under constant and suspicious examination. People are angry at laws, angry at events, angry at groups other than their own. They are angry at other nations, races and cultures. They are often angry at the weather. They get angry at sports events, being angry with their own team if it loses, and the other if it wins. People also get angry with themselves. They get angry with those they love most, and there is often more anger for the loved than the unloved.

The whole matter is strange. Why should it be that there is little in life about which we do not have anger? Sometimes people who love their country, their people, their culture, their homes, and their work, seem more angry with what they love, than with what they do not love. They would die for

these things which they hold dear, yet in life they are habitually angry with them.

### THERE IS A RIGHT ANGER

Of course there is. Paul advised, quoting from an old Scripture, 'Be angry and do not sin'. He meant, 'You have a right to be angry in some circumstances, but then don't let that anger pass over from its legitimate perimeter into something else.' Nevertheless we must not let this possibility minimise righteous anger. If we do not get angry with rape, murder, lying, evil events, genocide, and much unnecessary suffering caused by human selfishness, then we are not truly human. We have lost moral sensitivity. Our sense of injustice has become dulled. We are callous.

In the Scriptures there are many examples of right anger. In Judges 9:30ff., there is the story of the treachery of the men of Shechem, concerning which Zebul is righteously angry. When Nathan the prophet, in 1 Samuel 12:5, tells the story of a poor man's family which owns but one lamb and this is taken and slaughtered by a rich neighbour, David the king is filled with righteous anger. In fact he is unaware that in principle he himself is the rich man of the story! Moses is in righteous anger at his people when they manufacture and dance around the golden calf (Exodus 32:19). Nehemiah is angry at what is happening in regard to Jerusalem (Nehemiah 5:6), and in this he is justified. Christ, casting the moneychangers from the temple, is also righteous in his anger. Jesus, we read, became angry on a number of occasions, all of which were justified.

In the same way we often have indignation, and rightly so. Yet it can be that behind our indignation there are elements of guilt. We may even off-load our guilt on to others by the device of indignation, judging in another what is present in ourselves. Many years ago, in the Ward-Profumo case, a

judge warned others against judging. He suggested the most indignant might be guilty of similar elements, at least in the thinking of their minds, even if not in the outward actions of their lives. We see that few have a clear right to righteous indignation.

### THE CAUSES OF ANGER

#### (i) An Extended Sense of Justice or Injustice<sup>1</sup>

Without doubt much anger relates to a sense of justice, or even to the fact of justice. People become deeply angry when justice is not done, either in their own case or in the case of others. Wars are fought over justice. Along with justice goes the matter of *rights*. These rights may be reasonably based. They may arise from a false sense of entitlement, or they may ignore the facts of living and human relationships. We have to recognise, as sane people in a very mixed-up world, that rights cannot always be achieved, or even insisted upon. The human race has to live together under conditions which have not always been ideal. For every person to insist upon his so-called rights would be impractical and even harmful. Yet this is what people do: hence the anger in many.

This is not to deny the matter of rights. They exist, but then they are generally insisted upon for one's own, and single, benefit. The fulfilment of my rights may be unfair to another. And so on. There is nothing evil in a sense of justice. There is, however, something very wrong in a legalistic insistence upon one's own rights. This is generally unrealistic and damaging in its effects. Anger is present, often, when we insist upon our rights, but it is greatly compounded when—these not being granted—we continue to

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<sup>1</sup> For an extension of anger relating to justice, see Appendix, 'An Essay on Cops and Robbers, Injustice and Anger'.

insist upon them. At times we do this even in the face of common sense. Pride has been hurt. Ego has been overridden. So the insistence upon rights frequently becomes the dynamic attempt to assert those rights in the face of much suffering.

**(ii) Justice Relating to Dignity: Indignity and Honour**

We may rightly speak of the dynamics of dignity. Made in the image of God, man is the highest of all creatures on earth and in heaven. That he was created pure and with honour is a tenet of Hebrew truth, seen in the Hebrew Scriptures. That he was designed to be one day matured to full glory is a truth found in both the Old and the New Testaments. Whilst it is true that a *process* must be fulfilled is also taught, yet whatever the case may be, man carries with him a sense of his own dignity. His ultimate goal is glorification. No matter how far a human person falls, he jealously guards his dignity. Nothing causes anger more than an attack upon his dignity.

We may say that the whole social row has arisen in history because men have been demeaned, especially by others of mankind.

*'When Adam delved and Eve span,  
Who then was the gentleman?'*

The worst cases of human degradation still hold honour dear. Indeed the most volatile of all anger relates to the degradation of one person by another, or one class (so-called) by another. History has shown us that the original inhabitants of a country are pushed down into a lower class by the invaders. India is in particular an example of this. Each successive wave of conquerors subjugated those they overcame. The whole caste system on the Indian subcontinent is a rationalised form of grades of humanity. The horrible degradation of races in view of their colour is another form of human denigration. The anger and indignation of this demeaning must work itself out in history. The recent assertion of their dignity by the

American negroes is a powerful example of this. So then, class, creed, colour, social segregation, economic supremacy over the underdog all give rise to fearful anger—anger which sooner or later must express itself in violent protest.

However, we do not need to examine the matter only along these lines. The whole human race seems to suffer from a sense of indignity. In fact it might be better put as inferiority. Paul shrewdly, yet simply, put his finger on the matter. 'All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.' He was saying that the human race has fallen short of its own created glory when it has rejected the glory of God and gone its own (inglorious) way. For this reason—the attaining to glory—the human race is always sensitive to any criticism, patronising, paternalism, and other forms of denigration. Every man requires his human dignity to be respected. The shock of degradation in prison camp, and oppression by so called master races, is something from which many human spirits never recover.

Even so, forms of oppression or degradation do not need to be only along the above lines. In simple human relationships immense harm can be done. Emotional damage can be caused by a sneering parent, a condescending teacher, a class which ridicules a certain student. And so on: the ways are various. Many persons carry this kind of hurt, indignation and anger all their lives. It would be interesting to know what percentage of the population is motivated by the desire to vindicate itself in the eyes of others, to assert proper dignity where scorn, ridicule and oppression have put down men and women in their own eyes. Here the field for the researcher is without perimeters.

We often laugh at a man in his cups, yet note how dignified that person seeks to be, in spite of the alcohol which has made him look foolish. Look at the base person who is being judged in court for his actions; he does not easily become meek. The victim of ideological warfare—a political prisoner

being interrogated—will suffer all kinds of indignity to maintain his own dignity. Even so, all who suffer the various forms of degradation, do so in great anger. Only that person who lives under the love and grace of God can emerge unscathed from attacks on dignity.

If human beings were able to search their hearts, being rational long enough to be objective, they would be shocked to see the extent and power of the anger in them. The degraded wife, the spurned child, the rejected parent, the despised worker, the loathed employer—all of these nurse their wounds and enlarge their anger. In each the explosion is building up as the anger increases. One day it will break out in terrible violence, or shatter the angered person into states of mind from which there may be no healing.

Without doubt, attacks upon dignity are amongst the most powerful causes of anger.

**(iii) Failure to Achieve Full Identity**

Travellers are frequently bewildered by what they call ‘culture shock’. What is often called ‘jet-lag’ is really that state of being dazed when we fail to achieve quick compatibility with a new situation. Culture shock arises mainly from comparing one’s previous environment and culture with the new and different situation into which one has come.

Identity is something most people require for a sense of personal security. The accustomed forms of living—environment and the like—are necessary. A person from a slum area may be warmly at home in it, and feel lost and afraid when taken to the countryside. He may feel deeply threatened. Identity generally comes to us in the things and persons to which we relate.

Identity which is built and dependent upon what is familiar, will always be frail. High density living may threaten it, just as low density living may bring fear. A housewife can cope whilst she is allowed to live at a certain pace, but

quicken this and she may become fearful. There are so many ways in which we can feel our identity to be threatened, and since identity seems to mean so much to us, we become first of all frustrated—frustration itself being a form of anger— after which our anger and passions accelerate. It seems we can only retain our dignity at the pace of life to which we are accustomed. Some of us have never accepted our environment. Also we have failed to relate to others. Thus our hold upon identity has been very weak. Feeling helpless in life, we resent the things which come upon us, and with which we seem unable to cope.

Man as created is a creature of the Creator, a son of the Father, and a serving subject of the Father-King. When man refused this relationship of dependency he removed himself from his true identity. As a lost son he roams without purpose, desperately seeking the fullness which he needs. Failing to find it, his anger compounds against God, man, and creation. His frustration makes him the victim of his own compounding anger.

**(iv) The Way Things Ought to be, but are Not**

Immediately, objectively, we can see that most anger arises from the fact that *things are not as we would wish them to be*. This may mean that God is not as we think he should be. It may be that another person is not as we think that one should be. It may be that the system does not match our expectations. Our circumstances may not satisfy our desires. Events may not be as we would want them. Things do not serve us as we wish. In short, anything which does not meet the mark according to our images and desires can be the cause of anger,

Doubtless the matter goes more deeply than this surface explanation. Why do we have such images of what persons, places, times, events and things ought to be? Why should God, persons, events or things change their own being and

conform to the demands we make of them? Why are we so insistent upon our ideas? There must be a deeper explanation than the one we have given.

Not only do we desire things to be as we want them, especially when this is so for our own convenience and pleasure, but we want them to be so for other reasons. It may well be that we will never be able to trace the reasons, at least in some cases. Yet it is fairly sure that most anger comes out of the motives of self-protection, self-expression, self-extension, and self-fulfilment. Put bluntly, we may say that we get angry with anyone or thing in our way. We are compulsive about ourselves. In short, we seek to 'god' it for ourselves, and woe betide lesser creatures who invade our autonomy or fail to recognise our deity!

#### (v) The Problem of Authority

We scarcely need to expound this point. We all know the problems authority raises for us. Few of us—if any—have ever obeyed anyone from the heart. We may toe the line, but that is not true obedience. Our rejection of earthly authorities (parents, teachers, elders, rulers, etc.), if we only knew it, is basic rejection of God. Paul argues in Romans 13 that all authorities are ordained by God, and, even though they are imperfect, ought to be obeyed. We quickly rationalise authority as wrong, as dominating us, as restricting our rightful freedom, as encroaching upon our sovereignty of being, and so having refused authority we justify our rejection of it. To have someone over us seems to attack our personal dignity and honour. We are suspicious of employers, of police, and other persons who have been delegated authority. For the most part—which is ironical and contradictory—we like to exercise authority. Those of us who reject it most strongly, often handle it most poorly.

We may not see why we habitually reject authority, but the reason lies in our basic rejection of God's authority. This

causes us to oppose all human authority. Even so we often recognise the need for authority. We see that anarchy is its only alternative, and we know the dangers that lie in lawlessness. Most of all, we require authority to 'do us good', and in fact that is its main purpose. In just and beneficent authority lies true security. Yet parents are imperfect and often expose us to hurt, wounding, and loss of honour. Other forms of authority do likewise. We judge authority to be dominating, and even evil. Yet actually, without knowing it, we are protesting against its failure to be strong, beneficent and helpful. We are hurt, wounded, resentful and angry. Anger, as we have seen, compounds itself. We human beings generally feel guilt for having anger, and then have anger for feeling guilt. Our anti-authority spirit flourishes in the presence of anger.

So then, one cause of anger is our opposition to authority. If we understood the true nature of authority this would not be so. Authority is in fact that loving exercise of God's nature which is intended to create, sustain, and care for human beings so that they may be fulfilled in their humanity and be ultimately brought to rich maturity. In the first case, authority involves law, but law as the functional principles of true living. Thus, secondly, when law is broken the Cross-Resurrection event becomes necessary to reveal the loving grace of God, and to dynamically liberate human beings from their guilt and its power. Thirdly, God purposes to bring man to maturity as a human being, and so the law of love operates to mature him. In every case, authority is a good thing for man. This is not how he sees it—more is the pity! Only when the revelation of grace comes to him will he understand and accept authority. Only then will he lose anger. Man without grace insists on retaining his anger, compounding his guilt and opposing true authority.

There are many more causes for guilt, but these are subsidiary

to the ones we have mentioned above. It would be useful for us to examine the five causes we have studied and see whether we relate to them, and they to us. This knowledge could be very helpful, not that it could, of itself, release us from anger, but it could help us to see its irrationality. It would be a step towards being rid of that enemy of human tranquillity—human wrath.

### 3

## CASES OF ANGER

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### GOD GETS ANGRY

Some of us get angry at God getting angry! We have higher ideals of God, and a better image to which we think he ought to conform. We will not say much on the subject here, but one has the feeling that if God were not angry with us (as Romans 1:18ff. describes), then we would be less angry with the human race the creation, and ourselves.

That God is angry there is no doubt. If we have moral sense, then he more. If we speak of rights, then he has more right to rights. If we are often angry at what happens in God's world, then he will more intelligently and rightfully be angry. And so on. It may well be then that the root of our anger against things is God's anger against us. There will be many readers of this paragraph who will get angry at its statement. The question is, 'Why? Why does God's anger make me angry?'

### PERSONS IN ANGER

If Adam was angry with God for seemingly limiting him to

his humanity, we are not told so.<sup>1</sup> If Adam were angry with his wife, or she with him over the failure that came through the temptation, then we are also not told. Even so, we cannot miss the implied anger when Adam virtually laid the blame on God for giving him the woman, and then on the woman for giving him the fruit. Eve's anger would scarcely be absent in face of her husband's betrayal. What we are told plainly is that their first son, Cain, was an habitually angry man. We need to study his life and actions to make sure of this.

#### **Cain (Genesis 4:1-16)**

God said to Cain, 'Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen?' We are told that when Cain's offering was not received by God, 'Then Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.' The question is, 'Why?' The answer given in I John 3:16<sup>12</sup> is virtually: 'He was angry because his brother loved him, and he hated his brother; because his brother's deeds were righteous and his own evil.'

Cain's hatred and anger, then, were irrational. There was no authentic cause for them. God could not be blamed for not receiving that which was, at heart, evil. In the heart of Cain there was anger. The anger was only enlarged by the event of the sacrifice. Its outcome was murder. The murder was totally unjustified. At the same time, Cain must have thought of God as unjust, and his brother also as unjust. The account in Genesis 4 leads us to believe this.

#### **Lamech (Genesis 4:19-24)**

Cain, even in his anger, had asked for protection (verse 14).

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<sup>1</sup> There are theologians, eg. Paul Tillich, who believe man is angry because he is finite, as over and against God's infiniteness. This may not be wholly true. Man's anger is surely because he is a creature rather than innately a Creator. Man must not be measured in quantitative terms, ie., personal terms. Man's richness lies in his contingent being. That is, he has to be dependent on God to be truly himself. It is this fact which makes sinful man so angry. When he refuses his contingent nature (Jer. 10:23) he then becomes guilty and compounds his anger.

God had promised a sevenfold judgement on anyone who attacked him. Lamech was dissatisfied with this. The word 'man' in verse 23 really speaks of a lad. Lamech's anger did not stop at seven wounds for his one, but resulted in death. Where Jesus said we should forgive seventy-times-seven, Lamech decided on seventy-fold vengeance. He was impatient of any pattern God may have given to his ancestor.

Things were not as he wanted them to be. His anger was deep and vengeful. Anger had caused morality to deteriorate

#### **Esau (Genesis 27:1-46, cf. 33:1-20; Hebrews 12:14-17)**

The story of Esau and Jacob really commences in the womb, where, we are told, they struggled together. There was rivalry before birth. The full story of these brothers needs to be studied. Esau was careless and indifferent about his birthright. He was an example of what we today would call 'the secular man'. Jacob used guile to obtain the blessing of God and his father. Esau had not a valid reason to hate Jacob, but he hated him without doubt. His 'exceeding bitter cry' of Genesis 27:34 (cf. Hebrews 12:15-16) indicates that there had been internal anger. This is shown by his bitterness.

Genesis 27:41 says, 'Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob."' 'Esau had planned to kill his brother because of the blessing which he himself had despised. His anger was so deep that his mother sent Jacob away 'until your brother's fury turns away; until your brother's anger turns away, and he forgets what you have done to him. . .'

We might conclude that Esau's anger was just, but the facts do not bear this out. The account of Genesis 33 shows it was not finally dealt with. In later generations the children of Esau (Edom) act cruelly against the children of Jacob (Israel). Many statements and prophecies deal with this matter (for

example, Ezekiel 25, Psalm 137:7-9, Amos I and 2, Obadiah, etc.). Anger, then, seems to go down through generations. One cannot have privatised anger. Anger affects others as it also infects others.

#### **Moses**

Known as 'the meekest man on all the earth', Moses, too, could show anger. In some cases it was righteous, but in others, not. The story in Numbers 20 is of the children of Israel who grumbled because of the lack of water. As usual, they put the pressure upon Moses, who was told by the Lord to *speak* to the rock. In Exodus 17 we read the first account concerning the rock. Then Moses had been told to smite it with his rod, and had done so, water pouring out for the thirsty. Now, on this later occasion, there was no need to .smite but simply to speak to it.

Moses became angry and said, 'Hear now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you, out of this rock?' He then smote the rock—and not once, but twice. This was a provocation by the people, and Moses was provoked. Later, Paul was to write, 'Love is not provoked'. Much commentary could be made on this story. It is sufficient to say that Moses had his most powerful moment—his most potent opportunity—for showing love, but destroyed it in his anger. So unacceptable was this anger to God that he called it profanation of his name. Moses was not allowed to go into the Promised Land.

#### **Saul**

This first king of Israel seems to be a man who constantly smouldered with anger. A study of I Samuel 18:8-9, 19:9-10, and 20:30-31, shows him as hating David because he was favoured by the people. David himself was intensely loyal desiring only to serve the king, but Saul was virtually destroyed by his own anger. Saul was a man who simmered

ceaselessly, even if he boiled over only on certain occasions. This man of dark spirit scarcely knew the meaning of repentance, although he purported to do so. The story in 1 Samuel is one not of repentance but of remorse. Anger and remorse are, doubtless, tied closely together.

#### **Jacob's Sons, Simeon and Levi**

These two represent classic examples of anger. Of them, the old man, prophesying before his death, said (Genesis 49:5-7), 'Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords. O my soul, come not into their council; O my spirit, be not joined to their company; for in their anger they slay men, and in their wantonness they hamstring oxen. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel'. This passage is also a powerful exposition of hatred expressing a general principle. Jacob seems not to have been a man of anger. Genesis 34, describing the slaughter of Shechem and his family, had remained indelibly in Jacob's mind. The very nature of anger is revealed in his prophecy. Jacob appears as a man who has been permanently shocked by anger.

#### **Naaman**

In II Kings 5 we read of Naaman's application to the prophet Elisha for healing. Commanded to wash in the River Jordan, this general of Syria could not contain his anger. Such phrases are used as, ' . . . Naaman was angry', and, 'So he turned and went away in a rage'. He was angry because his dignity was not considered. Even his servants knew his anger was unjustified. Of course his anger dissipated when he was healed.

#### **Balaam**

In Numbers 22 we read the story of the disobedient prophet who was prepared to prophesy for gain, but his ass

refused to co-operate because of the presence of the angel of the Lord. Balaam, unaware of the angel, struck his ass three times. This was out of anger. His anger, it became apparent, was unjustified. Doubtless his anger was increased by the uneasiness of his guilt, otherwise he would have investigated the strange behaviour of his usually obedient animal. Balaam, like Naaman, is a good example of our thesis that anger comes when things do not turn out as we wish.

#### **Nebuchadnezzar**

One other example in the Old Testament is Nebuchadnezzar. The story in Daniel chapter three is of the edict of the king that all should worship the golden image which he had set up. The three Hebrews—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—refused to do so. In verse 13 we read of the ‘furious rage’ of the king. Doubtless he thought this justified. In verse 19 we are told the king ‘was full of fury, and the expression of his face changed’. The king, again, was angry because things were not as he wished them to be. Doubtless he knew that Hebrews did not worship gods as such, but his pride would not accept this. The same could be said of many others not in his position of authority.

We see then that some of these were men of deep and continual anger. Others were merely angry, intermittently. Yet in fact we have taken only a few samples of all the angry persons in the Old Testament. Some of these, too, were women, yet for the most part women gave less expression to anger. Perhaps the culture assured this!

## **4**

### **MORE CASES OF ANGER**

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When we come to the New Testament, the principle does not change. Here too, is the same background. The people, even though called the people of God, show themselves as angry. In the Old Testament they were angry in the wilderness. No matter how much was done for them they forgot it, and took it naturally as their right to be well cared for. They were angry even with their idols, and angry without them. This continued to be their history.

When Jesus comes to Nazareth after his baptism and wilderness experience and reads the prophecy concerning himself from Isaiah 61, those in the synagogue are at first caught by his unusual power and grace. Then it dawns on them that he is claiming to be Messiah—this man who has lived amongst them. Livid with rage they seek to throw him over a cliff. Likewise when he teaches in Jerusalem they attempt to stone him. His own cities of Galilee reject him.

Crowds murmur against him. Everything he says and does is listened to, not with rapturous attention but critically. Time and again he has to say, ‘He who has an ear to hear, let him hear!’ He speaks in parables so that many of them will not understand the inner meaning of his words. In fact it is their obtuseness which prevents them hearing truly.

It is this fickle crowd which ultimately crucifies him. Given many of them had great expectancy of his Messiahship, their disappointment quickly turns to anger. *Things are not as they wish them to be!*

*Let us* then look at some of the angry persons of the Gospels and Acts.

#### **Herod**

Herod was an astute politician as well as a king. The thought of being superseded by a spiritual king does not appeal to him. Calling himself a Jew, although by birth he was not, he wants to know the Scriptures regarding Messiah only in order to subvert them. So he orders the massacre of innocent children. The word spoken in regard to Herod in Matthew 2:16 is, 'Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, was in a furious rage, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the wise men'. We are told, 'he was in a furious rage'. He was angry that things were not as he demanded they should be.

#### **The Elder Brother**

The well-known story of the prodigal son, his father and elder brother, is so familiar as not to call for explanation. This story was told because regular Jews refused to have social fellowship with those nominated 'sinners'.

When the prodigal son returns, it is into the father's welcoming arms. This is the warm part of the story. However, the parable was told to illustrate the rejection by Jews of their compatriots who were sinners. The elder brother represented a nation, almost, of angry, proud moralists.

In Luke 15:25-32 we see the climax of the story. Seeing the reception given for the younger brother (ie. 'this son of yours'), ' . . . he was angry and went not in'. The explanation

he gives to his father shows that he has always been sour with his father. 'All my life I have served you, and you gave me nothing!' His attitude has been one of bitterness. Doubtless the slow fire has smouldered from an early age. Angry with father means angry with son (cf. I John 4:20). It also means angry with God.

#### **Martha, the Sister of Mary**

When it comes to anger, Martha is probably closest to us all, that is those of us who are cases of chronic anger but who have not as yet exploded in dangerous action. Martha draws the sympathy of most people because there seems to be something in her complaint. Mary seems to have neglected the practical details of meal-getting for the luxury of sitting at Jesus' feet. That is how the matter appears on the surface, but in fact Martha had only one guest, and a guest who certainly did not greatly care about elaborate meal preparation. Martha, as a competent woman of the house, should easily have been able to cope. Even so she complained to Jesus: 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her, then, to help me.'

Jesus' reply was unvarnished. 'Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things. One thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion which shall not be taken away from her.' Analysed, Jesus is saying, 'Martha, you are habitually fussing and fretting. It is not just a matter of this occasion. You have a chronic state of anxiety and being troubled. You have chosen the path you take, and Mary has chosen another path. She seeks what is truly valuable, and it will always be hers.' He is implying that Martha's approach is a wrong one. Doubtless he appreciated her desire to prepare a good meal, but the problem lay deeper than Martha assessed it to be.

It is always dangerous to read other's motives, but Jesus' assessment was undoubtedly right. Even we can see that

Martha was angry with the Lord, and with Mary. It seems certain that in fact she was at odds with herself, ie. angry with herself. She accused the Lord of neglecting her, and she accused Mary of opting out of her responsibility. Accusation springs from one's own guilt, one's lack of being wholly justified. There was guilt there, without doubt. Perhaps Martha was a perfectionist, and desired others to be so. Some who read the incident in Luke 10:38-42 will bristle with protective anger for Martha. If they do, then why? The authentic reading of Martha by Jesus should be our true guide to the situation. A person who has a constant state (or states) of anxiety and being troubled is not living without frustration, and frustration is a form of anger—anger at restriction and powerlessness to fulfil all the aims one has.

The story proceeds in other events and Martha's condition is further exposed, and she is healed. In John 11:1-45 Jesus clears Martha thoroughly of the fear of death. She, like others (see verse 45), believes completely. She sees Jesus as the Lord of life and death. When, then, we read of her in John 12:1-8, we see her calm, serving at tables without frustration and complaint. We seem justified then in saying that her anxiety and fretting had its roots in the conscience, that her fear was wider than circumstances. It related to basic lack of peace and security. When the conscience was quieted by the knowledge that Jesus was Lord over life and death, and that she was accepted by him, then her anger died.

For us the value of the story is that anger is shown to be linked with states of anxiety and insecurity. In fact, it is accusative, which reveals that it is self-justifying. Self-justification is the device of saying one has no guilt. Somewhere it is anger against God himself, probably because of fear of him. Most of us are in that state. We are seeking the praise of human beings, trying to assure ourselves by their acceptance of us, when in fact justification is an act of God in his grace. Only justification is an assurance against chronic

anxiety and attempts to justify ourselves. Without the guilt-clearing that comes from God's grace, we are always in danger of an explosion of accumulated anger, something which could result in pain and suffering to others, let alone the dreadful guilt it would bring to us. Like Martha, we need the Lord to confront us with our condition, and then for him to work graciously to change that condition.

#### **Saul of Tarsus**

Here we come to the classic example of an angry man. We meet him in Acts 7:58 where Paul is consenting—as a member of the Sanhedrin—to the death of Stephen. The next time he appears he is described as 'still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord'. Doubtless, then, he has been in this state of mind since Stephen's death. He is an angry young man. He desires letters of assignation from the high priest to continue his destruction of the Christians.

Jesus' question to him was, 'Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?' Whilst it is news to him that he is persecuting Messiah (ie. Jesus of Nazareth), it ought not to have been news. He has been 'kicking against the pricks', and these, we suppose, are the pricks of conscience. Anger will not allow him to be rational. If he had been reasonable he would have known from the life and actions of the Christian believers that they were godly and loving people, and that their Gospel must have borne reasonable investigation. He was not calm enough to listen: he presupposed their claims were invalid. Anger had made him both deaf and blind to the truth.

Paul is especially interesting because he seems to see the danger of anger more than others. He warns against it. He exhorts his readers and converts to put off anger. He is positive in regard to love bearing all things, and not being provoked to anger. He himself is a wonderful example of an angry man becoming a loving one. It would be interesting to discover what had made him angry prior to his conversion. Yet what is

it that makes a man so zealous? What creates this zeal which pursues men even to death?

### **THE PRINCIPLE OF AN ANGRY MAN**

In Ecclesiastes 5:13-17, we read:

‘There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt, and those riches were lost in a bad venture; and he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand. As he came from his mother’s womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil which he may carry away in his hand. This also is a grievous evil: just as he came, so shall he go; and what gain has he that he toiled for the wind, and spent all his days in darkness and grief, in much vexation and sickness and resentment?’

Whilst this is not speaking primarily of an habitually angry man, the words of verse 17 really describe him fully: ‘ . . . and spent his days in darkness and grief, in much vexation and sickness and resentment’. So the words, ‘darkness’, ‘grief’, ‘much vexation’, ‘sickness’ and ‘resentment’, describe the ways an angry man lives his life. When, later, we examine the causes and modes of anger, we will see how true this statement really is.

### **ANGER AND THE KINGDOM OF DARKNESS**

To this point in our study we have indicated that anger is destructive to man, especially when it is wrong anger. We have seen that some of us appear to be habitually angry. Also we have noted that crowds, or mobs of people, can become corporately angry. Do we, however, realise that anger is not merely involuntary, the flash point reached through continuous stresses and tensions? Do we understand that in fact man’s wrath against God, the creation and others, is part of the action of the kingdom of darkness, and that it is out of

this anger that evil seeks to dethrone God, and effect its rule over the creation?

### **SATAN THE WRATHFUL**

In Revelation 12, the rebellion of Satan is recorded, with a description of his drawing down from heaven a third of its stars. The stars refer to angels. Satan, then, has a vast host of fallen angelic powers who assist him in his rebellion. He seeks to dethrone God and enthrone himself (cf. II Thessalonians 2:4), and thus to rule *all* angelic powers (cf. Isaiah 14:12-14). His anger is against God for being God, and for ruling the universe. He is angry because things are not the way he wishes them to be.

In Revelation 12:12 we read, ‘Woe to you, earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows his time is short!’ Note the phrase ‘great wrath’. It is obvious that Satan must be the most insecure of all creatures, seeing he has opposed God, and denied the true nature of the universe. He has abdicated from his godly responsibility as Lucifer (Lightbearer), ie. the one to whom God has given great gifts and authority. He is also called ‘The Destroyer’ (Apollyon, Revelation 9:11), and he certainly seeks to destroy. Jesus said, ‘The thief comes to steal, and to kill and to destroy’ (John 10:10). Peter says, ‘The devil goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour’. The Relation depicts Satan under many guises, one of them being the angel of the bottomless pit, out of which emerge numberless stinging creatures which seek to put man into pain. Another guise is that of the Beast, and he brings misery to those who refuse to have his mark upon them.

For those who belong to him, there is a life of anger. In I John 3:1611, we have seen that the children of the devil are those who do not love their brethren, and who do not do works of righteousness. In the Gospels we see the deep hatred

for Jesus because he comes from the Father. They hate him also because he loves them, and because his works are righteous. He tells them, 'You are of your father the devil, and you do his will and desires'. The doing of his will and desires is shown in their anger against him, the Son of the true Father. Later Jesus says, 'They hated me without a [authentic cause]'. Doubtless they thought the cause was a valid one, but then it was not, for he was the true Son.

### **THE CHILDREN OF WRATH**

In Ephesians 2: 1-3 we have a number of statements which explain how men are linked with Satan. We are told that sinful men are 'children of disobedience' and 'children of wrath'. The first means they are linked with the 'father' of disobedience, the second that they are under the wrath of God. We are told that these 'children' follow Satan in all that he does, and live the way he does. We are also told that he 'energises within the children of disobedience', ie. he charges these sinful human beings with his own mind-set, life-style and stereotype. We have seen that to be under the wrath of God is to be wrathful oneself, especially against others. Man then is infected with this anger, and it is evident that Satan gathers all he can amongst angels, creatures, and mankind to oppose God, and so to help him dethrone the King of all the earth.

### **THE KINGDOM OF DARKNESS**

In Luke 11:18 Jesus infers that Satan has a kingdom. In Revelation 16:8-11 we read the following:

'The fourth angel poured his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch men with fire; men were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues, and they did not repent and give him glory. The fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was in darkness; men

gnawed their tongues in anguish and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores, and did not repent of their deeds.'

God's judgements, given partly to punish and partly to bring men to repentance and grace, are scorned and rejected by those who live in anger. We are told twice that they curse God. They know he is behind their torment, and they hate him for it. With them there is no 'fear of the Lord which is the beginning of wisdom'. They violently hate him.

### **CONCLUSION AS TO EVIL ANGER**

We conclude then that the kind of anger we have seen portrayed is part of the armoury of evil; part of its deliberate intention to destroy purity and truth. Hence Paul shows the deadly danger of badly handled anger. In Ephesians 4:26, 27, and 31 he says, 'Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil'; 'Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, with all malice'. It is part of the system of evil, and would infect us, even within the church, the place of the people of God; the place not of anger, but of love, kindness, tender heartedness and forgiveness.

## THE CLASSIC ANGRY MAN: JONAH

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Jonah is a significant book amongst those of the prophets. Jonah was commanded by God to go to Nineveh and preach against that great city. He was to tell it of its doom.

Jonah was a knowledgeable prophet. He knew the nature of God. He knew Nineveh deserved to be destroyed for its evil. He knew God could not tolerate evil. Because of his great holiness he must act against the vileness of this traditional enemy of Israel. For this Jonah was delighted. It would be a quick way of ridding Israel of its troublesome enemies.

What Jonah also knew was that Yahweh is a God of mercy. Whilst it is true that Yahweh will destroy an evil people, it is equally true that if they genuinely repent and turn to him then he will pardon their sins, and heal their land and its people. This latter thought was more than Jonah could tolerate. So, instead of taking a trip to Nineveh, he took a sea voyage to Tarshish. These two places were quite a distance, one from the other. The only problem was that Jonah thought that to travel from Israel was to leave the presence of the Lord. This was not so.

What is interesting about the story of Jonah is that the man knew the storm which came over the sea and the ship was

## THE CLASSIC ANGRY MAN: JONAH

caused by his own disobedience, and he was fair enough to ask punishment for himself so that the sailors did not perish. He had this redeeming feature. Perhaps he thought he might pay for some of his guilt.

Whatever God's purposes may have been for Jonah, the fact is that he was swallowed by this big Yahweh-prepared fish, this great finny denizen of the deep which took him into its maw. Some think this to be not an actual fish, but some great problem and sorrow put by God into the life of the prophet. Which, then, would be the worst?

We need to read the whole of the poem to understand the mind of the prophet.

*'Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish, saying,  
 "I called to the Lord, out of my distress, and he  
 answered me;  
 out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and thou  
 didst hear my voice.  
 For thou didst cast me into the deep, into the  
 heart of the seas, and the flood was round  
 about me;  
 all thy waves and thy billows passed  
 over me.  
 Then I said, 'I am cast out from thy  
 presence;  
 how shall I again look upon thy holy temple?'  
 The waters closed in over me, the deep was  
 round about me;  
 weeds were wrapped about my head at the  
 roots of the mountains.  
 I went down to the land whose bars closed upon  
 me for ever;  
 yet thou didst bring up my life from the Pit, O Lord  
 my God.  
 When my soul fainted within me, I  
 remembered the Lord;  
 and my prayer came to thee, into thy  
 holy temple.  
 Those who pay regard to vain idols*

forsake their true loyalty.  
 But I with the voice of thanksgiving will  
 sacrifice to thee;  
 what I have vowed I will pay.  
 Deliverance belongs to the Lord!"

And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.'

What then do we make of the prophet? He needed an experience of God in deep suffering before he would go to Nineveh. The amazing thing is that he did not remember God's mercy to him for his rebellion. He did not see the parallel with Nineveh. Jonah's experience was that of a prophetic rebellion; Nineveh's that of a moral rebellion. What then was the difference? *Jonah, more than ever, knew Yahweh to be the God of grace.* Yet, it seemed that he had learned nothing.

Jonah was an habitually angry man, angry at Israel's enemies, learning nothing from great grace.

We know the rest of the story. It runs like this:

Jonah travelled through Nineveh. So large was the city that it took three days to traverse it. Jonah travelled one day, then began his proclamation of God's wrath which called for repentance. In actual fact he said nothing about repentance: such preaching was dangerous! His message came through as one of God's anger against Nineveh's evil way of living.

The king heard the message and called for repentance. A fast was proclaimed. The king abased himself in ashes, and covered himself with sackcloth. The people followed suit. Even the cattle were called upon to relate to this repentance. The city was a solemn place, the only sounds being those of calling upon God. Perhaps there was also weeping at the grave warning. The city was in repentance.

As for Jonah, he had wanted them to despise him and his message and scorn the ways of Yahweh, but they did not. They respected Yahweh and humbled themselves. Moreover

Yahweh saw their genuine repentance and he recalled the evil he said he would do.

The angry prophet went out of the city. He sat under a booth, in the hot sun. His hopes were faint, but they were there. Perhaps God would yet do something terrible. A huge desire for dreadful violence rose in Jonah, and he stared eagerly towards the city.

The Lord had pity on the disappointed prophet. He also had a special design for him. He caused a plant to grow up miraculously and cover the open booth. Some say it was the vine from which comes the melon-like gourd. Others say it was a castor oil plant. Whatever it was, it gave protection to the prophet, and a great and responsive love arose in his heart. He felt the love of the inanimate plant. He needed a touch of love in the midst of his bitter disappointment.

The next day the Lord caused the plant suddenly to die and wither. The burning sun shone through to Jonah, and an east wind—the dread hot wind—blew upon his exposed pate. He sickened within himself. He had loved that plant. The only friend he had known had suddenly died. He wanted to die. He said, 'It is better for me to die than to live.'

It is here we understand the writer of Ecclesiastes. Here are grief, vexation, sickness and resentment. Anger makes a man grit his teeth against the whole universe, man and God, and in sheer chagrin he wills himself to be out of it all.

When it was time, Yahweh said, 'Do you do well to be angry for the plant?'

Jonah replied, 'I do well to be angry for the plant, *angry enough to die!*'

It is here we are amazed. True, we have been as angry as that ourselves. We have wanted to die, and pull all the pity of the world about our ears, but then we have been infantile emotionally—like Jonah. This great man of God, with so much knowledge of God, could pity a plant, but not one human Assyrian. He could pity no animal which might be

doomed. He could hear, unmoved, the shrieks of people under destruction—at least in his imagination—and remain cold and hard.

No wonder God said to him, ‘You pity the plant, for which you did not labour, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night, and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?’<sup>1</sup>

Was Jonah moved by this sermon of the Lord? It is difficult to say. Anger had blinded him, making him wholly irrational. His grim demand of justice had immured him to love. He was out in a terrible world all of his own, a world of awful anger.

‘I do well to be angry,’ he said, ‘angry enough to die.’

That is where anger brings us to—the edge and then the pit of death.

*‘A tranquil mind gives life to the flesh,  
but passion rots the bones.’*

Of these passions, almost the greatest is anger. It is so deceptive, and at the same time so destructive. Justice has never solved anger. Only love may do this.

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<sup>1</sup> Jonah's irrationality because of his anger is incredible. If we had not been similar to him in our angers and reactions in some situation, we would find it unbelievable. How could a man pit one plant over and against 120,000 people, with all their cattle, domestic pets and family life? What is more, these people live in moral ignorance, helpless in their spiritual blindness. They have not gone down into the depths of suffering, of relationship with God, as has Jonah. They have never been in the belly of any kind of whale. How can Jonah be so indifferent to the horror of judgement, such as Jeremiah contemplates in Lamentations? The horror lies in the vicious nature of human anger, the unbelievable implacability of a wrathful man. Where is the image of God, the One who says, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion?’ (Rom. 9:1v15, Ex. 33:19).

## 6

## THE NATURE OF ANGER—1

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### ANGER, RIGHT OR WRONG?

We have seen already that some anger is right, especially if it is directed only against that which is evil. We have also seen that it is difficult for a human person to be wholly pure in such motivation. There must be right anger if God can be righteously angry. Man, being made in his image, must also have the faculty for righteous anger. Doubtless he will use this correctly when in true union with God. Otherwise he will use it in wrong ways, even in pursuit of justice. Who, however, practises constant unfailing union with God—abiding only in him?

We have seen that the two references to man being angry also contain inbuilt warnings against sinning via that anger (Ephesians 4:26 and Psalm 4:4). There are other warnings also against wrong anger. Jesus said, ‘. . . I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother . . . shall be liable to judgement’. By this he meant that anger in the heart is wholly wrong. The passage in which this statement is couched (Matthew 5:21-23) speaks of first having anger, then insulting the brother, and finally calling him a fool, ie. one who is damned. Some see this as an ascending order of anger, with accumulating punishments. This may well be so, but it is

more practical to see that anger, insulting and damning are all in the one. They are part of a whole complex of human wrath. They are related and they are wrong.

Let us look at some of the statements about anger.

*Proverbs 6:34.* ‘Jealousy makes a man furious, and he will not spare when he takes revenge.’

*Proverbs 14:17.* ‘A man of quick temper acts foolishly, but a man of discretion is patient.’

*Proverbs 14:29-30.* ‘He who is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly. A tranquil mind gives life to the flesh, but passion makes the bones rot.’

*Proverbs 15:1.* ‘A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.’

*Proverbs 15:18.* ‘A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.’

*Proverbs 16:32.* ‘He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.’

*Proverbs 19:11.* ‘Good sense makes a man slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offence.’

*Proverbs 19:19.* ‘A man of great wrath will pay the penalty; for if you deliver him you will only have to do it again.’

*Proverbs 25:23.* ‘The north wind brings forth rain; and a backbiting tongue, angry looks.’

*Proverbs 27:4.* ‘Wrath is cruel, anger is overwhelming; but who can stand before jealousy?’

*Proverbs 29:8.* ‘Scoffers set cities in a ferment, but wise men moderate anger’ (*Jerusalem Bible*).

*Proverbs 30:33.* ‘For by churning the milk you produce butter; by wringing the nose you produce blood, and by whipping up anger you produce strife’ (*Jerusalem Bible*).

*Ecclesiastes 7:9.* ‘Be not quick to anger, for anger lodges in the bosom of fools.’

*Psalms 37:8.* ‘Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it only tends to evil.’

*James 1:20.* ‘The anger of man does not work the righteousness of God.’

We conclude then that man’s irrational anger is wrong on every score. What then is its basic cause that it should be regarded as so wrong?

### BASIC CAUSES OF ANGER

We must be careful not to think that secondary causes or symptoms are primary causes in the matter of anger. We have said that much of our anger arises from our desire for, and insistence upon, autonomy of living. We want things to be as we desire they should be. When they are not then we become angered.

The primary cause of anger is our rejection of God, his universe as he has created it, others as they are, and ourselves as we are. When God created all things he pronounced them to be ‘very good’, ie. functionally good, harmonious in their working and purposive in their goals. Man’s rejection of God means his non-acceptance of the way things work. Man wishes them to work in accordance with his desire or plans. Rightly speaking, all mankind, creatures and other created things should live in harmony, and work functionally, being interdependent. For any creature to seek to assert autonomy means that other persons, creatures and things will be put out of harmony—at least to some degree. This is *the* cause of pressure, stress, friction, disorientation, personal dislocation, and so, anger. Of course the desire to be autonomous was what caused the Fall. Man now lives consonant with that Fall.

Put more simply, this must mean that when we do not align ourselves with God, creation, man, and our essential (created) selves, then stresses will come which would not otherwise trouble us. Being out of kilter with things-as-they-really-are, we are out of focus. Thus we cannot tolerate our experience(s) of life and so we protest. We become angry. Generally God is blamed, but man’s rebellion causes his distress and anger.

In our next chapter we will see some of the implications and working out of this principal reason for anger.

7

## **THE NATURE OF ANGER—2**

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### **FURTHER CAUSES FOR ANGER**

One of the primary causes of anger is the guilt we feel for not conforming with the true order of the creation. We are wrong, and know we are wrong, but we rationalise our wrongness as being right, thereby increasing our guilt. Our guilt compounds itself, and so increases our insecurity. Break of relationships with God means break of relationships with fellow man. Again, all of this compounds itself. Uneasy man is easily angered.

Man being made in the image of God has the capacity for anger, and this anger is intended to be righteous, ie. to be against evil and for righteousness. Anger, when it is—in principle—for others and not primarily for oneself, is reasonable. Righteous indignation, especially when one has been done an injustice, easily passes over into self-righteous indignation. Anger then flowers out.

The guilty man is the one who has basically rejected God. Nevertheless he retains moral sense and knows he is wrong. He can, to some degree, rationalise this wrongness to himself, but confrontation by righteousness, love and/or holiness is devastating. I John 3:10-11 tells us that Abel loved Cain, did works of righteousness, and so portrayed the image of God.

It was this image which Cain could not tolerate. He had to rid himself of it, so pestiferous it appeared to be. *To hit at Abel was to hit at God.* This principle is also found in Genesis 9 where a man or beast who kills a man is himself to be killed, since *man is the image of God.*

Romans 1:19ff. tells us that all creation in its life and actions portrays God, ie. his eternal power and Godhead. Hence man will come to hate anything which reminds him of God when he himself is seeking to blot out the knowledge of God. This is why man sneers at the beautiful, the good, the loving, the holy and the moral. *They anger him.* That is, they are not as guilty man would have them to be.

The law also shows the righteousness of God, and in so doing shows the unrighteousness of man. That is why man hates the law. He seeks to demean it, denying its eternal nature and its true significance.

With the law, of course, there are the ordained authorities which are placed in the universe. Man connects law and authority in his thinking, and is angered by this imposition upon his freedom (so called), ie. his autonomy or self-rule which he covets and imagines is a birthright.

When then we add all these things together, we can see the causes of anger in man. Elements of God, creation and man seem to interfere with man's freedom, ie. his personal independence. He cannot acknowledge that he is only true man when he is dependent upon God as Creator, as Father, and as King. Jeremiah 10:23 affirms, 'The way of man is not in himself'. This being so, *autonomy in man is a functional impossibility.* Nor is it to be desired.

### **THE MATTER OF MAN AND THE WRATH OF GOD**

We now come to the real cause for anger. God, for his part, is angry with man! It is he who is angry with rebellious man! Psalm 7:11 says, 'God is angry with the wicked every day'.

This accords with Romans 1:18, which tells us that 'the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress [ie. hold down] the truth in [acts of] unrighteousness'. That is, God must express his active anger against all the evil which man does in His universe, against that sin which is contrary to its natural, ie. moral, creational and functional order.

At this point we need not go into discussion concerning the wrath of God, except to say that it must not be thought to be like the irrational anger of man which often expresses itself out of sheer frustration, rage and resentment. God is love and not wrath. When, therefore, he is provoked to wrath, his love, so to speak, handles his own wrath. It is under his control. Such a wrath is not to be seen as human, or as arbitrary. God's wrath is simply his set opposition to evil, and his unchanging intention to destroy it, and keep his creation in purity and love.

When, then, we come to man-under-wrath, we observe a curious phenomenon. Man feels the wrath of God but cannot accept that God is wrathful with him. *Man's anger is his transferring (off loading) of that wrath on to other persons or things* so that he might be relieved of its pressure. At first sight this is not apparent. However, since we judge ourselves when we judge others, it must be that we see in others that same thing which is in us and we judge it. This is a guilt-relieving device. Even so, it can never—by nature of the case—prove successful. It is strange that the very anger we make others feel is in fact related to the way we feel about God's anger. If we examine the way we feel God's anger, then we can recognise what we are about in being angry with others.

### **SOME ELEMENTS OF GOD'S ANGER**

'God is angry with the wicked every day' (Psalm 7:11).

Hebrew thinking recognised man *felt* that anger every day, ie. man felt guilt for his sins in a bodily way. Augustine said, ‘Man carries about in his conscience, every day, a testimony to the wrath of God.’ In other words, that wrath is felt in the conscience. On this score Psalm 32:1-5 needs to be read.

‘Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.  
Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.  
When I declared not my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.  
For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.  
I acknowledged my sin to thee, and I did not hide my iniquity;  
I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord”; then thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin.’

The psalmist sees his sin as a vitalistic, destructive and dynamic power within him. When he encloses or locks it within himself by refusing to confess it, then it causes him deep distress. This is the wrath of God, ie. ‘God’s wrath is not sin, but sin [unconfessed, internally active] is God’s wrath.’ Psalm 31:10 says, ‘For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away’. David sees his sin as wasting him away, whilst at the same time it is God’s personal (though not vindictive) wrath upon him.

The *locus classicus* of wrath is Psalm 38. At least its first eight verses give us the action of that wrath:

‘O Lord, rebuke me not in thy anger, nor chasten me in thy wrath!  
For thy arrows have sunk into me,  
and thy hand has come down on me.  
There is no soundness in my flesh because of thy indignation;  
there is no health in my bones

because of my sin.  
For my inequities have gone over my head; they weigh like a burden too heavy for me.  
My wounds grow foul and fester because of my foolishness,  
I am utterly bowed down and prostrate;  
all the day I go about mourning.  
For my loins are filled with burning,  
and there *is* no soundness in my flesh.  
I am utterly spent and crushed; I groan because of the tumult of my heart.’

What then is the meaning behind this graphic description of personal suffering? It is this:

We see that man is in suffering because of his rebellion. We realise he is in a state of personal dislocation, disharmony, disorientation. Hence his immense frustration. If we add to these thoughts the fact that he cannot be fulfilled as a person, by nature of the case, then we can see why he is unhappy, uneasy, and quickly stirred to anger. His anger assumes a chronic state. The fact is that he has deprived himself of love, social fellowship, natural harmony, and most of all of that deepest emotional fulfilment which comes in obedience to God. We know then why man is so easily angered.

In fact, because of his sin, and in his sin, man has, so to speak, ‘unmanned’ himself.

### HOW MAN’S ANGER WORKS ITSELF OUT

We saw in Ecclesiastes 5:16-17 that man has ‘toiled for the wind’, ie. for emptiness, to no purpose. Therefore he suffers ‘in darkness and grief, in much vexation and sickness and resentment’. It is this which man cannot tolerate. Nor does he see why he should do so. Many times, then, he acts towards others as he feels the action of God upon him. In fact, this person is suffering from *deprivation*. He has denuded himself of peace, joy, love and personal fulfilment. He has done so

by living to himself and not to God. He is going against his own true humanness, so he compounds his anger and resentment in his deep sense of loss.

When we meet a person like this we meet one whom we can call *the chronically angry man*. Everything he sees he judges as deficient, wrong, and even threatening. He meets it with aggression. He vents his anger and his venom in words, and often, actions. All spring from an habituated attitude of rejection. He is really angry with God and all that he has made, not even excluding himself, the angry man. It is a strange fact that we can see the habitual anger in others and not recognise it in ourselves.

## 8

## THE THINGS WHICH COME TO MAN

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So far we have spoken in general principles, and, we trust, biblical principles. Whilst that may be good, we are nevertheless faced with life where we meet it. What then are some of the things which anger us? What are some of the causes of anger which come to us from our heredity, parental upbringing, circumstances and environment?

### THE THINGS WHICH INFLUENCE MAN

Before we discuss these we must see that it is not the things of heredity, parental training, circumstances and environment which *necessarily* anger man. Those who attend births report that some babies appear to be born with aggressive temperaments or attitudes. Others portray placidity. This phenomenon raises deep questions:

Does the child determine itself, so to speak, even in the womb?

Does it choose its own attitudes at this early age?

Does it exercise a determinative choice?

The story of Esau and Jacob is a classic example of intention, if not exercise of choice. These two struggled in the

womb before they were born (cf. Genesis 25:22-26). What is more, they kept this attitude consistently in life.

Some of the persons we have noted who were angry contrast with others who seem habitually placid and serene. Some are bright and yet tranquil. Is this merely a given temperament, derived genetically, or does some mysterious determination of the will happen when the child is even in the womb? The psalmist said, 'The wicked B° astray from the womb, speaking lies'. God says to Jacob, 'You were a rebel from the womb'. We know that John the Baptist received the Holy Spirit in the womb. Attitude, of course, determines the responses or reactions to heredity, parental training, circumstances and environment.

Even so, many things happen, especially in a world of sinful human beings, which bring deep stress. These can be the anger of parents and family, the selfishness of others, the depressing circumstances in which some live, and the external provocations of greed, cruelty, injustice, and the like. Other factors may also obtain. Some parents have states of neurosis and psychosis (if these terms are valid), ie. states of depression, anger, failure, inferiority, and have often done just about everything that could bring fear, insecurity and alienation to the child. Positive instructions are given in Scripture for the well-being of the child, and the loving care and encouraging discipline which should be exercised.

Every child has a right expectation, so to speak, when it is born into the world, ie. that it will be loved, received warmly, made secure, and cared for. It has a primal right to this expectation in that God created man in his own image, ie. the image of (holy) love. God is love and light: hence man ought to reflect these two elements of holy love. All human creatures should live in that state and exercise such love to others. In the light of Romans 5:12f., the question is, 'If the human race is a solidary being, a corporate body of humanity, and has made its own (corporate) choice in Adam, then what expectancy

can it have when it, too, is involved in sin?' Paul says, '. . .all *did* sin', ie. when Adam sinned, all sinned. His sin was man's corporate choice, ie. man, somehow, chose to sin along with him. Doubtless this is a strange principle, but it must be examined, even despite its strangeness.

Many folk—as we have suggested—have problems with this sort of reasoning, but it cannot be avoided. We have no right to say that a child is, willy-nilly, the victim of its heredity, parental upbringing, circumstances and environment, however much these may prove to be pressures upon it. When James Denney said,<sup>1</sup> 'What we inherit. . .may be said to fix our trial, but not our fate',<sup>2</sup> he knew the dignity of the human person. This dignity lies in the powers of intelligence, intuition, and choice. It is the right and power of choice which marks man out from the other creatures. Doubtless—strange as it may seem—all children make their choice, set their attitudes, and so develop what we may call 'the mind-set'. We do not at all underrate external influences, pressures, stresses. Nor do we ignore genetic influences. We do not insist on a stoical attitude to life, ie. a trained indifference to emotions, hurts and stresses. We admit the thrust and tug of temptation, considerations of fame, achievement, hurt, and wounding, but none of these should take us into a weak state of pitying man or diminishing his moral nature and responsibilities. We surely, too, admit the moral weakness of every human creature, but insist that *this need not be so* if man will come to union with God. According to Christ, it is little children who can be powerful members of the Kingdom of God and exercise simple, uncomplicated faith. These can overcome what seem insuperable difficulties, not by intellectual brilliance,

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<sup>1</sup> *Studies in Theology*. p.91 (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1895).

<sup>2</sup> He could have been speaking of other elements also, such as parental upbringing, circumstances and environment.

but by simplicity of life, ie. by seeing clearly things as they really are. We are saying that more things are possible to human persons—even unborn babes—than we usually care to attribute to them. Why, then, is a child disappointed if it does not receive the tenderness such as is given in a Leboyer<sup>1</sup> birth, and why does it respond so well to such tenderness? What are its standards of expectancy, and where do they come from? Why are some children angry at apparent injustices, whilst others seem to accept things as they come?

### THE HUMAN RACE IN ACTION

It is apparent that love is the basic affirmation of God's creation. He is love. His creation must be a love-thing. Man is designed for love. Hence the possibility of great reaction is present when love is missing. We have also seen that a sense of righteousness is part of man's moral being, hence insistence upon justice is innate in man. There is even 'honour amongst thieves'! What we are saying is that man will know when a thing is evil, and his reaction can be strong. The question, however, is, 'Does love in fact need to react to the point of unremitting anger?' Given the fact of injustice, should reaction be so radical?<sup>2</sup>

We must recognise that in the committed evils of man there is great room for hurts, wounds, bitternesses, reactions, and so on. We might then well expect anger, resentment, retaliation, and even vengeance. The world has a history of social injustice, selfishness, greed, manipulated wars, genocides,

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<sup>1</sup> The Leboyer method of effecting birth is based on the premise that expressed love at birth by parents and others will induce a sense of security and acceptance in the baby, and the result of this will be a more serene and contented child. (Cf. *Tranquillity Denied*, Anthony Hordern. Rigby Ltd., Adelaide 1976, pp.118ff.)

<sup>2</sup> We think of the violence that meets violence because of its anger at 'unrighteous' violence, particularly where the innocent suffer in the course of the actions of retributive violence.

rapes, political corruption, nepotism, fratricide, and other evils. We might well, on our general levels of thinking, excuse man for becoming bitter and cynical. The only weakness in such expectation and pardoning of man is that he does it all himself! None of this is directly the work of God. The fact is that anger often arises out of an unrealistic and even cynical view of the human race. This cynicism is extended to God. It seems that the critic alone is good and just!

The essential truth is that God requires total love, total righteousness of everyone in the human race. He never accommodates his levels of command to our levels of what we see as 'reasonable practice'. We are all expected to live in love from birth. That we do not is our sin. Nor can we criticise one section of the human race, and excuse another. We are all caught up together in the action and entail of sin. As John Donne rightly pointed out, no man is an island, entire of itself, but part of a great continent. Hence, whether we like it or not, we are committed to one another, for good or for evil. We simply cannot be angry at the treatment we have received. Somehow there is purpose in it all.

We may not understand or even believe the doctrine of predestination and election—the planning of God for his people from before time—but the fact is that the action and events which happen in the world are not arbitrary, even though they may seem to be this way. God's hand is in it all—all appearances to the contrary. The psalmist was confident he spoke the truth when he said, ' . . . thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb', and, 'Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance; in thy book were written every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them'. No wonder he adds, 'How precious to me are thy thoughts, O God!'

What is even harder to accept is the statement of the writer of Proverbs: 'You have made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of judgement.' The man who

believes in the sovereignty of God is the man who can remain calm and composed. The man who distrusts God is the man who can become angry, even chronically angry. It is at this we must now look. If all things, in the ultimate, are not in, and under, the hand of God, then we cannot even say, 'God help us!'

## 9

### ALL THINGS ARE GOOD

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#### GOD'S GOODNESS: SOMETHING WE CANNOT BEAR TO HEAR

Paul tells us that we were enemies of God, in our *hearts*, through wicked works (Colossians 1:21, cf. Romans 5:10, 1:30, 'haters of God'). John is milder: ' . . . not that we loved God' (I John 4:10). Man hates God because of his own sin. He repeats Cain's hatred against Abel, because (a) Abel loved him, and (b) Abel's deeds were righteous and his own evil. Man is guilty because he is wrong. He hates his guilt, its state, and yet somehow blames God for it. He loathes his own evil, but is angered with God because of it. Irrationally he blames God for his own guilt. For this reason no one can tell him God is good.

It is fascinating to read the Psalms concerning what it calls 'the earth'. The earth, ie. creation, does so many things, and is so many things. Though the heavens and earth belong to God, yet '...the earth he has given to the sons of men' (Psalm 115:16, cf. Genesis 1:28f.). What concerns us, however, is God's government of all the world, all happenings, all time. Man, generally, does not (or will not) believe that God

is beneficent, ie. that he handles all things—given in the evil of rebellious human and celestial powers—in the best way possible. He sees God in a contrary way. As Paul says (quoting Old Testament scriptures), ‘There is none who understands God. There is none who seeks after him’. The statement is dreary, no doubt, but it is true.

We are angry because—so we think—God does not love us. God does not care. God does not do good for us. Sometimes, indeed quite often, God is callous to our need, and even harmful to us. He is grim, judgemental, vengeful: this is how we see him. Even the reading of Psalm 104—the psalm above all others which speaks of his continual providential care of the entire creation—may not make us change our mind. The numerous Scriptures which speak of his longsuffering and loving kindness may also make no difference. The sheer joy some men say they know in God may leave us unmoved.

The only thing which can move us is his great Cross. Here we see his love, and once we see it here, we may see it everywhere. *We will not read God's love and care in creation, providence and preservation until first we have seen it in the Cross.*

The question of course is, ‘How many have seen and understood the Cross?’ It is on this understanding that everything hinges.

### **GOD'S GOODNESS—EVERYWHERE**

Let us look at the statements Scripture makes about the earth. Let us read how God has given everything into man's hands. Let us look at what he has, so to speak, stashed away for men, in the earth. Minerals, fossil fuels, atomic power are there for mankind. The world is so made that man may produce food in abundance; that is to say, that man can use the earth to grow fruit, grain and vegetables, and use birds and

animals to produce other foods.<sup>1</sup> If man does not share these gifts properly, or distribute the world's natural wealth in a kindly way, then God must not be blamed. Rightly seen, this world is a beautiful place, stunning in its lavish provisions. Only man exploits it, and in so doing exploits his fellow man.

When Paul had to preach to pagans, he told them of the goodness of God: ‘ . . . for he did good, and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness’. To others—Greeks this time—he said, ‘ . . . he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything’. He added, ‘In him we live and move and have our being’.

Such arguments rarely move human beings. This writer once had a young man come to him for counselling. The man had lived wildly for some years. He had been through the experiences so many go through when they are angry with parents, God and man. He had experimented with sexual immorality and drugs, and dabbled in Eastern esoteric religions. He told a fascinating story of having seen a beautiful young woman on the TV screen. He had not been sexually stimulated. He simply watched this beautiful person as she sang and played her guitar. It was not even the words of the song which had touched him. He suddenly saw incredible beauty. He cried out, ‘Whoever made her must be wonderful!’ He had been given a window on true created beauty, and so the magnificence of the creation. It had been his special moment in time to respond, yet what he saw had always been so. If all human beings would see this, anger would disappear.

The young man had grasped the truth that God is good, and all he has made is good. For many days he could not eat

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<sup>1</sup> It is a matter of constant amazement that man fails to see the *nature* of creation and to realise that foods, sources of clothing, housing and medicines, are functionally adapted to man's needs. How come they should be? This amazing fact and principle is stated by Paul, when he says, ‘All things are yours’, and ‘God has given us all things richly to enjoy’. Why then, human anger?

or sleep. The thrill of this new truth went through him, and he gasped continually with the wonder of it. The human race needs only a dose of this understanding to make it different. Of course it simply *wills* not to see such things. It protects itself generally against such confronting revelations. Such revelations would unmask the ingratitude of the human race.

This truth—the revelation of God—is the basis of the great themes of praise and worship in the Scriptures. The man who truly sees God cannot refrain from worshipping him, and from giving him continual adoration. He is grateful for the very Being of God. He is full of thanks that God is so good. He needs to worship God and is fulfilled in so doing. Worship is giving true worth, and man is doing himself a disservice in refusing to worship God. In worshipping God, man discovers his own true worth.

#### **GOD'S GOODNESS THE CAUSE OF PRAISE**

Paul says that man's trouble began when he refused to give God his glory, and to be thankful—in his heart—for God (see Romans 1:20ff.). Man should be filled with joy just for the sheer fact of God being God, let alone thankful for what God does for him. Being unthankful, he cut himself off from the goodness of God. He made substitutes for God, ie. idols. He believed he could control idols, and place his worship where he wished, ie. anywhere other than in God. Jesus had said, 'God is Spirit, and they who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth'. Man is basically spiritual also, and can only be free in the truth. He has intense joy when he surrenders to these two elements, ie. God's Spirit, and God's truth. Jesus had added, '...such the Father ever seeks to worship him'.

In the epistles of the New Testament we have such statements as, '... always, and for everything, give thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to the Father'; '...giving

thanks to God the Father'; 'Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God for you'. The thrust of these and other Scriptures is that God is good, and everything he does is good, although this may not always appear to be so.

Romans 8:28 states the principle that in all things God is working-for the good of those who love him. This must mean, then, that there is nothing in life which is not for man's good, even though immediately it may appear otherwise. Not all things are good, but God is working them for good. *This we must believe even though appearances are to the contrary.* Man, of course, does not believe it. This is why he is angry.

#### **SIN HAS CONFUSED THE ISSUES SO THAT MAN CANNOT SEE GOODNESS**

Man thinks that he would be a fool who looked at the world and said, 'Everything is good', for this is not how it appears. True, as C. S. Lewis observed, it could be and even should be infinitely worse because of man's capacity for evil. The wonder, he suggests, is that it is not worse than it is. Nevertheless many things which happen in creation are terrible. It may then be argued that had there been no sin, all would have been wonderful. That of course is a true statement. Yet whilst it is true that there is much evil in the world, it is also true that *nothing has essentially changed.* However many perversions man may bring to his universe cannot essentially change the creation. Of course, man can use the elements of creation for evil, but the innate nature of creation is unchangeable. Man, we repeat, cannot change the essential nature of creation. Only God can do that.

Secondly, God is working all these evil things for the ultimate good of his creation. That is the strange and wonderful marvel of God's action. He is not a God of legalistic rigidity. He is love, and he exercises grace. Man is a perfectionist, rigidly demanding (though never accomplishing) perfection.

God handles his universe well, even though evil powers and man, within it, are rebellious. The only person who can be serene is the one who can see this. Doubtless he will have to see it by faith, for it is not apparent by sight. Having, then, seen this, he can live serenely in his world. The wonder of God is that the interference in creation by Satan, evil powers and rebellious man does not stop him from doing good, or from working all things—even evil things—for good; that is, for *ultimate* good. Whilst we may not immediately see this working of things for good, we shall ultimately see it if we are currently persons of faith. It is no wonder, then, that all his works praise him.

## **THE CONTRAST: TRANQUIL MIND OR ANGRY SPIRIT?**

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A significant statement is made in Proverbs 14:29-30. In the book of Proverbs, as a general principle it is difficult to know whether two verses necessarily follow one another, or are even linked in thought. In this particular case they appear to be.

‘He who is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has  
a hasty temper exalts folly.  
A tranquil mind gives life to the flesh, but passion  
makes the bones rot.’

It seems that the person who is slow to anger is the one with the tranquil mind, and the man with a hasty temper is the passionate man. We need, however, to examine these verses closely to get the best out of them. The general sense is that a man of tranquil mind lives as a healthy person, but the man of passion knows inner erosion of his being.

### **THE TRANQUIL MIND**

The word ‘tranquil’ has been translated ‘sound’ in the *King James Version*, but other versions opt for ‘tranquil’. In fact the word means ‘health’ or ‘healing’ (Heb. *marpe*). It can

have the ideas of cure, healing, health, remedy, yielding, sound, and wholesome. It is not difficult, however, to figure out its meaning here. It surely means a heart that is whole, healed of *passion* as a ruling factor, and which is calm about life, as also wholesome in being. The general meaning can be sensed from the following references which use the word *marpe*.

*Proverbs 3:8.* 'It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.'

*Proverbs 4:22.* 'For they are life to him who finds them, and healing to all his flesh.'

*Proverbs 13:17.* 'A bad messenger plunges men into trouble, but a faithful envoy brings healing.'

*Proverbs 16:24.* 'Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.'

*Jeremiah 14:19.* 'Hast thou utterly rejected Judah? Does thy soul loathe Zion? Why hast thou smitten us so that there is no healing for us? We looked for peace, but no good came; for a time of healing, but behold, terror.'

*Malachi 4:2.* 'But for you who fear my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. You shall go forth leaping like calves from the stall.'

*11 Chronicles 21:18.* 'And after all this the Lord smote him in his bowels with an incurable disease.' (We see the negative form in this latter reference—*en marpe*—meaning incurable.)

An examination of these texts makes interesting reading. The heart, the soul, the body, are all in good health. The person with the tranquil mind is full of joyous health. This is particularly so in Malachi 4:2, where the sun's rays have healing within them, and so bring to men joyous health.

The word 'mind' used in Proverbs 14:30 is, in fact, 'heart'. In the Old Testament the heart was always seen as the seat of emotional, intellectual and volitional life. When the heart is settled, tranquil, and unmoved by surges of passion, then the possessor of it is indeed healthful. His thinking is sound. His

decisions are not hasty ones. He does not fret himself because of the things around him. In fact he is not feverishly troubled by the things which trouble many others.

### THE TRANQUIL HEART

Once the point is established that it is the heart which is the centre and spring of life, then the Scriptures open up a wide vista of human personhood. In the Old Testament the heart must not be separated from the intellect, the will, the body. It is at one with them, as they with it. In fact, the heart is really the whole person, the whole of man. The study of the heart is really the study of man.

Man must keep his heart with all diligence, ie. guard it from defilement, wrong use, abuse, and so on. Out of it flow the basic issues of life, the very issues flowing from God himself. They flow to man from God, and then through man. This heart can become proud, evil, autonomous, a polluted fountain, a muddy stream. It can be deceitful above all other things in the universe. It can hide its murderous, lustful and lecherous intents, but then only for a time, for the heart will bring forth its own bitter fruits. Murder, lust and lechery will finally have their way, emerging from their breeding ground, born of this strange matrix.

Likewise the heart can be pure, flowing forth sweet waters. Love can flow from it. There is the inward heart, the *secret heart*, as David once called it. In the depths of it man meditates wholesomely, powerfully. He actually communes in the depths with God. It is the man who is versed in this true meditation who has a *tranquil heart*.

The tranquil heart is one which has been healed of human rebellion, of its former sinful aptitude. It is now what has been called 'the new heart' or the 'heart of flesh', as against the stolid, stony heart. It is warm. In it the Spirit of God has his home.

This heart belongs to the man who has a holy fear of the Lord, the fear which is the beginning of wisdom. Proverbs 3:7-8 has it, 'Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.' In Isaiah 58:6-9, the principle of the healed and healthful heart is set out, for when one's soul is drawn out to the poor and the hungry, and one cares for them, 'then shall your light break forth as the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily'.

## **THE ANGRY SPIRIT**

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### **THE PASSION WHICH IS ENVY, JEALOUSY AND ZEAL**

The writer says, ' . . . passion rots the bones'. What does he mean by 'passion'? Some translations have 'envy'. In other contexts of use, the word 'jealousy' is used. Another meaning is 'zeal'. Why then have modern translations used the term 'passion'? The answer is because the basic thought is zeal, and the intensity which goes with it. The Greek equivalent is in fact the word *zelos*, from which we derive the English word 'zeal'. The Hebrew word is *qinah*, which is translated as 'envy' or 'envying' some twenty times, as 'jealousy' some thirty times, and as 'zeal' about fifteen times.

If we examine some of the contexts in which the word is used, they, like the word 'tranquil', convey the general meaning of the term. One is zealous for God, but primarily God is zealous in what he does. In Psalm 69:9 the psalmist cries that 'the zeal of thy house has consumed me', and this statement is quoted of Jesus in John 2:17 when he cleanses the temple. In both cases it is a passionate affair.

Jealousy is said to burn like a fire. It is said to consume one. In Song of Solomon 8:6, jealousy is said to be as cruel as the grave. In Proverbs 6:34 we are told, 'Jealousy makes a

man furious, and he will not spare when he takes revenge'. Envy and jealousy are really the one, and this is said to 'slay the simple', or 'cause rottenness of the bones'. Proverbs 27:4 asks, 'Who can stand before it?' Envy, jealousy and zeal are the same in the New Testament as in the Old Testament.

### THE INTENSE PERSON

*Qinah* in the Old Testament and *zelos* in the New Testament are akin. They are marks of the intense person. The intense person does not control his passion, but it controls him. Sometimes the passion is good. It has no obvious evil about it. A man is passionately attached to his work, his home, his sport, his nation, his family, his hobby. Yet it is the level of intensity which is wrong. His passion rules him. He is compulsive where his passion is concerned.

When we begin to examine the intense persons, we find they are often the angry persons also. They cannot brook impediments in what they are doing. They cannot accept handicaps. They are very serious about what they seek to do. Things must be just as they want them, and they must be so immediately.

There is in them a driving zeal, a powerful motivation, and it will brook no interference. We can see, then, why the passionate man so easily becomes angered. The fact that a passionate man can burn with passion, can burn with jealousy, zeal and envy, is significant. In fact in the Old Testament anger is a burning thing. So then, these elements are all in the one.

### EXAMPLES OF INTENSE PERSONS

We have already covered many of these. Cain was an intense man, full of steam, and his steam was dangerous. A man like Nimrod was intense, hunting men, building a kingdom, fortifying

himself against invasion. Saul, King of Israel, was an intense man, and dark in his intensity. He was fearful, morose, and had the sorrow which brings regret, and 'worldly grief which produces death' (11 Corinthians 7:10). Saul of Tarsus also was a deeply intense man, and until his zeal was purified was a person who hunted others to their death.

One of the simpler examples is Martha, whom we have previously mentioned. She was 'anxious and troubled about many things'. One translation has it, 'You are fussing and fretting about many things'. She was a disturbed woman. Her native practicality was impeded by her great passion. She must have felt insecure, and even inferior. Her sister represented some kind of a threat to her. If we are indignant about Jesus' rebuke to her, then it may be we react because there are similar elements in ourselves. Without doubt Jesus met her needs in the events of the death of her brother Lazarus. He dissolved her fears and anxieties in his statement, 'He that believes in me. . . shall never die'.

Simon Peter was a passionate man. He was impulsive, lacking self-control. He was sure of himself, but yet greatly uncertain. Even after his failure—when he had denied his master—he impulsively returned to the trade he had known: fishing. In Galatians 2:11 we see him suddenly afraid of the Judaisers. James and John, 'the sons of thunder', were likewise passionate men. They had wished Jesus to bring down fire upon the Samaritans. How angry they were with them!

We could multiply instances and examples. Indeed it would surprise us to know how many passionate and angry people there are. Our conclusion, then, is this: the passionate man, the one who shows zeal for this and that, who is easily envious, quickly jealous, who displays zeal for action, is, to say the least, an intense person. Much as we wish to put most of this down to temperament and heredity, we are baffled in our claim. So many who were intense and passionate people have

changed when the grace of God has come upon them, and when his love has flowed into their lives.

*Qinah* or 'zeal' is not merely a matter of temperament. It is a matter of attitude. If we ask, 'How did such an attitude originate?' then the answer must be that sinful man is never secure, never wholly at peace, never fully serene. He is compulsively driven to prove himself, and always on the alert to justify himself. He is constantly aware—though he would deny it—of the feelings and attitudes of others. He has regard for their opinions. Hence he compounds his insecurity and inferiority. He is afraid to fail.

Underneath all this is guilt. He cannot cope with his own person. His insecurity grows, but his control of it diminishes. It is no wonder that this passion, this intensity, this compulsiveness draws upon all his resources, and brings rottenness to the bones. Some medical folk would say it literally rots the bones, in some cases, with cancer or other diseases. Man cannot live in anger and aggressiveness and not receive bodily damage of some kind. He cannot continually stimulate certain of his glands and be unaffected by their discharges into his bodily system. Man's own anger builds up his misery.

Only a tranquil mind puts flesh on a man.

### MAN CAN DO ALL THINGS

Looking at the problem of human zeal, we can also detect human pride. Man often reasons that God is not doing what he ought to do. Zealous man is impatient. *He* will do what needs to be done! Even so, the matter is not so simple. Man's pride arises from his belief that he can be *as* God and do most, if not all, things. In fact the human system is built on this concept.

So man strives to do all things. When he fails, he does not accept responsibility for the failure. Adverse elements must have caused the failure. The world is in many ways alien and

hostile to him. Insecurity is a constant threat. Thwarted zeal (passion) compounds the same zeal. Man is caught in a perpetual mill-race of self-works, failure, guilt-driven effort, attempted compensation, and the like. Failure depresses him, and so his anger builds.

If—exhausted by this inner demand for success—he could simply stop, admit his human inability to do all things, and if he could look to the forgiving and rehabilitating grace of God, then he could relax into his true humanity. His bones would cease to rot, and he would become whole in his living of life. 'Be still and know that I am God' is a great word for true health.

## 12

## TRYING TO COPE WITH ANGER AND ITS CAUSES

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The Scriptures clearly demand control of anger. The intense person in his passion, zeal, envy and jealousy is required to moderate his experience and expressions of anger. The truly righteous person (who is he?) may, from time to time, be consumed by zeal for the Lord and his house, but the personally angry man, the annoyed bitter man, must finish with his wrong anger. The following Scriptures make this clear:

*Proverbs 16:32.* 'He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.'

*Proverbs 29:11.* 'A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man quietly holds it back.'

*Proverbs 25:28.* 'A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.'

*Proverbs 19:11.* 'Good sense makes a man slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offence.'

*Proverbs 29:20.* 'Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.'

*Proverbs 29:22.* 'A man of wrath stirs up strife, and a man given to anger causes much transgression.'

*Proverbs 14:17.* 'A man of quick temper acts foolishly, but a man of

discretion is patient.'

*Proverbs 14:29.* 'He who is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.'

*Proverbs 15:18.* 'A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.'

How then does a person deal with his own wrong anger? To deal with it effectively he has only one way; that is the way of catharsis. He must empty out his anger, not merely by ventilating it aggressively, but by the means of confession and received forgiveness. Such confession must be preceded by repentance. Repentance must be the result of (a) a revelation of the wrong and evil nature of passion, anger, envy, jealousy and misplaced zeal; and (b) a revelation of the love of God in forgiveness of the same. Before we explore this catharsis, we ought to see that man attempts to deal with his anger by either ventilation or suppression. *Suppression* only dams up the intensity the man has, and further threatens his person. Psychologists and psychiatrists sometimes claim that depression is inward anger, ie. rage which has been suppressed. It is covered over because the subject does not wish it to be known. He may be ashamed of it. He may wish to conceal it, or he may know no other way of dealing with it. Suppression then is highly dangerous, leading as it does to destructive explosion.

*Ventilation* is the other way of seeking to deal with it. Some may call this the 'honest anger', but that is doubtful. The one ventilating it feels he has a right to do so. Ventilated anger often causes great distress. If the subject is guilty because of his anger, then he increases his guilt through ventilation. The statements, 'He who is slow to anger is of great understanding', and, 'It is prudent for a man to restrain his anger; it is his glory to overlook an offence', are statements which show that the greatness of character lies in self-restraint. It is interesting that one version of II Timothy 1:7 speaks of a 'sound

mind', and another of 'self-control'. Self-control is not self-repression. It is the right use of intelligence and emotion, not merely the repression of wrong emotion. It is the positive and useful controlling of one's self.

### **IS CONTROL OF ANGER UNREALISTIC?**

The godly man is expected to empty himself of his anger and thus to be free to control his emotions. The ungodly man may be required by God to do the same, but he will not. His moral confusion and spiritual disorientation is such that he cannot. He is an angry man because he is a frustrated and rebellious person. Hence he cannot—over the surface of his guilt—either effect a catharsis of his anger or control the passion of his being. It is all part of his guilt, the complex of sin-guilt-fear and rebellion. Over the years his passion has both compounded and habituated itself.

The only way in which the man who is angry with God, creation, others, and himself, can be cured is by repentance and faith. We mean that the way out of his anger is by spiritual regeneration. This fact and process we will discuss at a later point. The point before us is really the godly man, the person who is in Christ. It is evident that a person who is in Christ, who belongs to God, who has experienced regeneration, should be one who is, generally speaking, free from wrong anger. Yet the truth is that many are not. If they were, then there would be no need of injunctions or exhortations along this line. It is evident that the epistles of the New Testament do give such exhortations.

In order to understand fully how it is a person is released from anger by the Gospel and the Spirit, it will be profitable for us to retrace our steps in the whole matter of the Cross, the Gospel, the work of the Spirit, and the fact of man's redemption and regeneration. It will at the one and same time teach those who have not experienced the release of regeneration,

and those who need to see afresh how it is we can control or obviate wrong anger from our lives.

**13****REDEMPTIONAL RELEASE  
FROM ANGER**

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We have seen that the cause of anger is alienation from God. This alienation springs from our will to be independent of God and autonomous in living. To separate ourselves from God means to reject and lose the power by which we could live properly. It also means our deepest emotional requirements cannot be fulfilled, by nature of the case. We are cut off from the source of total emotional fulfilment—God. We have also prevented ourselves from that emotional fulfilment which comes from human relationships. Nor can we fully enjoy God's creation. The perversity of our minds sees all kinds of things which are not there (anyway, essentially) in the creation. One has to be in harmony with the Creator to enjoy his creation.

Of course there is evil in the world, and the person who is separated from God is exposed to such evil, and the insinuations of evil. Evil can only think evil of God, and so the person's view of the world is perverted and distorted. Whilst it is true that God does not wholly abandon man—'in him we live and move and have our being'—yet there is a difference in being preserved by him and fully relating to him. The knowledge of God becomes an affront, a confronting demand to be

other than what we are in our separation.

As we have said, all of these things, especially emotional things, are the causes of our anger. We are angry because our lives are not rich, creative and wholly fulfilled. We imagine God is responsible for this, rather than our rebellious wills. We chafe against the true nature of things because they are out of kilter with what we are. In fact it is we who are out of kilter with what they are. Moreover we suffer the pangs of our guilt for being out of kilter. We suffer the pangs of our objective guilts, the wrong acts we have done. So we become creatures of guilt, insecurity, fear, and then *anger!*

**RELEASE THROUGH THE CROSS**

Our study is not a detailed one on the work of the Father and Christ. Nevertheless we can see that the Gospel pronounces freedom. This freedom is from the guilt and penalty of sin. It is also freedom from the shaming pollution of sin. It is liberation from the dominating power of sin. Through the Cross, man escapes sin's tyranny. He is a liberated person. The New Testament tells him that he is reconciled with God, and so he may live in reconciliation with all men, at least from his side and determination. It also tells him that the objective work of the Cross for him, brings its subjective response within him. That is, the revelation of God's love has changed his mind and attitude. God has loved him, and God unceasingly loves him. He then loves God because God has loved him, but he also loves others because God loves him. John says, 'We love because he first loved us'. John also infers that if God *so* loved us then we ought also to love one another.

This matter of love is important. Creationally it is natural to love and *unnatural* to hate. Man's suffering comes from fighting the way of love, ie. resisting what is innate in him, the capacity to love. Yet not only does God restore in man the drive to love, but he himself floods the human heart with

love, and at the same time gives the gift of the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of love (Romans 5: 5). He also teaches love (I Thessalonians 4:9). Indeed the whole purpose of the Gospel is that redeemed persons should love (I Peter 1:22).

None of this would have been possible apart from the Cross and the Resurrection. In his death Christ bore our sins, and the 'deathness' of us. He identified with us (11 Corinthians 5:14-15). He laid the legal basis for God's forgiveness. He laid the basis for our justification, ie. our release from guilt. When Paul said, 'Sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace', he meant (a) no sin shall have dominion over you, whatever it may be—even anger—and, (b) this is because you are no longer under law, ie. you do not have to satisfy the law. You do not have to carry its guilt. You are free.

We talk about grace that is known, but by this we do not mean that grace is an abstract notion; we mean grace as it has its impact on our lives. That is, we *know* God's love in forgiveness, justification, cleansing and liberation. The impact of the Cross-Resurrection achievement actually affects us as it effects wholesome redemption. In fact, in technical language, we have the tranquil mind, ie. the healed mind or heart. This is regeneration. This is 'the washing of regeneration, and the renewal of [by] the Holy Spirit'.

One thing more: we must understand something of the cost and suffering of the Cross. Whilst we do not discount the physical side of the crucifixion, we must see beyond it to the terrible moral, mental and spiritual suffering of the Son. All the distortion of spirit we have spoken of, all the anguish of man who has never been (emotionally, personally) fulfilled, including the action of wrath, is what he bore on the Cross. He was numbered with the transgressors, ie. he was made sin for us, and bore our actual sins in his own body on the Cross. Whilst we must never dwell morbidly upon this suffering, we must nevertheless dwell seriously and reverently upon it.

Insofar as we gauge that suffering, and the causes of it, we will discover the love of God. Only that love will dispel anger, and the causes of anger. As we have said, the separation from God, creation and man are the primary causes of our restlessness and the spur of our anger. Remove these and man becomes tranquil. Give him freedom and he will love God, the creation, and fellow man. In reconciliation the motivation to wrong anger is destroyed.

### LOVE NEVER FAILS

The true antidote to anger is found in I Corinthians 13:7-8. 'Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. . . ' This love is not the love which sinful humans exercise, but the love which flows from God through human persons. When this love is present, anger finds no rootage. Anger is a work of the flesh, but love the fruit of the Spirit. By love, then, we deal with anger. Love effects the catharsis of anger when it brings love through the forgiveness and kindness of God. 'We love because he first loved us'.

### CHRISTIANS FAIL TO LOVE

The truth is that Christians often become angry. Some of them are very angry. Some are even chronically angry.<sup>1</sup> It is not because love is not there for them, since it has been poured into their hearts. It is not that God does not love them and so denies the power to love. He does love them, no

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<sup>1</sup> The writer—an erstwhile missionary—has counselled missionaries on many fields, both in conferences, and on their usual locations. He has found that many of them are angry with both God and man, and circumstances. This chronic anger is deeply seated, often having a long history. One cannot but marvel at their zeal for teaching the Gospel of love and forgiveness. It has been gratifying to know that many of these have had a release from anger, often into an overwhelming experience of love.

matter what they are, or do. How then can those who belong to him know irrational anger? How can they know it in an undiminishing flow? The answer lies in Paul's statement, which itself was written to Christians. He said, 'Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you *are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?*' He means that even though it is true that we belong to God, we can choose to serve evil. If we make that choice, then we make ourselves the slaves of evil.

For a child of God to have habitual anger is a contradiction of his true being. The answer to this dilemma—man being loved and regenerated and yet being angry—must be that he has yet to see the full-orbed image of the glory of God in love. He may have seen but deliberately forgotten (11 Peter 1:9), or he may have escaped from the doom of his sin, but never fully from its power though all the means of escape were open to him. He may have known something of grace, but turned, even unwittingly, to law. His freedom may have been swallowed up by legalism.

Whatever it is, this person has yet to know in fullness the cathartic power of love, and the present power of love to energise to love and not to exercise anger. If this love seems not to be working, what then is the problem? The problem must be that the initial understanding of God's love is deficient. It must be that grace is not recognised in its fullness. 1[ he person must be relying partly on his own efforts and only partly on the work of God in Christ. Yet God's love must be seen as unconditional. God says, 'I will love you freely.' It is, 'Freely, freely you have received'. That is, 'Because he loves unconditionally, so must you. There is no place for wrong anger. There is only place for love.'

## COMING TO LOVE

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In our last chapter we saw how a man comes to love through being forgiven, through seeing God's unconditional love to him, and feeling its impact as through repentance and faith he receives the gifts of God, namely eternal life, forgiveness, cleansing, justification and reconciliation with God. The great flow of love upon him determines his response of love to God, and so his love for others. That is coming to love.

We saw that if the recipient is hazy about the gifts, and the free nature of God's giving, then his view of God's love and God as love will also be deficient. The way to come fully to love is to ponder the truth of the Word of God, by the power and inspiration of the Spirit of God, until one knows God's love. 'Herein is love, not that we loved him, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.'

### THE PAST CAN BE AN IMPEDIMENT

We mean that things in the past can present impediments. This is not necessarily so. It is only so if we give power to the past. Since Christ identified with us, and with all that we call our past—as well, of course, as our present and our future—then he has, so to speak, taken the sting and steam out of it. In taking the penalty and the pollution of sin he has

broken its power. This, of course, is only evident to faith. It is, by nature of the case, never evident to sight.

Some who really believe in God nevertheless cannot believe that all is forgiven. They say they cannot forgive themselves, but this is an unconscious way of avoiding the full forgiveness of God. We are not called upon to forgive ourselves. This is neither our prerogative nor duty. No Scripture speaks in these terms. God has forgiven us; that is enough. The unconscious device in rejecting total forgiveness is aimed at escaping the total obligation to love-obedience which is inherent in full forgiveness. It is equally true that another form of escape is to say, 'I understand forgiveness with my head, but not yet in my heart.' That also is a clever expedient to escape forgiveness. In any true person there is no division between head and heart. It is only there if we wish it to be! We had better not wish it to be.

Finally, there is no reason why anything from the past should be a cause of distress, insecurity, guilt, and so, anger. This does not mean that many things from the past may not cause these states, and assuredly they will, if *we do not walk by faith*. Everything from the past will seem real if we do not see Christ has borne it all to exhaustion (so to speak), and thus to extinction—so much so that nothing remains to be remembered. Whilst it is true that we once had every reason to be ashamed of many things, nevertheless he has borne the shame as well as the blame. Should things of the past come to mind they must be treated primarily as reminders of what he has done for us, and not what we have done in error. They are powerful reminders of his grace rather than accusations of our sins.

It is, of course, argued that the past has its own natural consequences, and this is true. Since these consequences will come to pass it is no use bemoaning them, and experiencing guilt afresh. It is true to say that Christ has taken the sting and steam from them, and we must accept the consequences,

remembering that in all these things God is working for good. In the ultimate our failures will work for good. He turns the wrath of man to his own praise. Also he has promised to restore the years which the locusts have eaten. He says, 'Look! I make all things new!'

### IMAGES FROM THE PAST

Without going too much into the theology of the following, let us say simply that since man is made in the image of God, and is both male and female, then the dual male-female (*that* which God has joined) relationship forms the image of God. A child then will receive its first and most powerful presentation of the image of God from its parents.<sup>1</sup> This will remain with it all its life. Since both parents and children are imperfect, the image received will be imperfect. We mean it will be *imperfect as given*, and will *be received imperfectly*. The variations of reactions and responses are too complex to be dealt with here, but without doubt the image given by parents will rarely be satisfactory and sufficient. Doubtless this is the entail man has from the primal rebellion against God.

It is indispensable to full human living to have total emotional satisfaction—something which is rarely achieved by anyone. Ideally this should begin when man relates to God through Christ. It should then reach out into other relationships. Often this is just not the case. Human expectation is that emotional fulfilment should be supplied by parents to children. It should also be experienced in another situation, ie. when two are joined in marriage. Rarely does a human being achieve emotional satisfaction from child-parents relationships or from marital union. Unfortunately we do not take into account enough the factor of man's sinfulness.

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<sup>1</sup> For further study of this subject . see the author's *Oh, Father! Our Father!* (Blackwood: NCPI 1983).

Hence *anger arises from (so-called) deprivation of emotional fulfilment*. Anger always compounds itself and so the trouble is made to be perpetual.

When the image of God given by the parents is unsatisfying, the person who believes he (or she) is deprived will seek out an alternate source (or sources) of emotional fulfilment. Primarily this will be an image created in the mind of the unsatisfied (angry?) person. Such images we call idols. Certain idols are already part of the human race's invention. We may even speak of 'stock-idols', eg. sex, money, fame, and so on. In certain religions there are nominated stock-idols. For the most part man uses any one of the many and varied elements of creation. He will seek pleasure as a source of emotional satisfaction. Doubtless God made the world for man's pleasure (I Timothy 4:4, 6:17, Genesis 1:31, etc.). However, man seeks pleasure in immoderate and malfunctioning ways. He utilises stimulants and sedatives. He seeks to get his tranquillity from drugs—the tranquil mind issues from chemicals!

All images and things fail ultimately to provide emotional satisfaction. This is by nature of the case. Man's anger increases, and in the guilt-anger and anger-guilt process man's anger is compounded, and, as we said before, habituated. *He needs an image which will satisfy him wholly*, and so release him from the conflict of loyalties with parental and other images. The only image which can do this is the Image of God, that is, God himself. Hebrews 1:3 tells us that Christ is 'the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person'. Thus Christ has revealed the Father in all fullness of Being, and in his totality of love. In fact it is the Holy Spirit who has revealed first Son, then Father, so that we may know him as he is, bypassing the parental image. This is true freedom; this is wholesome liberation, and it is liberation from the past. All images—apart from the Son and the Father—are images of the past, and for this reason are outdated, superseded, and defeated. Nothing can give to us what he alone can give, and

he gives perfectly, and what he gives is perfect and we are satisfied.

### **HURTS, WOUNDS AND HATES**

Of course, these are things, also, of the past. They need never touch us in the present. Isaiah 53:3-S tells us of Christ's vicarious sufferings and speaks of him 'bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows'. This means an end to them. Also it says, 'By his wounds we [ie. our wounds] are healed'. That means we need have no wounds. This wonderful news is often met with dismayed looks by Christians. They have built much on the fact of their hurts, their sorrows, and their wounds. *They will not be parted from them*. Unbelievable as this is, it is often a fact. In counselling, the writer has been confronted by angry people who are set on their suffering. They feel cheated if it is taken from them. It seems they have much invested in being hurt and wounded. They cannot afford to be released into normal living! They seem insecure when promised security!

What such people do not realise is that often they have compounded the initial hurt by savouring and fostering it, and by cultivating and enlarging it. Basically it began with a sense of injustice which was fuel for this fire of anger, and let it be said that the problem is not so much sorrow and suffering as it is anger, and anger is what it ought to be called! This really places it in the category of self-inflicted wounds. In any case Christ has borne even these foolish wounds, and has healed them—*if, of course, faith will have it that way!*

### **CONCLUSION ON COMING TO LOVE**

We can see, now, that every person who has come to conversion or forgiveness and redemption ought to be in the flow of the love of God. Hence causes for, and incitement of,

anger should have been taken away from that one. The angry Christian person is the one who will not allow the grace of forgiveness and love to heal him. The greatness of God's love tells us the past is dealt with in the loving action of Christ upon the Cross, and we are free to be healed of the past, as also liberated within the present. Only this radical knowledge and acceptance will place us in the full flow of that love. If we condition grace even one point of a degree, or minimise the full action of the Cross, or cast doubt upon the total nature of God's love, then we will always leave a place for human anger. We will not be seeing, fully, that God's wrath is not upon us. Hence we will not feel free. We will have no tranquil mind, or healed heart, or serene spirit. We will still be caught in our guilt and (so) passion, and know the power of envy, jealousy and that ubiquitous zeal which stirs man to intense action, and never allows him to rest.

## LIVING IN LOVE

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### COMING TO LOVE, AGAIN

We have seen that a newcomer to the Christian faith should come into a crisis and experience of love through faith in Christ. This crisis may be dramatic and obviously dynamic, or it may be scarcely perceptible, being quite subterranean, and yet it will be no less dynamic than something more volatile which presents itself on the surface of the personality. Both persons come to love because God first loved them and because they have seen this. When the Son is the 'brightness of his glory and the express image of his person', and when thus he reveals the Father, then it is that a person is brought into the gracious assurance of God's love as Father—something he has been unable to see in the world about him. He is now flooded with love. From this point onwards his life can be love-motivated.

What, however, of the person who has grown cold in love? There are causes for growing cold in love. We forget we were purged from our old sins and so we lose the joy of love (II Peter 1:9,1. Iniquity abounds and our love becomes cold: we are caught in the iniquity. We begin to fear persecution. We tire in the battle (Matthew 24:12, et al.). We begin to love *things in* this world, making them the primary objects of our

love and our self-fulfilment (I John 2:15-17). We backslide, as the nation of Israel is portrayed as doing in Hosea. Yet God says, 'I will love you freely. I will heal your backslidings'. In Zephaniah 3:16-20 God gives a beautiful message of reassurance. This Israel which has so much rebelled against him, this Israel is the people that 'he will rejoice over with gladness'. That is, he will utterly delight in her. In the centre of this news is the statement, 'I will renew you in my love'. He loves them. They will be renewed. They will be renewed in love, that is in his love, as by it. We can, then, come again to love. We can have the promise perpetually. 'I will restore the years which the locusts have eaten'.

At the same time, unless we are renewed in his love, that is unless we come afresh by repentance, he will come with judgement. This is seen in Revelation 2:1-7, where the church, although excellent in doctrine, practice and the discernment and rejection of heresy, is nevertheless without love. It is of this terrible state it must repent. Then it will be renewed to its first love, and so do the first works. All the time it is not loving it is losing ground. Who, when reminded of the joy of the first love and who lives in the dreariness of 'no-love', will not want to repent and come again into the warmth of his love?

### LIVING IN LOVE

The life of love is an apparent matter. He said that if we loved him then we would, naturally, keep his commandments. These commandments would be the true way of life. They would not feel heavy or intolerable. Indeed the whole law of God is love, rightly understood (Romans 13:8-10, cf. Galatians 5:14, James 1:25, 2:8). Hence the very doing of the commandments of God is, itself, the process of love working itself out in action (I John 2:3-6, 5:3), the actions being those of the commandments.

Our task then is constantly to continue in love. Love must be a matter of the will, for it is a thing commanded by God. It must be, then, a thing obeyed by our wills. 'This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments'. Obedience is the working out of his love. Hence we must place obedience as our first priority. It goes without saying that the motive for obedience is love itself. We are not loved because we obey, but rather the reverse is the truth. Being obedient, then, is the best way of keeping warm in the love of God.

Previously we saw that God is working everything for the good of those who love him. It is important to keep this in mind. When hard times come, and puzzling things happen, we must persist in believing that they will work out for good, ultimately. This will keep reminding us—against seemingly contrary appearances—that he does love us. We can thus keep warm in his love. We must refuse to be hurt, to be wounded, to be angry!

The richest way of keeping in love is to love! Love, of course, is at once an attitude and then those actions which spring from the attitude. The person who waits to be loved will never really know love. Love takes the initiative in action, and so must we. Though another never love us, we must persist in loving. The great supply of love which God has poured into our hearts keeps sweet *whilst we love*, and like the widow's cruse of oil goes on being replenished *as we love*.

Love, as we first came to know it, came from and through forgiveness. The fact that God paid so great a price to forgive us impressed us with his love. The impact of that forgiveness in its liberating release made *us feel* that love. In the same way men and women feel our love when we forgive them. Doubtless that forgiveness must never be condescending, patronising or demonstrative. It will be best if we just forgive quietly in our heart, and continue to love. For some the gift of forgiveness, when suddenly imposed upon them by another, is a terrible burden. The love of forgiveness to the believer is a

revelation. That is how it must remain. In action it must never be a mere tidying up of our guilts. We must forgive others gently and secretly, out of a loving heart. In this way they will be introduced gently to love, and we will remain fresh in it.

### THE ABSENT ANGER

In all of this we have not spoken of anger. We have presupposed that anger will be absent—even mysteriously absent—when we love. This is true. The antidote for hatred and wrong anger is love. Love, as Paul tells us so richly in I Corinthians 13, is not boastful and arrogant, self-seeking and the like, but patient and kind and caring. Hence there can be no breeding ground for anger.

We must not represent this tranquil state as though it happens spontaneously and automatically. If loving is a matter of the will, then we will be tempted continually not to love—ie. not to love as an act of the will—and we will often have to battle hard to get to the place of loving. What is more, we will often fail. Even so, grace will lift us up, and get us going again in the business of love. Grace, when we avail ourselves of it, gives us a new fresh moment every second of our lives.

The Holy Spirit introduced us into love. Indeed he poured it into our hearts (Romans 5:5). In Romans 15:30 Paul speaks of ‘the love of the Spirit’. In Colossians 1:8 he says, ‘. . . your love in the Spirit’. Galatians 5:22 speaks of the fruit of the Spirit, and nominates the first of these as love. It may well be that the remaining eight fruits are really subsumed under, or derive from the primary fruit, love. We can see then that the way of remaining in love is to walk in the Spirit and be led by him (Galatians 5:16-18, 22-26). Again this walking is a matter of obedience. Paul makes it clear in Romans 8 that the

sons of God are those who are led by the Spirit of God. This was true of the Son when he was on earth. He too was led by the Spirit. It must also be true of us, now.

### KEEPING ONESELF IN THE LOVE OF GOD

If one lives in the love of God, and goes on loving, then anger is not merely kept at bay. It is beaten; it cannot exist. It has no routage. We have seen that the removal of guilt by forgiveness and justification starves the element of anger. It takes away its causes. Hence, by nature of the case, the thing which will be most attacked by the powers of evil is love, ie. holy love. This holy love is abhorrent to the powers of darkness. For them it is stifling, destructive of their being. All God’s creation lives purely where there is holy love.

Spiritual weapons, and spiritual warfare, of which the New Testament speaks much, is not bitter aggression against evil, nor harsh hostility, born of the same evil as evil. It is love going out to destroy evil; going out to destroy that which destroys. Therefore love will itself be attacked, and men and women of love, likewise. Jude, then, has some good words to say:

‘But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And convince some, who doubt; save some, by snatching them out of the fire; on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.’

We see then that to keep ourselves in the love of God is to build ourselves up in our faith, ie. the things we believe, and the things we do as a result of that belief. It is also to pray in the Holy Spirit. It is this alertness which keeps us in the love of God. It is a willing passivity, for the word is saying, ‘Be kept in the love of God.’ This, then, is continuing dependence upon God.

**CONCLUSION ON LIVING IN LOVE****16**

We see then that to live in love is to negate all forms of anger, hatred, jealousy and bitterness, and to espouse, nourish and foster all things which relate to love. It is to be alert against temptation, evil attacks, inward illusions and delusions, and every form of seduction. It is to stand firm against threats and persecution. Such things constitute a difficult battle, but the man who battles this way is released from the weariness, boredom, emptiness, and futility of a life of anger, especially of past-based, long-standing and chronic anger.

It is a delight to be free of anger!

**PUTTING OFF ANGER**


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Colossians chapter three opens with the apostle declaring that his readers have been raised with Christ. He urges them to fix their attention on heaven where Christ is. They belong to this sphere. He tells them that their life is already hidden with Christ in God. One day, when Christ appears, they will all appear with him, in glory. The hope of this is a present power for rich ethical and personal living.

On this basis he exhorts them to mortify (put to death) any elements within them which would seem to go the way of evil. He names such elements as 'immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness which is idolatry'. We will remember that living in these things causes uneasiness to a person and forms the seedbed and matrix of anger. It is exactly about this matter that Paul speaks: 'But now put *them all away*; anger, wrath, malice, slander and foul talk from your mouth'. All these things are close bedfellows.

The basis on which one puts off these things is that one has already put off the old humanity, ie. the rebellious, anti-God, pro-self, incorrigible Adam. We are no longer related to Adam. We are released from him. His is the humanity in which we once shared, but now we share it no longer. Paul gives the picture of baptism where the old clothes were shed, and new put on. Baptism cleansed from the old, and made

the recipient new. Adam was put off and Christ was put on. Paul has used two terms, 'put . . . away' (verse 8), and 'put off' (verse 10). In fact the first is a command: one has to put away. The second is a statement about what happened in the past, ie. one put off the old (man) and put on the new (man). It is necessary that we understand these things. In baptism we severed ourselves from the old life, especially with all its evil elements, and we put on the new humanity (Christ) in which we now participate. It is this act, or what happened as a result of this act, which gives us the power to put away anger, wrath, and malice. In other words, if we will, we can put off or put away anger.

This same principle is taught in Ephesians 4:17-32, where Paul draws a similar parallel. In verse 31 he says, 'Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, with all malice'. In verse 32 he gives the positive way of going about life, namely, ' . . . be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you'.

The message, then, is that any believer can be finished with anger, *ff he will*. In fact, not to be finished with anger is inconsistent with one's having been baptised and having become a new creature.

### WHAT HAS HAPPENED, HAS HAPPENED

The basis on which Paul demands the putting off of anger is also the basis on which one can put on love, namely the regeneration which has come through repentance and faith. One might assume then, that all anger would naturally cease. Doubtless it would if one lived totally in love-inspired, Spirit-enabled faith and obedience. Nevertheless Paul (and other New Testament writers also) has to remind his readers to do this, ie. 'to put off' and 'to put away', as well as also (positively) to 'put on love', and the like.

The question then is not one of inability (especially as one draws upon the power of the Spirit), but rather whether or not one is gripped enough by the love of the Father to put off the anger. It is the burning love of the Son and the Father which captivates a man, motivating and inspiring him to this obedience. From time to time a reminder of the harsh corroding nature of sin may be necessary. It is helpful to remember the bitterness and misery that accompany anger, and the futile restlessness of the human spirit which comes from that same anger.

In Colossians 1:8 Paul tells them with joy that he has heard of their 'love in the Spirit'. This is not a mere term, a polite statement about their mutual affection. A reading of the first chapter of Acts tells us the deep love that believers had for one another as the people of God. They were of one heart and of one mind. That was a rich relational matter. No one thought anything he had was his own. Every day they shared in a distribution of aid, given by those who had sold all they possessed. Widows were cared for. The poor were assisted. Love flowed deeply.

Even so, it is to such situations as this that Paul writes 'put away anger'. It was the Colossians, whose love in the Spirit had been told to Paul, that Paul was to exhort. The danger of anger is always with us, even if the anger is absent. It can come and come quickly. Satanic powers would topple the bastions of love. To them the most hateful thing is the tranquil mind and heart.

In Ephesians 1:15 Paul is thanking God for his readers. He has heard of their 'love to all the saints'. Yet it is these very folk to whom Paul writes, 'Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. *Let all bitterness and wrath and c/amour and slander be put away from you, with all malice*, and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you' (Ephesians 4:30-32).

Paul has high regard for the Corinthian church. He commends its members for the variety and number of gifts that they have, but this church draws more teaching on love from Paul than any other. The gifts are always for love, but in their case there were divisions in the church. There were other wrong practices also. To this church Paul wrote (11 Corinthians 12:21), 'I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned before and have not repented of the impurity, immorality and licentiousness which they have practised'. This then is the church God has so blessed. Just prior to this statement, Paul has said, 'For I fear that perhaps I may come and find you not as I wish, and you may find me not what you wish; that perhaps there may be quarrelling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit and disorder'. We wonder, then, what advantage there is in the Gospel if folk within the churches have the seething of anger instead of the tranquil mind.

### THE POWER OF WHAT HAS HAPPENED

Nevertheless it is still true to say that 'what has happened has happened'. In other words, we must acknowledge that believers can be tempted to human anger. Does this mean the Gospel is thereby invalidated? Paul makes it clear in II Corinthians 5:16-17 that we must not judge a brother 'after the flesh', but infers we must discern what he is 'after the Spirit'. It is true that anger, wrath, malice and clamour can happen in the life of a person of God, but for these things to happen is a contradiction of his new being, and incongruous with his new life and with the spiritual powers God has given him. The point is that it *does not have to happen*. This is the message of Galatians 5:13-26. We should examine this Scripture closely.

In this passage Paul has said that the life of the church consists in serving one another in love. In I Corinthians 16:14 he

says, 'Let all that you do be done in love.' Every action then should be carried out with the motivation and modes of love. A believer can do just this, (if *he will*). Thus in Galatians 5:13-26 Paul is saying that when one is led by the Spirit he will not seek to justify himself by law-works. Hence he will be free from the dynamics of guilt which work perversely in the human spirit. If he walks in the Spirit then the passionate thrust of the flesh will not control him. Rather, the Spirit will keep him free of this, helping him to surmount it. Otherwise he will find himself in the works of the flesh. He says, 'The works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, carousing, and the like'. We can see the other fleshly elements which relate to jealousy and anger. Indeed we ought to read this passage along with Romans 1:28-31;

'And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct. They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.'

Reading these two passages we understand why Paul says, 'The mind [heart] that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God'.

### CONCLUSION IN REGARD TO WHAT HAS HAPPENED

We now draw our conclusion that because we have been baptised into Christ, incorporated into his people, and become part of him, so the work he has done in his death has liberated us to live. The state of grace in which we live not only frees us from the condemning past but places us in the

freedom of the present. We can love and we must love, We do not need to be angry, jealous and over-zealous. We do not need to work through compulsive guilt and try to justify ourselves. We do not need to be highly intense about all things. There is no need for us to be uptight about life or death. We can know a serenity, and we ought to experience tranquillity. Whilst we are not automatically proof against the intrusion of anger or other passions, we need not succumb to them!

A basic knowledge of these facts gives us assurance that we can live the true life. Nevertheless we have to keep Paul's advice in mind: 'Let him who think he stands [ie. 'of himself'] take heed lest he fall'. This, then, induces humility, and humility finds its true expression in love. If we will, then we need not have wrong anger. We can thus be at peace.

## **THE MAN OF ANGER AND THE MAN OF PEACE**

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### **THE MAN OF ANGER**

If we go back to the statement of Proverbs 14:30—'passion rots the bones'—then we can see who and what is the man of passion. He is a man who is not at peace with himself. In fact he is not at peace with anyone or anything—at least, not wholly. He is a man under compulsion to do what he does and to feel what he feels. All human beings know intuitively that to be a human being fully is to be great in spirit and in character. The Scriptures speak of the greatness of man. Psalm 8 asks, 'What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you go on visiting him?' This thought is [repeated elsewhere (Job 7:16f., Psalm 144:3)]. Man then must be important—not in himself, nor in his own rights, but in his being placed by God within His creation. Man has been created for great things.

God said to man, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over it'. When man used his great powers wrongly, God said, ' . . . this is only the beginning of what they will do; and *nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them*. Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language. . . ' (Genesis 11:6-7).

Man has a great destiny—to be a son of God, to be, corporately, the family of God, to be a kingdom of priests unto God, to reign on the earth, and to reign forever. Thus he knows that to be fulfilled as a human being is not only a thrilling but a majestic thing. Anything less than this full majesty and man will not feel himself to be whole and complete. Paul says to man—in regard to Christ—‘You are filled full in him’. He means, ‘You are complete—as man—in him’, for ‘in Christ are hidden all the treasures of God’s wisdom and knowledge’, a fact which is stunning to contemplate, and impossible to encompass. Man cannot of himself be full or fulfilled without Christ, but *in him he can*.

It is when a man realises that he is not fulfilled, and, as it seems to him, never will be, that he becomes angry. More than that, he feels guilty within himself for not being what he was created to be. He sees himself as deprived. He is deprived vocationally (man’s calling and dignity are both high): he is deprived relationally. Because of the latter he is deprived emotionally. Man, in essence, is an emotional creature. Because, functionally, his mind and heart are the one, and his will is linked with them, then man is properly and appropriately emotional (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Hence he requires emotional fulfilment to be at peace with himself, his Creator, his universe, and his fellow creatures. In fact, emotional fulfilment is just that—relating wholly to all things created and their Creator. It is understandable then that the man of anger is the man who has not been fulfilled and who senses he has no hope of the same.

He is, then, angry at not being fulfilled, and this anger prevents him being fulfilled. He has rebelled against God and gone his own way to seek the fulfilment he desires. He has chosen gods and images and other lords to assist him. As the writer of Ecclesiastes says, he has used parts and portions of God’s creation as the whole. He has sought to derive from the parts what he can only derive from the whole. As Paul puts it,

he has loved the creation (or part thereof) more than the Creator. This, Paul avers, is ‘exchanging the truth of God for a lie’.

Living in his lie, man is wrathful. He is never at peace. He is compelled to press on to achieve what he can never achieve. He keeps adding to his guilt of separation from God his individual guilts of breaking the basic laws of God’s love-creation. Doubtless we have said all this before, and have observed that by so doing man compounds his guilt as he habituates his anger. He is chronically angry. He is caught in a cage of his own making. He paces and prowls in it in ever-increasing rage.

This is not a pleasant matter: man is jealous of others who have attained serenity. He is covetous of the things which promise him some emotional fulfilment and even security of his tenure of life. He fears death—deeply down he fears death—and therefore lives in bondage all his life. Because he is competitive with others who are on the same futile pilgrimage as himself, he can be very dangerous, even to the point of committing crimes. He is easily the victim of malice. He can become clamorous about his rights, and he can demand justice under pain of bitterness and death. He can fight the most powerful wars to maintain his rights or to get justice, but the means of obtaining these things are more cruel and terrible than those things he criticises. Yet, he is the man of all men who is critical. He cannot be otherwise.

We see him then, restlessly compelled to attain. His zeal he has justified to himself, but the objective observer sees that zeal as wrong and misplaced. Such zeal has become a tyrant. This angry man cannot bear success in another unless that success is under his government and for his benefit. He cannot withdraw from compulsive emulation. He cannot rest. Zealous, jealous, envious and covetous, he is driven on, his anger meanwhile compounding itself, and being compounded whenever he sees success in others and failure in himself. The

whole creation seems to set itself against him and his ambitions. He can fly into a rage in the twinkling of an eye, and at the slightest thing which appears to be in opposition to himself. This, sadly enough, is the angry man; and his anger is dangerous. As we have said, it can become patricidal, matricidal, fratricidal, homicidal and suicidal—if not always in action, then certainly in intent.

### THE MAN OF PEACE

The man of anger is really the negative of the man of peace. The man of peace is the positive counterpart to the man of anger. The man of peace has met fulfilment at the hands of God. Without exaggerating, we can say that he has peace *from* God because he has peace with God. True, this peace is contested every moment of the day in a world in which there are angry and rebellious men, and in which there are also dark powers who seek to deny men their creational rights. They cannot deny these rights to believing persons because the grace of God has brought redemption to the world. Being justified by faith, a man now has peace with God. Christ said, 'My peace I leave with you. My peace I give unto you. Not as the world giveth, give I unto you'.

In the works of the flesh there is anger, rage, wrath, envy, jealousy, emulation. In the fruit of the Spirit there is love, peace, joy, patience, gentleness. The man of the tranquil mind is really the man of the healed heart. Not only is it healed once for all, but it now has health for each day. That is the true meaning of salvation. The salve of God, the balm of Gilead, has been applied in the deepest parts of man, and he is healed.

It must be said plainly that his health is also contested. Every day evil seeks to inflict more hurt, more pain, deeper wounds. That is how evil is forced to work. Yet the man of peace knows that no matter how much his health and peace is

contested now, the day will arrive when nothing will be able to contest it. In that day his peace will be sealed forever. He, therefore, is a man who lives in hope. His hope is not mere wishful thinking or desiring. It is knowledge backed by prophetic certainty. God has promised and he will fulfil his promises. He has sent the Prince of Peace. This Prince has already established peace in the hearts of his people, and his day will come when the lion and the lamb shall lie down together, and when the child shall have its hand over the snake's hole, and when nothing shall hurt or destroy in all his holy mountain. The Holy City will descend from heaven, and in it there shall be heard no sound of crying. There shall be no more tears, no more pain, and death will have vanished.

The man of peace, therefore, is established. He knows that God is working in all things for good. As for anger, he does not fear that for he knows that God turns even the wrath of man to his praise. He knows that in that day when all is completed, the knowledge of the glory of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. He himself will know the completeness that is his in Christ. He will be filled unto all the fullness of God. He will have achieved his vocation in being a priest, with all other priests, and he will reign on the earth, as all the others in Christ will reign—forever!

Meanwhile he is a man of hope, knowing that the whole creation will be liberated simultaneously with the unveiling of the glory of the sons of God. Yet whilst living in hope he is not only a man of hope. He is also a man of faith. He is learning more and more the power that is working towards him and the power that is working within him. As for himself, his task is to exercise faith, ie. that faith *which works by love*. Love in its humility subserves faith and so authenticates it. Faith without love is worth nothing, no matter what it may appear to accomplish.

Being a man of hope and faith, he is even more a man of love. The universe was created in love. The universe has its

essential harmony from that creative and sustaining love. We have said enough about love to know what the man of God should be and do. Here, however, we are concerned with the subjective. *Man is at peace because he loves.* This is the way God is, and this is the way a man ought to be. We are not talking about some esoteric fact, some pantheistic oneness with the universe. We are talking about the way things are essentially because God is holy love. Man is at peace because he is loved by God and because, consequently, he loves others.

The man of the tranquil mind cannot afford wrong anger, any more than he can afford to condone evil and be unmoved by it to righteous anger. His anger must never be for himself, but for the truth of things, and for the way of God in his universe. He must be careful not to endanger his tranquillity by falling for the Satanic ploy of imagined injustice, or for that matter, actual injustice. That is, he must not be angry on his own behalf. He has to have the mind of his Lord: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' He must not be talked into feeling past grievances afresh. He must see that they have been immolated in the sufferings of Christ.

This man has no need to be competitive, to emulate, to envy or to become the slave of tyrannical zeal. This does not mean he is not purposive, that he does not toil, that he is not busy; but there is no need (with him) for the fanatical, the frenetic, and the compulsive busyness. Like Mary he has no need of self-justifying actions. If it is to cook, as with Martha, then he may cook. If it is to be quiet and sit at the Master's feet, like Mary, then that is equally acceptable and important. One is not above or below the other.

Who then is this ideal man? In practice he does not exist, except for our Lord himself. Yet in essence he is every man in Christ: man learning, man growing in knowledge and wisdom, man maturing in love, but also man making many, many mistakes. In fact he is man kept by the love of God. He

is man in grace. He does not have to paddle in such grace but he may swim in it. He needs the oceans of it to cover his vast mistakes. He is the man who knows the truth of what Paul has said:

'For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men, training us to renounce irreligion and worldly passions, and to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world, awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds' (Titus 2:11-14).

## AN ESSAY ON PEACE AND REST

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### THE MAN OF QUIET SPIRIT

Whilst there is a clear doctrine in the New Testament that somehow suffering is indispensable to the glorification of man (Romans 8:17f., 11 Corinthians 4:16-18, I Peter 4:1f.), yet man was not made for disquiet. He is certainly uneasy when his conscience is disquieted, thus showing he was made for obedience, a clear conscience and serenity of spirit. That he can have this quiet spirit is shown clearly in many Scriptures. Ecclesiastes 4:6 says, 'Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and striving after wind.' Proverbs 17:1 has it, 'Better is a dry morsel with quiet than a house full of feasting with strife.' The wicked know no quietness, for 'The wicked are like the restless sea which casts up mire and dirt'. Proverbs 1:33 says, 'He who listens to me will dwell secure [AV, 'shall be quiet from fear'], and will be at ease, without dread of evil.'

In Psalm 131:1-2 the writer shows how he has become quiet, by not occupying himself with things that are beyond him. His spirit is humble. He says, 'O Lord, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvellous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a child quieted at its

mother's breast; like a child that is quieted is my soul.' This is a good hint or recipe for quietness which we can pick up as we walk in the business of life.

In Psalm 107:23-32 we have the story of seafaring men. In this fascinating account we see that the storms and disturbances of the sea are from God and under his hand. The sailors cried in their distress to the Lord, and he answered them. Verse 30 says, 'Then they were glad because they had quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven.' This too has its instruction for us.

The thought then of 'quiet' in the Old Testament is to have rest, be at peace, cease from something one has been doing, and in ceasing be quiet. The idea is much the same in the New Testament. Without comment, we quote some of the passages:

*I Thessalonians 4:10f.* 'But we exhort you, brethren. . .to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we charged you'.

*II Thessalonians 3:11-12.* 'For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living.'

*I Timothy 2:1f.* ' . . . I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way.'

*I Timothy 3:11.* 'The women likewise must be serious, no slanderers but temperate, faithful in all things.'

*I Peter 3:3f.* 'Let not yours be the outward adorning . . . but let it be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.'

We gather then the sense of quietness. It is the measure of man. Man is hasty and driven willy-nilly by his passions, or he is calm, collected in his spirit. Ecclesiastes 9:17 shows that quietness is necessary for understanding: 'The words of the

wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools.’ We are reminded of Mary, quiet in her spirit and listening at Jesus’ feet. We are also reminded, to the contrary, of the demoniac who had been crazed with the fury of demonic oppression, never able to be at peace with himself, wandering the gloomy tombs of Gadara, but now healed, quiet, in his right mind and sitting at Jesus’ feet. In wry humour we remember the terror of the disciples at the storm on the lake, and Peter angry with Jesus because he slept without fear. Then when Jesus calmed the elements and great peace spread across the waters, they were afraid. They were afraid of the peace! So dynamic is peace when it comes. Likewise the citizens of Gadara were afraid when they saw the former demoniac totally at peace.

The matter of the peaceful mind and the quiet spirit is underlined in I Peter 3:4 (quoted above). One translation speaks of ‘a sweet and gentle disposition’ (*Jerusalem Bible*), whilst another, as we have already seen, has, ‘the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit’ (*R.S.V.*). Here is a calm mind, an imperturbable spirit, a placid and gentle heart. No wonder it is called a jewel. It is rare; it is precious. It has the power to calm others also.

To sum up: true quietness is that which avoids wrong stimulation. An example of unhealthy stimulation is in II Thessalonians 2:2; ‘not to be quickly shaken in mind or excited, either by spirit or by word, or by letter. . . .’ Thus true quietness is acceptance of a situation. We see this in Acts 21:14 where the church *ceased* to seek to persuade Paul from going to Rome. They accepted the matter. Likewise in I Timothy 2:11 a woman is to learn in silence. This silence is of a person who is quiet, thoughtful and accepting. She gains by this thoughtful serenity. In Acts 22:2 the boisterous crowd becomes silent when it hears Paul speak in Aramaic. In the light of what we have said previously, a quiet spirit is that which accepts the situation as it is, knowing God is in control

and that his sovereignty is to be trusted. It is not bovine placidity but thoughtful acceptance and contentment.

### THE PRINCIPLE OF REST

Linked with the principle of quietness is the idea of rest. One of the Hebrew words for quiet or quietness is *shaqat*, and it is related to the idea of rest. Isaiah 14:7 says, ‘The whole earth is at rest and quiet’. Isaiah 30:15 has it, ‘In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust [rest] shall be your strength’, and Isaiah 32:17 states, ‘the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust for ever’. The New Testament Greek word *hesuchazo* carries the idea of being quiet and resting, as in the quotes we read above.

In Job 30:1-31 the unfortunate sufferer speaks of his lack of quiet. He describes the calamities which come upon him. One description is graphic: ‘My bowels boiled and rested not’. This is a description of the man of passion, unable to be at rest because of his reaction to the circumstances. What a statement—‘My *bowels boiled*’! Psalm 37:7f. takes up the same word for rest (*daman*) and says, ‘Be *still* before the Lord, and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over him who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices ! *Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath!* Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil’. Yet there is rest for the quietly submissive man.

In Psalm 127 we see that the man who toils all day has to return home late and sit up to ‘eat the bread of toil’, ie. ‘of sorrow’. We also see that ‘The blessing of the Lord makes rich, and *toil adds nothing to it*’, ie. it is complete in itself. We can rest in it. This is the principle of Isaiah 30:15; ‘In quietness and confidence will be your strength’. This is supported by Isaiah 28:16; ‘He who believes will not be in haste’, ie. he will not have a hasty spirit. He will not panic but he

will trust God. In Psalm 37:7 to rest in the Lord is to be still before him. Doubtless it is to contemplate him and who he is, and in coming to know him find peace of spirit. Thus Psalm 46:10, 'Be still and know that I am God'. One translation has it, 'Pause awhile', and another 'Let be, then, and learn that I am God' (*Jerusalem Bible; NEB.*).

All of this assures us that the man of the tranquil mind *is* the man who is not so agitated in spirit that he cannot contemplate God. He becomes calm in that contemplation. The man under wrath cannot rest. Psalm 38:3 says, 'There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest [completeness, health] in my bones because of my sin'. The Hebrew *shalom* (peace) is the word translated as 'rest' here. However, the tranquil man under tribulation—no matter how fierce it be—can rest. When he contemplates God he has no reason for fear. Logically he should be borne down and crushed by calamity, but since his trust is in God he can remain serene.

### THE SABBATH REST

It is important that we rediscover the principle of the Sabbath rest.<sup>1</sup> The land also was to be given its rest, not only on the seventh day but in the seventh year. The Jubilee year—the fiftieth—was the culmination of seven sevens, and all things were to be specially rested in that year. Slaves were to be freed; captives were to be loosed from the prisons, and debtors from their debts. It was to be a time of rest. Release was to bring rest. The principle behind the Sabbath is refreshment. Doubtless God did not need refreshment. In John 5:17 Jesus makes a surprising disclosure. Far from not doing anything on the Sabbath, Jesus says, 'My Father has always been working',

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<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive study on the nature, use, and place of the Sabbath, see *Sabbath Rest or Human Turmoil?* (G. Bingham. Blackwood: NCPI 1981).

meaning God has never been without action. Yet it *was the action of rest*, not merely passivity of rest. It was not a static state. In Matthew 11:28-30, the famous passage where Jesus invites men to take the yoke of discipleship upon them, he says, 'Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'. Rest here can mean refreshment. He goes on to say, 'Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you shall find *rest* for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light'. It is clear from these words that to rest is not to cease from doing things, but to *do those things which are truly the will of God*. This is the easy way, the way of rest, ie. the way of obedience.

Having said then that *rest is action*, it is still true that man needs rest of mind and body in order to be refreshed for true action. Doubtless he needs time for meditation,<sup>1</sup> to catch up with his thoughts, to contemplate God, to work out the matters which confront him, to become habituated in his thinking in regard to the great truths of God. He must not begrudge this time. At this time the sword must not even be out of the scabbard. In Jeremiah 47:6 the prophet cries, 'Ah, sword of the Lord! How long till you are quiet? Put yourself into your scabbard, rest and be still!' Doubtless the sword is normally there for action, but it must have its time of quiet. The command to men to rest is, 'Put yourself into your scabbard, rest and be still!'

Without doubt Israel grew and matured as a nation through its Sabbath observances. Much of its greatness may have sprung from observing this functional principle of creation. It was judged and punished when it broke its Sabbath, and partly because of this went into exile. It broke the Sabbath because

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<sup>1</sup> The reader is referred to a monograph by the writer, entitled *The Making and Meaning Of Christian Meditation* (Living Faith Study No. 41, NCPI, Adelaide 1980). This contrasts man-oriented modes of meditation with the biblical God-oriented meditation which is so recreative for those who undertake it.

it set itself upon commerce, idolatry, and not living before God. We then should learn from that fact. We should observe the principle of a Sabbath rest. The legalistic way in which some may observe the Sabbath is no reason for rejecting its principle. All the laws contained in the ten commandments we feel to be obligatory upon us through grace. Why, then, not the Sabbath, seeing this is one of those laws?

It is true that in the Christian era the seventh day has given way to the first and that this day is known as the Lord's day rather than the Sabbath day as such, but the *principle* of a Sabbath cannot alter. It is inbuilt into creation. Men may debate the actual day and miss the principle of rest. It is the principle of rest which matters.

We have seen that the man of passion is too compulsive to rest. He is so sure that everything depends upon his activity for true success. He must press on. The religiously passionate man is the same. He must work for God. (Sod will never get his plan fulfilled without the passionate man working away at it!

The man of tranquil spirit has learned that he is, of himself, a weak creature. That does not disturb him since he is kept, motivated and energised by the power of God. The calamities which come upon him are not from some fierce and angry God, but necessary by nature of the case. He knows he does not live within the orbit of himself but that of the entire universe. He cannot be excepted from universal happenings. If he is a man of rest then he has time to contemplate these matters. They are profound. They are often complicated. They need thinking about, but then the man of meditation does not ponder what comes to him so much as he ponders God, his creation and his works.

### HEBREWS AND THE SABBATH REST

In the Epistle to the Hebrews the writer has a point to make.

It is the matter of what he calls 'a Sabbath rest'. In chapter three he quotes from Psalm 95, which talks about the disobedience of Israel in the wilderness and how God has said, 'As I swore in my wrath, "they shall never enter my rest."' 'The rest was primarily going into Canaan, but then God called it my rest (ie. his own innate restfulness, cf. John 14:27, Philippians 4:7), rather than simply a rest given to them. God had his rest which followed the period of creating the world.

In chapter four the writer makes the point that the rest the Israelites failed to enter may primarily have been Canaan, but the promise of the Psalm still stands. The word 'today' is the key word. In other words, man, even redeemed man, has yet to enter into God's rest. This can only mean then that God's people, as such, have not entered into the rest promised in the ultimate by God. In order to enter this they must labour. Only when they have fully laboured, and labouring is no longer required, will they enter that rest. In Revelation 14:13 we read, 'And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them!"' 'This must mean that the labours believers had to do in accordance with Ephesians 2:10 and Matthew 5:16 are no longer necessary, but that their works which followed justification are not lost. They follow them, ie. believers have the credit and advantage of them.

What then, do we understand by rest, if rest is to come (only) eventually? The answer is that the believing person now has a rest, but not in its eschatological (ultimate) fullness. Our present rest has its basis in Christ's promise to give us his peace. It is most needed *now, so* that one can live in the stresses and pressures of a sinful world, and a world in which the good are constantly persecuted. Man must share in the suffering of the whole creation as outlined in Romans 8.

Peace with God and peace from God are necessary to this kind of living. Thus the Old Testament exhortations to wait upon God, to be still, and the statements that he who believes shall not be hasty, and that renewal of personhood is a gift of God, are all an encouragement to be persons of peace. Isaiah 55 is a beautiful chapter which promises this renewal, and perhaps of all passages the most comforting. Verse 12 undoubtedly points to the great day of renewal, but its principle currently operates for those who wait upon the Lord (Isaiah 64:4, 30:18, 40:31):

‘For you shall go out in joy,  
and be led forth in peace;  
the mountains and the hills before you  
shall break forth into singing,  
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.’

No wonder the same prophet proclaims (52:7),

‘How beautiful upon the mountains  
are the feet of him who brings good tidings  
who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good,  
who publishes salvation,  
who says to Zion. “Your God reigns.” ‘

## THE SURRENDER OF ANGER

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Almost all our studies have been connected with the causes of anger, the modes of anger, and the reasons for retaining anger. On the positive side, we have seen the elements which encourage us to put off anger, and even the fact that we can—if we will—put off anger, and put it away. The latter, of course, is only because we are in Christ. We have also been able to distinguish between the anger that is righteous and the anger which is wrong, either because the latter has no authentic cause or because it has passed from being righteous anger to self-righteous anger, ie. no longer truly rational.

Knowing all about anger may be helpful to us. It may explain a host of things we did not formerly understand. To know what is going on, as well as what has been going on, can be a great help. It is the unknown which mystifies us, and often keeps us in an uneasy state. However, if our minds are ready to accept the revelation, generally, of man’s continual anger, and specifically of our own anger, the knowledge may prove most confronting. It is scarcely likely that we will accept such knowledge as being authentic unless already God has worked in our hearts by his Holy Spirit. Even so the confrontation will be embarrassing, and demanding. It is probably true to say that many Christians come into their conversion without necessarily dispensing with their anger.

Contradictory as this may appear, it is often a fact we cannot deny.

Perhaps in the early stages of the joy of forgiveness, and the inflooding of love, a person may find anger easily counteracted or overcome, and it may appear that his anger has been surrendered, and that habitual anger has been dealt a death-blow. This is certainly how it ought to be. Nevertheless time often shows that the anger is still there.

### HOW THEN DO WE SURRENDER ANGER?

We can say nothing on this score that we have not already said. A revelation of the glorious nature of God as Father, Creator, King and Redeemer should be enough to grip the will of the beholder. The experience of that forgiveness and love which flows through Christ, along with a recognition of its great cost, should certainly grip our hearts. This should be the end of our anger. Anger, as we have said, is our insistence upon things being the way we desire them and our reaction at their not being so. This makes us angry against the Person of God (who rules all things), against the creation which refuses to alter its functional being for our whims, and against human beings who participate in actions which do not conform to our image of what they ought to be. We have seen that anger against men or things or creatures is in the last analysis anger against God.

Anger then can be simply dealt with by the expedient of us putting it away. Paul has shown us that, in Colossians 3:1 - 10. Nevertheless the final question is, 'Do I want to put anger away?' That is the crucial matter; that is the vital point of decision. It ought to follow naturally that we will put it away, but then we do not live in a world that is neutral. Evil has much to lose by us surrendering our anger, and much to gain by our retention of it. We saw the injunctions against anger. Psalm 37:8 says,

'Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath!' Job 5:2 says, 'Resentment kills the senseless, and anger brings death to the fool.' Job 18:4 tells of the futility of anger: 'Tear yourself to pieces if you will, but the world for all your rage will not turn to desert, the rocks will not shift in their places.' Psalm 4:4 says, 'However angry your hearts, do not do wrong.' Strong as some of these injunctions are against anger, the strongest injunctions come against the *outcome* of anger. Some who are angry seek to hurt others, to vandalise the world about them, to kill.

Given the fact of these injunctions, why is it we do not surrender our chronic anger? The answer must take a number of things into consideration. The simple and obvious one is that people need to be tutored about anger. Many are not even aware that they have an anger problem. It is ignorance then that aids people i.e. continuing with anger. If we understand how much evil has invested in man's anger, then we will realise that the deceit of evil will be working to keep people in ignorance. We have observed from Ephesians 4:17-32 that pre-Christian standards are often retained. The required radical change has not always taken place. Romans 12:2 shows that our minds need continually to be cleansed of worldly ways of thinking. Ignorance and deceit can keep us thinking that (a) basic anger is not present, and (b) if it were, then would it matter greatly anyway? 'Isn't anger permissible?' asks the thoughtless person.

Some are aware of the anger, although this awareness may be limited. They often do not know its causes and its cure. Ideally the forgiven, loved person, as we have said before, forgives and loves. Sadly enough, some seem able to receive forgiveness and love without naturally expressing the same to others. Forgiving others and loving them is the best way to deal with anger. Yet deep-seated causes for anger seem, in many cases, never to be uncovered or made known. It is not that this is essentially necessary. It is only necessary when

people hang on, generally, to their anger.

The *how of* surrendering anger is the recognition of the dimensions of God's love and the consequent recognition of the deadly evil of wrong anger. When Joseph refused his master's wife's seducing invitation, he cried, 'How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?' The same may be said of redeemed man. How can he continue in anger, and give way to its seductions? He has both the obligation and power not to do so.

To love God and to serve him is, anyway, a command. The surrender of anger is, therefore, submission and obedience. In other words, to retain anger is the rebellion of the will against God. Put like this, many may be surprised to know they have not yet obeyed God *from the heart*.

Even so, we must appreciate the dilemma of a person who believes he loves God and yet retains anger. We have spoken of the conflict of the images. Primarily a child receives its image of God from the dual father-mother image which presents itself to him. This too is the initial confrontation of authority. A child reacts to authority<sup>1</sup> not because of the deficient nature of the parents (although we generally think that to be the case), but because primarily (biblically speaking) the child has its bias against authority, stemming from the Fall of man. It has to rationalise its parents as being deficient, even greatly deficient, in order to excuse its refusal to obey them. Even where the child appears to be obedient, it may not be basic (ie. genuine) obedience but simply a 'toeing of the line'. Obedience from the heart is rare amongst human beings, and this observation is not made cynically but realistically.

In one sense any person may be caught, emotionally, in his early anger or angers, especially where the anger is related to his parents or family. As we keep saying, conversion should

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<sup>1</sup> A fuller treatment of authority and obedience may be found in the author's booklet, *The Authority and Submission of Love* (Blackwood: NCPI 1952). See also *True God or New Guru?* (Blackwood: NCPI 1979).

erase that anger, or, rather, at conversion we should see that our anger (which is wrong) has been neutralised at the Cross. If there were any authentic cause for the anger, then that too has been borne on the Cross. Foolish anger has been borne, as sin, upon the Cross. The effects of anger—our wounds— have also been dealt with in the Cross. Unfortunately we have placed layer upon layer over our (now rationalised) past anger, and are not aware it is still there. Our anger with the images from which we sought satisfaction and found none, is also linked with our anger against parents and authority. We blame them for having compounded our suffering. Most of human suffering is tolerable under grace and equanimity *of* spirit, but where anger is, then bitterness and hardness flourish.

The best way *of* surrendering anger is to recognise its presence and equally recognise the power *of* the Cross. This recognition comes only through the Spirit and his revelation of the unchanging love of God. Only in the wonder and melting warmth of this, will a person surrender his personal wrath.

### THE LIBERTY OF LOVING

Strictly speaking, the Scriptures know little of our modern counselling therapies. These issue from researched principles. They are our means of methodologising principles into practicality. This does not mean that therapies are not useful or helpful. They can be. It does mean that we ought to be biblical in our counselling.<sup>1</sup> What the Scriptures do know is the healing which comes from forgiveness and love. The power of reconciliation, first between God and man, and then

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<sup>1</sup> Of course we ought to be biblical in our counselling, but we mean that all helpful insights given by secular research should not be rejected, especially when they accord with, and are supportive of, the healing truth of the Scriptures. Whilst much non-biblical research may not be helpful, much of it may, and indeed does, prove useful.

man and man, is the power which can make wrong anger seem stupid and its presence irrelevant.

Innumerable people have clung to their anger, and of these many have been redeemed persons. Anger has blinded them to anger. Obstinate they have rejected the charge that they are angry. The depths to which this anger has taken them has been in many cases horrific. Some have come near to the edge of homicide or suicide. It is the story of Cain and Abel all over again. It is only when love finally wins the day (the love of God, of course) that the spirit of the person is flooded with sheer relief, the unutterable joy of release from futile and destructive anger. The physical processes of anger's erosion cease within the mind and body, and the person is at rest. It is then that the futility and deadly danger of anger is unmasked. The person who has truly learned this truth is forever after wary of the anger which destroys, and the evil powers which lurk behind its lethal smokescreen.

### **THE POSITIVE LOVER**

The powers we dissipate in the emotions and actions of anger become most useful in the processes of life. Man was made for love, and not for hate, for purity and not for impurity. He is most at home in being himself. Love is exquisitely joyful, even when it faces the demands made by ugliness, squalor, mediocrity, bitterness, hatred and the like.

It is of course the warm, full-orbed true image of God which causes a man to be glad. His anger melts in the sight of this revelation. Likewise warm and loving relationships become his eager desire. In these he grows and matures. The futile emotional immaturity he has known in his angers is replaced by the love that mellows and matures him.

What a glorious history it would have been if Adam had not blamed Eve, if Cain had loved Abel, Lamech the youth who had attacked him, and the youth—in return—Lamech

himself. What if Ishmael and Isaac had been loving brothers; Esau and Jacob as one; Joseph and his brothers the true affectionate family?—and so on. What if Jonah had pleaded with God for Nineveh as Abraham had for Sodom? What if Herod had wept tears of joy for the coming of the King, and Saul had leapt to respond to the beauty of his son-in-law David? What if Saul of Tarsus had cried with joyful recognition of the truth of the Gospel?

### **IT WILL BE ALL LOVE, AND NO ANGER**

In Christ all things will be unified. In him all things will be reconciled. He will bring all things to fullness as he fills them with love from his own (and the Father's) resources. Finally he will 'put on love which binds everything together in harmony', and the earth will become as serene as the purified heavens. Tranquillity will reign which is not dull supineness, but that most powerful calm which tells us God is Sovereign, and all evil but a memory—if, even, that!

No longer the hurts, the sorrows, the pain, the fracture of human spirits, the divisions of families and peoples, but one vast multitude which knows God as Father, and experiences him as love.<sup>1</sup>

All this is to be. Evil has never been able to fracture essentially the unity of creation which is immutable. Further, we are not left simply longing and hoping for the ultimate when that creational and redemptive unity will be revealed. Now, where we are, in this age, we can experience the peace of God which passes all understanding. It is known only in the experiencing of it. Though many may tell us (and they may well be right) that the peace we know now is but the first fruits of

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<sup>1</sup> Of course we must not confuse salvation which is universal with the errant doctrine of universalism. The former is a Gospel for all the world, yet only those who have faith will receive salvation. Universalism claims that all men will receive salvation. This is not true. Only those who are in Christ may have salvation.

what is to come, we feel constrained to reply, 'Yes, but such peace may be known now—if we will have it that way—that it will be all that we can need and more than we can cope with. It is enough. It really is enough.'

At the same time the hope of what is ahead is so powerful that we feel drawn on to that eternal reign of peace, serenity, and tranquillity. We long to see the living God, and to know the calm gentleness of what it is to be the children of the God of peace, in all reality.

## **TREASURES OF PLEASURES: MAN AND ALL THINGS CREATED FOR PLEASURE**

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### **GOD IS CERTAINLY TO BE ENJOYED**

'Man's chief end is to serve God and to enjoy him forever.' Paul says, 'We rejoice in the hope of sharing the [very] glory of God'. Psalm 42 depicts man as a thirsty hart, panting after the waterbrooks. Psalm 63 says, 'O God, thou art my God, I seek thee, my soul thirsts for thee, my flesh faints for thee'. Psalm 84 has it, 'My soul longs, yea, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God'.

It is not every one who sees or feels it like it this. Why then should a person long for God? Augustine's famous answer is, 'You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you. ' Man is made for God, as God also created man for himself. We have said that total emotional and so personal fulfilment must be found primarily in God, and that this will simultaneously relate us to all things. The vertical-horizontal relationships are all, virtually speaking, one. In such relationships we find rich emotional fulfilment. The simple truth is that man cannot be himself apart from God, and only in God can he wholly be himself. Wholly

being oneself is what brings peace and joy, even to the point of intense pleasure and—at times—even high rapture and ecstasy. And why not? Is this not the state for which man was made by the God of joy, pleasure and peace?

### **GOD CREATES FOR PLEASURE**

The old English word 'pleasure' in some (though not all) contexts means 'will'. Revelation 4:11 says, 'Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for thou didst create all things, and by thy will they existed and were created.' All things by his will (pleasure) were and are created. Doubtless his will is his pleasure. Nevertheless the words 'joy' and 'pleasure' are used much in Scripture. When God creates then he sees everything as 'very good'. The idea behind the word 'good' is 'full of pleasure(s)', just as 'evil' is 'full of pain(s)'. We are told that everything was 'good', ie. functional. If one lived in harmony with its functional nature then delight and pleasure resulted. Many spiritually-minded persons rightly enough despise hedonism, which is the philosophy of pleasure, ie. one lives primarily for pleasure. Doubtless this principle of 'pleasure for its own sake' can be used foolishly, but even so there is more than a modicum of truth in it. *Man was made for pleasure*. God intended us to enjoy rich pleasure.

The word 'Eden' means 'delight'. Certainly the garden was a delightful place. The New Testament word 'paradise' comes from an old Persian word, meaning 'a garden'. This garden then was a place of delight. We are told that 'every tree of the garden was good for food and pleasant to the eyes'. Note the word 'good', ie. 'functionally excellent', 'full of delight'. The beginning, then, was a time of delight. The end will be the same. Pictures in the Revelation show the eternal state as one of joy and serenity. Created beings go into rapturous praise of the Creator. The psalmist says, 'In thy presence

there is fullness of joy, in [or, at] thy right hand are pleasures for evermore' (Psalm 16:11).

Pleasure, then, is not only a legitimate experience for man, but one which is indispensable for his emotional fullness, and so for his fullness as a person. This can be seen in the very fact of creation. I Timothy 4:4 says, 'Everything created by God is good'. I Timothy 6:17 says of God, that he 'gives us all things richly to enjoy'. Ecclesiastes 3:11 has it, 'He has made everything beautiful [ie. good, appropriate] in its own time', Romans 8:32 says, '. . . will he not also give us all things?', whilst I Corinthians 3:22 declares, '. . . all things are yours'. It is clear then that God is prodigal in his gifts. It is also true that 'All *good giving*, and every *perfect gift* comes down from the Father of lights'. Man knew that this was the way God was, and is. Few persons realise that giving is a special art, a rich and powerful skill. Only God can give with the motive of pure love. Such giving brings intense pleasure to receiving man. *There is nothing suspect about God's gifts*.

### **LOOK AT THE PLEASURES**

Angry man is angry because he thinks he has been deprived, unjustly, of his rightful pleasures. We would bet nowhere with him if we suggested he has deprived himself of these pleasures. He just would not believe this fact. In getting angry he is saying there are pleasures, and that such are the true birthright of every human being. He is affirming that pleasure for man is the true norm. If we can see that his anger is because he is not experiencing pleasure then we can understand his anger even more. He believes he has been unjustly deprived of pleasure by God and man, and even by circumstances. He thus believes his anger is justifiable.

If man were to count his blessings, and name them one by one, he would be surprised. If on the one hand he imagined life without them or on the other compared what he has with

others who have little or nothing, then he could see how blessed he really is. He has the gift of created life, the many talents, abilities and gifts which go with such. He has a family, friends, and a host of things which, when looked at positively, are heart-warming, and sometimes even mind-boggling. Of course to the pure all things are pure, but then for the corrupt all things are corrupt. So it is just the way one looks at it. Not every person is born as handicapped as was Helen Keller. Most of us have more than one sense, and many of us have all five. Such facts should cause us to be grateful for what we have.

However, all these gifts and graces to some people seem as nothing. These endowments bring no joy to the angry or bitter person. They diminish in his sight as his anger grows. It is possible therefore to read the Scriptures and become more angry with every reading. We have said that a man's attitude to life and his image of God will determine his experience either *of* pleasure or of bitterness. A man with a stern image of God will have little joy from his universe.

Yet it is true that he is the God of delights. Psalm 16:11, which we quoted above, says, 'Thou dost show me the path of life', and then adds the words, 'In thy presence is fullness of joy; in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore'. We saw in Jeremiah 10:23 that 'the way of man is not in himself. It is not in man to direct his own footsteps'. When, then, a man allows God to show him the path of life, he is filled with delight and pleasure. This is seen in Psalm 36:7-9,

'How precious, is thy steadfast love, O God!  
The children of men take refuge in the shadow of thy wings.  
They feast on the abundance of thy house,  
and thou givest them drink from the river of thy delights.  
For with thee is the fountain of life; in thy light do  
we see light.'

What a beautiful statement: 'The river of thy delights'! This is why the psalmist says, 'God, my exceeding joy!'

(43:4). No wonder another poet sings, 'My soul is feasted as with marrow and fat, and my mouth praises thee with joyful lips' (Psalm 63:5).

Seeing God's abundance, a man must then realise the innate nature of all things and thus give praise to God. He would delight in him out of sheer wonder and gratitude.

### **PULLING DOWN THE BLIND ON PLEASURE**

Man has to have amnesia in regard to the goodness of God at creation. He has to pull down the blind on what-once-was. Eden must have been a place of delight. It must have been rich with serenity, tranquillity and joy. Man's desire to handle the universe autonomously brought deep tragedy to him. Instead of feeling godlike, he felt emptied, barren, fearful. Being cast out of his paradise, his soul still longed for the created pleasures. His natural desire for pleasure-fulfilment was denied along these lines.

Man has to rationalise his tragedy. Obviously God was wrong. God is wrong. Man refuses to see the *nature* of his original pleasures. They were authentic pleasures, all known in innocence. Sin had not entered. The desire to be as God had not come. Man-in-sin cannot understand the true nature of pleasure, and so he cannot afford to look back to the state of true pleasure. He has to keep the blind pulled down.

Sometimes the blind seems to snap, and roll up. For a few rare moments the real nature of pleasure is known. The sudden revelation of it is brilliant and beautiful. Poets, musicians, artists and writers all seek to catch these momentary gleams of the paradisiacal, and to pass them on. Yet in the richest beauty that they grasp there is a shadow, a shade of wistfulness, a spasm of not fully understanding. At the heart of all things is a wistful, elusive element, so that at this very best point of experience, man is most baffled. What the psalmists sing about is nevertheless true, for the revelation

they received was authentic: God alone can be man's true source of joy and delight. The idols see to it that they promise more than the dull old God Yahweh, or even his Son, Jesus. Their promises of course are empty and delusive.

### SUBSTITUTES FOR PLEASURE

Man must have pleasure, whatever! He was made for joy and serenity, and he must have these. If the trees of the garden were good for food and pleasant to the eyes, then man must find pleasure through these sources. The five senses are his natural way of finding such pleasure. They may also be the ways of thwarting true pleasure when used wrongly, or when abused. The senses are willing servants but bad masters. They are tyrants when used wrongly, bringing men into their captivity. A thoughtful reading of Romans 1:21-32 will show that.

The writer of Ecclesiastes is a person who knows the futility of the search for pleasure. In two fine passages he speaks of legitimate and full pleasure given to man by God in the order of true creation. These are:

(i) Ecclesiastes 2:24-26a,

'There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God; for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? For to the man who pleases him God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy'.

(ii) Ecclesiastes 3:10-13,

'I have seen the business that God has given to the sons of men to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; also that it is God's gift to man that every one should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil.'

Over and against these two passages is the writer's discovery that the search for pleasure was empty. 'I said, "Come now, I will make a test of pleasure; enjoy yourself." But, behold, this also was vanity.' The writer then proceeds to expound the folly of approaching the quest for pleasure from the wrong angle. In 2:2-23 he shows the folly of using any part of the creation to bring full pleasure, or to use the creation apart from God to achieve the same object. For him everything is *vanity* (ie. emptiness, futility, grasplless wind, hollowness) apart from saving God.

When we pause for a moment and think of the things the writer used, such as wisdom, knowledge, money, possessions, sex, stimulants, sedatives (wine, etc.), and other pleasure-objects, we see that to love these things in an idolatrous way, or to give them the value God only should have, is to pervert them. This is what John means by saying,

'Love not the world, neither the things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of [from; for] the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the last of the flesh, and the *lust* of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.'

All created things are beautiful and functionally appropriate, but they are not to be used lustfully.

Jesus knew the 'riches, cares and pleasures of this world' could actually *choke* the life of persons caught in them. Hence he warned us against them. Compulsive pleasure-seekers, he showed, would be fruitless, and in fact be devoid of a genuine life experience. Paul speaks of a widow who 'lives in pleasures [but] is *dead whilst she lives*'. The writer of Hebrews speaks of 'the fleeting pleasures of sin'. Paul speaks about men in the last terrible days who will be 'lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God'. He also speaks of a man who had been his dose companion: 'Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world'. Of the foolish rich people, James says, 'You have lived on the earth in luxury and pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter'.

James of course is not speaking against riches as such, but against their wrong use.

All these statements make us realise that man is on a crazy and illegitimate search for pleasure. It is generally compulsive and frenetic. We might say it is man's insistence on getting his rights, ie. achieving emotional fulfilment to the utmost. We might also say it is a compensatory drive to balance or counteract the misery he has in his being because of his chronic rebellion and anger. This kind of pursuit for pleasure must inevitably compound itself in desire and yet be frustrated by the elusive nature of the pleasure it seeks.

## **KINGDOMS OF PLEASURES**

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### **THE KINGDOM OF PLEASURE**

The kingdom of darkness is where obstinacy, and an implacable hatred of God and men exist. The angry, the wrathful, the bitter and the cynical live in this kingdom. Yet there is another Kingdom. Of it Paul said, 'The Kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (Romans 14:17). He does not mean that we put aside eating and drinking when we are in God's Kingdom. It is the way we go about these matters which determines whether we are citizens of God's Kingdom or of the kingdom of evil. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says that the simple ones who trust the Father will not be primarily occupied in their thoughts with eating, drinking and clothing. The Gentiles (ie. the non-God people) are occupied in these matters. He says, 'Your heavenly Father knows you have need of them'.

We discover that everything created by God is good, but that evil seeks to negate all that is good. Whilst God intends all things to be enjoyed, Satan seeks to demean and pervert the beauty and pleasurable nature of these things.

Take, for example, the statement of Proverbs 5:18-19. 'Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your

youth, a lovely hind, a graceful doe. Let her affection fill you at all times with delight, be infatuated always with her love.' Here we see true personal and sexual pleasure. To the pure in heart these things can be pure and simple. To the lecherous, however, there is another slant altogether. This principle then goes for all pleasures. To the pure they are pure and simple, but to the evil and sophisticated they are wrong, twisted and impure. Hence the cynicism of the chronic sinner.

Nevertheless, not all are overly gross in their pleasures. Some are very calculating. They are, so to speak, gourmets, not lechers. They have worked out how one can enjoy oneself; theirs is a calculated system. They have learned from both the Stoics and the Epicureans. In fact there is something quite chilling about such calculated patterns of pleasure. This ruthless pursuit of pleasure is little less than horrifying.

### **THE GAMES! THE SPORTS! THE CIRCUSES!**

We need say little about these. What is the philosophy of games, sports and circuses which man espouses in the main? Is it the tingling of the nerves, the stimulation of the adrenalin, the blood-thumping pulses of victory? It does not much matter. Playing games is part of true life. Guileless dancing, frolicking, cavorting, playing at physical skills, and the perfect use of the body in sports and the like, can be a most joyous thing. Doubtless Adam frolicked in the garden with Eve in joyous innocence, and doubtless many a man and a maid have done so since. Doubtless running, 0 much of it. Darkness plays a sad part in many of man's trained entertainments. Man has abused the gift of games, fun and frolicking. He has commercialised it, made it a thing of rivalry, personal egotism as well as exhibition, often, of violence. Yet all of this only

serves to testify to the fact that man sees his needs of pleasure, recreation, entertainment, and the like. Where it is not abused, playing, dancing and physical skills are a source of genuine joy and satisfaction.

### **HOW, THEN, SHALL WE HAVE PLEASURE?**

Let us keep in mind the whole point of these last two chapters. A *man, whether he knows it or not, is angry because he feels himself to be cheated of his rightful claim to pleasure!* He is angry because of his failure ever to be fulfilled. He is angry at God, man, and creation for this reason. In his anger he goes out to obtain his right—pleasure! He will do this in bitterness. He will override others, often, to get this fulfilment. In a way he is compounding his displeasure and so his deep desire for pleasure. By nature of the case he is making the gratification of his desire even more difficult.

Hence the variety of exercises and devices man has invented in order to obtain pleasure, even to perverted forms such as sadism and masochism. Hence the great sadness that is across the human race. Hence the outraged expressions of man in his mounting angers: wars, murders, rapes, crimes, selfishness, greed and those things which promise him some sort of pleasure, in the ultimate. Man, then, has made a terrible mistake. *He has blamed God for his lack of pleasure when in fact he himself—singly as a person and collectively as a race—is responsible.* Because he will not accept the fact that the mistake is his and not God's, he proceeds to accumulate more and more evidence against God. Every Scripture he reads which says that God is the one who wounds, confirms him in his bitterness. He reads that 'If evil should befall a city, will it not be God who has done it?' This of course is true—in the ultimate. Nevertheless, God who wounds, also heals and does good in a city. How could man read these seemingly opposite statements with

penetrating judgement and so with gracious acceptance of the perfection of the Divine will? He cannot!

Man will only discover pleasure- when he seeks and finds God. He will only find serenity when guilt is lifted. He will only escape the shadows when his evil is neutralised. He will only come out into brilliant and pleasurable sunlight when he sees the love of God in Christ. He will only be free of the chains of his lusts and habits, and compulsive desire for pleasure, when he comes to the Fountain of Living Waters, the Father himself. Then he will drink of its sweetness and be refreshed deeply in his inner being.

At that time the tides of well-being will rise. Then he will eat and drink of the Godhead. What is true food to his being will truly nourish him. He will know that the Kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. He will understand that the Kingdom of light is light, and the very Kingdom of the Son of his (the Father's) love, and he will revel in it.

Only the guiltless person is truly the guileless one. Only he can see all things as pure. His sourness has become sweetened as his darkness has become light. Divested of his chains, he can experience new and glorious freedom. Lest we seem to idealise this new life of man. Let us say that it is attended also with suffering, and will ever be, for redeemed man feels more keenly the sadness which has come to the human race, through sin. He suffers along with the whole creation which, itself, knows convulsive suffering brought about by man's sin. He knows these things, and shares in them, and yet his joy is unimpaired. He has discovered the enriching truth that to share in the sufferings of Christ and his creation is to know a deeper joy, a richer pleasure, a fuller satisfaction.

### HAVING THE PLEASURE

To drink of the Fountain of Living Waters, is to become an

under-fountain. God is Joy, in himself. He is Delight, in himself. No true joy can be experienced apart from him. Hence all those passages we quoted from the Psalms are as true today as when uttered by the psalmists. The man who is vivified is the one who has been mortified. Colossians 3:1-13 tells this story. Because of the Cross, man can put to death anything incongruous with his new life. For his part it is a life of love, joy and peace, including all the other concomitants named in the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

The fruit of the Spirit comes from the seed of the Gospel. The fruit is not that which we create. It comes only from the Spirit. Nevertheless we are called upon to habituate it in our lives. Habituation proceeds from faith and practice. Practice is really obedience. *By faith* then we are joyful. *By faith* then we are serene and tranquil. *By faith* we are not bitter, grim, vengeful, jealous, remorseful, uptight, intense and compulsive in our work and actions. *By faith* we relax. *By faith* we insist we are free, and free enough to enjoy all the good things God has given us. *By faith* we can share in fun, sport, enjoyment, entertainment, and the like. We do not have to feel guilty, even though we do remain sensitive. Any shame at our failure is only present to keep us sensitive to the issues. It is not there to bring us back into bondage.

We should then be free to obey Paul's injunction, 'Put away anger!' The true man of God knows God is not to blame for his (previous) emotional deprivation. He knows God has set a fountain flowing afresh in him. He can laugh in a world that is gloomy with its guilts. He can be joyful no matter what the circumstances. He has no dreadful past to look back to, yet he has a rich future to contemplate with hope. As we have said, time and again, there will be no more tears, pain, suffering or death. What a prospect! As the old man remarked to the wife of his love, 'All this [present], and Heaven too!'

He, as the man of faith, must obey the injunctions to be

joyful, since faith is really obedience. These injunctions are found many times in the letter to the Philippians. He must also obey Christ's command to rejoice and leap for joy. Great is the reward of the persecuted. In this age redeemed man lives by faith and not by sight. He must then 'faith' his way into joy, into the actions of pleasure. It is not that faith is not seeing, but that what it sees is what the natural man cannot see. Faith *sees* great reasons for joy, great facts for pleasure. The man of faith understands creation. He understands redemption. He understands the ultimate renewal of all things. Thus he understands God. Hence he is joyful.

### PLEASURE COMES BY PLEASING

Jesus said, 'I am never alone for the Father is always with me, because I do always that which is pleasing to him.' Paul enjoins, 'Lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him'. Pleasing God brings pleasure. Serving man brings pleasure. It is as much serving man to do 'acts of mercy with cheerfulness', and to 'rejoice in hope', as it is to do dramatic works such as the laying down of one's life. It is a great affirmation of faith to be joyful, to enjoy the good fruits of the earth, and to show that the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. The redeemed man must continually witness to others as to the prodigal nature of the Creator-Father. He must show he enjoys the good gifts of God. He must be relaxed, not uptight; he must be a man of fun and humour, a man who discerns the gifts of God in others, and no less gifts of nature in the unredeemed.

All of these elements are part of the will of God. Hebrews 10:5-7 quotes Psalm 40:6-8, which says, 'I delight to do thy will, O my God! ' This is the same as the man of Psalm 1: 'His delight is in the law of the Lord'. True joy is experienced in unquestioning, un-angry obedience. To serve God and man is to live in the constantly flowing stream of gracious delight.

### THE END TO ALL ANGER

The bowels need no longer boil. The adrenalin need no longer flow; not for this cause, anyway. We have long ago seen that *there is no legitimate cause for anger with God*. Nor, for that matter, should we be angry with man, the image of God. There is, however, *every reason for being delighted with God*. He is the true source of all pure pleasure and joy. He makes a person carefree though the world be loaded with sufferings and problems. It is not that there are not things for which to care, but there is a spirit which can care without weighting others down with their own problems.

It is the Father then who gives delight to his children that they may come to delight in him.

'When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream.

Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing' (Psalm 126:1-2).

'Blessed is the man whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile' (Psalm 32:1-2).

'For you shall go out with joy, and be led forth in peace;

the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands' (Isaiah 55:12).

'They feast on the abundance of thy house, and thou givest them to drink from the river of thy delights' (Psalm 36:8).

'My soul is feasted as with marrow and fat,

and my mouth praises thee with joyful lips' (Psalm 63:5).

'The river of (Sod is full of water' (Psalm 65:9).

In that day the true liberation of the human spirit shall be made known. Human anger will be seen to have been

foolish, if not childish, if not deadly. This true liberation shall be seen in the joy of the sons of God as they share their eternal liberty with all the creation.

Doubtless there will be much dancing, much expression of delight, much sharing of joy. This of course will be appropriate in the presence of the God of all delights. At his right hand will be pleasures for evermore.

## THE WAYS OF LIVING IN PEACE

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The obtaining of a tranquil mind, we have seen, is a commendable and profitable matter. By tranquil mind we do not mean that which is supine, that which is merely bovine. Whilst a tranquil mind is the opposite of 'boiling bowels' (Job 30:27), yet it is not a mind which is peaceful because it has insulated itself against a sinful world, or refused to share in the convulsive sufferings of creation (Romans 8:22-23). Jesus said he had not come to bring peace, but a sword. He meant of course that to relate to him in a total love would cause jealousy and anger. Those who hated God and coveted the loyalty of their own, would be angry. Doubtless they were already angry, but then this anger would be incited to a high pitch. Division would not so much be caused as it would be crystallised. Man who covets another person's love hates the love of that person for God.

Given then, that Godly peace is not the complacency of ignorance or indifference, how does one continually live in peace? Wordsworth once spoke of 'central peace subsisting at the heart of endless agitation'. He must have meant that peace relates not to quiescence, but to positive movement. If God is pure action, then for us to live with the God of peace, knowing his peace, we too must be 'endless action'. In fact the way to live in endless peace is to live in union with God.

**PEACE IS THE LIFE OF UNION WITH GOD**

We have spoken of some of these elements. God is the Fountain of Living Waters. We must drink of him, drawing upon him, eating of the Bread of Life. Jesus spoke in these terms: 'As the living Father has sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me.' To eat him is to feed upon his words and actions, and to be one with him. This being one with him is called 'abiding', in John 15. 'Except you abide in me, you can do nothing.' At the same time we both receive and give. We take that which flows to us, and then ourselves flow to others. Our main point is that when Christ gives the gift of peace, then he gives himself. 'My peace I leave with you. My peace I give unto you. Not as the world gives, give I unto you'. We can know this peace, not merely by being given some status (and we are given that), but by personal faith-relationship with the Triune Godhead. We were first created in the image of the Triune God, then we were baptised into the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and so we are one with the Godhead. Nevertheless that relationship has to be cultivated. To cultivate it, God has given us certain means of grace. It is also true that the Father, the Son and the Spirit dwell in us, and we dwell in them, each personally, and, as all his people, corporately. To understand this we need to see the Pauline doctrine of 'in Christ', and 'Christ in us', matters which we have only briefly examined. We also need to see that we abide in God and God in us. Yet in seeing this paramount truth we need to keep filling out the relationship we have by the given means of grace.

**MEANS OF GRACE FOR UNION WITH GOD,  
AND SO, CONTINUING PEACE**

We repeat that peace is not a goal in itself. It can be known

only in the action of doing the will of God. That was the only way the Son could know it. It is known in the life of endless (ceaseless) action. All that we have said about being still, waiting upon God, does not contradict this. It is seeing God as Sovereign, waiting upon the revelation of his will and his work, which fits us better with peace so that we can actively follow that will.

**Means of Grace: Prayer**

There is much that can be said on this subject. Prayer is personal union with God. Whatever it may have in it of reverence, awe, worship, adoration, submission and the like, it is nevertheless still personal. Romans 8:26-27 speaks of a rich union of the Spirit with us in the matter of prayer. We may not know what to pray for, or even how to pray, but he will pray with us, for us. The Son, on the throne, is also praying for us, as he is one with us. The Father within us and over us cares greatly for us.

Prayer then is a private thing, a personal relationship with the Father. It is not just asking things from him, whether for ourselves or for others. It is true we are bidden to do that. However it is coming to know the Giver rather than merely seeking his gifts. Even the reception of his gifts needs prayer to fit us for them. Our main point is that prayer is the closest and most conscious living with God we can know. For this reason it is often the last thing we do. We are not so definitively finished with our anger that we no longer have the slightest trace of fear. We are still tempted to fears and angers, and cannot exist without the exercise of prayer. Here it is we have company with God, and share all things of our lives, including our weaknesses and failures, as well as our joys and the victories he has given us.

**Means of Grace: The Word**

Many of us have differing views as to the Scriptures being

the Word of God. Some see the Word only within the Scriptures. Some see all Scriptures as having equal (total) value. Others know that somehow the Word comes to them livingly through the gracious ministry of the Spirit. The Word also is where we come to know more of the Godhead. We come to know matters which unaided human reasoning could never discover. In other words, truth is revelational.

We must live then as those who love to hear God talking to them, even when much of what he says is exhortation, and even rebuke and chastisement. There is so much that is not this, so much that is just sheer good news, and when it is this, it is for our benefit and growing maturity. We have seen that angry people misinterpret the Word when they read it, because already they have distorted views of God. If we do not keep reading then we will easily revert to distorted views. More even than this: we are exhorted to the constant renewing of our minds so that the thoughts which become evil, and the old system of life, will not gain possession or repossess our minds. We must live with the mind of Christ.

#### **Means of Grace: The Sacraments**

The two basic sacraments—baptism and the Lord's Supper—are filled with meaning. They are only fully known in faith and repentance, and then they bring us to more living knowledge of God. They speak of forgiveness, cleansing and new life. Yet they do not merely *speak* of these things. They dynamically communicate them. We are always in need of sacramental renewal, not by some *ex opere operato* factor, but by our participation in the grace of God through the Word and the Sacrament as they are one. It is God who is working—not us—yet his working evokes the faith-obedience response, which for us is the action of true life.

In the sacraments we come to know him freshly, and this is not merely keeping us from anger. It is first a catharsis of anger, and second a bastion against revisitations of anger.

Love overwhelms the unworthy and the untrue, and above all things, the sacraments keep us in his love.

#### **Means of Grace: The Life of Fellowship**

God's love is not a privatised matter. We live in love together. This is the vibrant message of the New Testament. To continue in the apostles' doctrine, the breaking of bread and the prayers is also to continue in the fellowship, for this is how it was. We were called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 1:9-17 but the calling was from the Father. We have fellowship with the Father and the Son (I John 1:3), and this by the Holy Spirit (Philippians 2:1).

It is in this fellowship of God's people that our love is increased and then filled out. Paul makes this clear in Ephesians 3:14-19. This way we are 'filled unto all the fullness of God'. Paul has told us of its different aspects, especially in I Corinthians 12. He has shown us that we are members one of another, and that when one member suffers, then all members suffer, rightly speaking. This is why we say fellowship is not a privatised matter. We cannot have it with God and not with the brethren. In the fellowship we are kept in the warmth of love, no matter how weak each member may be, and even how sinful We are kept from anger, and over-zealous intensity.

#### **Means of Grace: Worship and Service**

Worship and service are really the one (Romans 12:2, Hebrews 9:14, Revelation 7:15, cf. Philippians 3:3 and John 4:20f.). Service means we are actually doing the will of God. I his then means we are not merely working for him, but with him. This surely makes our relationship more personal and intimate. We know our workmates best when we work with them.

Service is a gift. It is a privilege. We are not left unemployed. We are not spiritual 'lay-abouts'. We have the

dignity of work. With it we have the privilege of adoration, of giving that worship which helps us to be what we are—truly dependent creatures and children of God. Service and worship are the expression of our freedom (Exodus 4:22, Hebrews 9:14). It is by worshipping and service that we know the Lord's will (Romans 12:1-2, Acts 13:1f., cf. Ephesians 5: 17-20).

#### Means of Grace: God's Gifts and Sharing Them

The gifts are what make us truly human. 'What do you have that you did not receive?' asks Paul, 'and if so, then why do you boast as though it were not a gift?' (I Corinthians 4:7). The gifts are wonderful when used, wonderful for love and growth and gratitude. When thought of as deriving from ourselves, then they can be dangerous for pride, privatised possession, and even use against others.

The early church knew little anger because it did not have to be covetous. There was no life-preserving spirit about these early ones. They shared all they possessed. They believed also in the loving, providing Father. They knew his habit of giving *largesse*. So it was their delight to share. This was the way of constant love. Giving it was the way of love. Receiving it was being loved. The nature of the gifts was (is) to have such variety that the variety of needs may be met. To give is to love. To withhold is to hate. Only in the latter situation can anger thrive.

#### The Grace of Fasting

Naming fasting as a grace given to us may seem somewhat surprising. We tend to think of it as an exercise which is demanding in itself, and a way of pleasing God. We often think of it in the context of repentance from sin and evil, and related to the impending judgement of God, as, for example, when Jonah preached against Nineveh.

It is surprising to trace the number of times fasting is

recorded in the Scriptures. It is linked with many special situations. However, we will not pause to research these occasions. The fasting we refer to as a source of peace, is found in Isaiah 58. The passage from verse one to verse five speaks of false fasting, hypocritical because the lives of those fasting are inconsistent with the true purpose of fasting. The true purpose is described in verses six to twelve. We quote verses six to nine:

'Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness,  
to undo the thongs of the yoke,  
to let the oppressed go free and to break every yoke?  
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,  
and bring the homeless poor into your house;  
when you see the naked, to cover him,  
and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?  
Then shall your light break forth like the dawn,  
and your healing shall spring up speedily;  
your righteousness shall go before you,  
he glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.  
Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;  
you shall cry, and he will say, Here I am.'

Fasting is a joyous matter. It has others in mind. There is no question of our fasting to make up for failures or to make expiation for them. We saw before that participation in the will of God is what gives us a sense of satisfaction, fulfilment and peace. This kind of fasting provides all these elements. In our positive concern for others, self-protecting and self-extending anger dies away. It has nothing upon which to feed. Positive action for others leaves no grounds for anger to feed upon.

#### PEACE IS GOD: OUR PEACE IS LIVING WITH HIM

All that we have said about peace can be merely abstract. To live with God is no mere abstraction. It is the dynamic way of

living: the only way of living. 'To know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent—*this is life eternal!*' It is living with God. It is living on God. It is living through God. It is living from God.

As we have said, this will lead us into many strange paths, some of them being the paths of suffering and persecution. There is no cause to fear that this will destroy our peace. Only in it can there be genuine peace. It is 'central peace subsisting at the heart of endless action'. That action is redeeming. Not only does redemption bring us peace. It is sharing the redemption with others, as well as sharing their sufferings, which brings the deepest peace of all. To see our fellow creatures come into the peace of God is the most peace-giving thing of all.

## A CONCLUSION TO OUR ENQUIRIES

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### THE SEARCH FOR IDENTITY

What then do we conclude in relation to the man of anger and the man of peace? What makes the angry man, and what the man of tranquil mind? We have seen the elements which contribute to both. We have also seen the way out of anger, and into peace. With this understanding we have come to know how a man can remain in peace despite the world about him. One man may opt out of the so-called rat race, by going out into some desert, and another may seek the forest or a desert island. Others may draw walls around their minds or spirits, withdrawing inwards.

None of these solutions is courageous. None of them can be satisfying. Man is a social creature, and he must find his true context. Many have attempted to do this, ie. to discover what and who they are within the universe, within time. Today there is a term for this enquiry, namely, 'Search for identity.'<sup>1</sup> There is much self-analysis, much contexting of one's person, much research into what a man is in general, and the enquirer in particular. Hence the surge of interest in personality and interpersonal relationships. It has invaded the

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<sup>1</sup> For further study of this subject, see the author's book, *Discovering Your Identity* (Blackwood: NCPI, 1982).

sacred halls of our seminaries, and taken over many of our pulpits. Once where the great eternities were preached, the domestic issues of humanity are now being discussed.

Sometimes it appears that our context is a trivial one, and that the mundane has found an exalted place in our thinking. Humanism excludes the supernatural dimensions. The greatness of God dwindles down to the perimeters of humanity. Eternity is swallowed up in mere time.

Be these things as they may, the search for identity goes on. However trifling it may be, and however circumscribed, there is a truth contained in this search. Man must know who he is, and why he is, as well as where he is. He must also know where he is going.

Many of the psalmists seem to introspect regularly. Yet when we examine their introspection it is not an inward-looking thing, and certainly is not analytical. It is human meditation upon the great things of God, his universe and his law. The Hebrew discovered his identity in the context of these. The more he knew these, the more he knew of himself.

### **SPELLING OUT MAN'S IDENTITY**

Man must find his identity in God, and at the same time in God's creation. This must mean his context is God, creation, and his fellow human creatures. Yet vast as is this panorama of being, it is pointless without the knowledge of the goals and purposes God has set for the human race.

The theologian delights in the great themes of Scripture. One takes creation, and there is enough in the subject to occupy his mind and heart for life. Another is enraptured by the theme of covenant. All, to him, is covenant. Yet another is gripped by the truth of the Kingdom of God. From creation to the new creation he is obsessed with Kingdom, the mighty rule and reign of God.

Not one whit behind him is the scholar who pursues the

thought and concept of the people of God. He finds his theme powerfully set out in the entirety of Scripture. God is the God not only of persons, but of nations, and then of all the nations. Hence the deep devotion to this subject.

Some see man's identity in the truth of salvation history, ie. *heilgeschichte*. From the Fall of man to the end when a great multitude stands before God, the theologian explores the depths of God's love and grace in salvation. The thoughtful person is intrigued by theodicy, that study which seeks a rationale of God's righteousness, and his reign and rule in a world where sin and rebellion abound. He is gripped by the way in which the Scriptures vindicate the righteousness of God, not only in mercy but also in judgement.

And so on: the themes are many, the interest is gripping. But where, in all of this, does man find peace, that is, liberation from anger to true serenity? The answer might be, 'Be not foolish, but wise, knowing the will of the Lord.' Yes, but such an answer must include the will of God from before time to after time. The will of God is known only in the wide context of creation, covenant, the Kingdom of God, the people of God and the world, salvation history and theodicy. In other words, man is not an insignificant and tiny unit in the whole of the purposes of God, but he is significant beyond all other creatures in the things we have nominated.

Man then finds his peace in union with God and his fellow man. He is a creature of destiny, not a helpless object of fate. He cannot be truly himself unless he is in the majestic context God has ordained for him. He, of all creatures, has been created to glorify God. He does this by enjoying his creation, by participating in his providential care, and by being rescued from mediocrity and death by his salvation. He has become energised by his union with the Triune God. He is living in the eternal purposes of the Creator-Father. He has come under the Lordship of the Son and walks in the Leadership of the Spirit of God. He finds his true being in obedience to God,

and in sharing the purposes God has for his creation. This is a wide context. It is made even larger by the knowledge that he, man, approaches eternal glory. He then not only loves God for his grace, and lives in powerful faith in him, but he has a most dynamic hope, based upon the promises of the Eternal One. Hence this person of hope, love and faith, works along with God. Worship and service are his, flowing from the adoration of love and gratitude.

The man who knows he is in union with God—and who seeks equivalent union with man—is the tranquil person, the serene man, the person of grace. He who refuses his basic identity, trying to carve out deity and autonomy for himself, is open to the most dreadful of angers. He breeds wrath in his guilty perverse mind, and he reaps the fruit of his sowing in the depths of his spirit.

Man does not really have to analyse his own context. He does not have to discover where he is in all the majestic and simple things of his universe, but he does have to live in relationship with God, man and the creation. The one who accepts these matters and realises—albeit simply—God's purpose for him, is the man of acceptance, the man who quietly submits, the man who accepts the truth of things-as-they-are. He is the one who lives accordingly. He has the tranquil mind, even whilst battling the perversity of evil. He knows that 'godliness with contentment is great gain'.

The other man—the man who will not accept things as they are—has the angry mind whose stomach seethes, whose bowels boil, and whose bones rot. Anger threatens to destroy him.

It is to such a person that Jesus says,

'Come unto me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and come learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'

The true way out of anger is submission to the Man of

Peace. To capitulate, to lay down one's arms, to find one's true self in the redeeming Son—this is the way of peace, for he is the Way to the Father, the God of Peace.

## SECOND THOUGHTS ON ANGER

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The title of this chapter, strictly speaking, is not correct. What I now write is the result of many phases of thought that have come to me since the first edition of this book. Having struck this very important vein of thinking, I have been unable to let it go. I see the things in my own life that could easily move me into anger. I have been surprised to discover that whereas I considered myself to be—in the main—an un-angry person, I now see how quickly I can fall into anger. At first I was shocked by the discovery, and then I realised that this is how most—if not all—people are. It is just that we express or conceal our anger in different ways.

### THE ROOT OF ANGER

I have seen afresh that the root of anger lies in our idea that God in general does not care for his universe, and in particular for each of us as persons. One person will think that God favours another and neglects him. This, of course, is not true. Jesus said that the Father is impartial, and loves all equally, or—shall we say—totally, since love which is true does not work in degrees. He sends his rain and sunshine on the just and the unjust, and on the good and evil alike. Yet for fairly obvious reasons we are critical of God, and are angry at him.

In earlier chapters we mentioned that four things confront man which make him feel he has been badly done by, namely parental upbringing, heredity, environment and circumstances. Most of us claim that we are the victims or products of these four elements. We know them to be dynamic. We say they condition us; that we are what we are because of them. The truth—on which I have previously touched only lightly—is that these four elements do not condition us. We condition ourselves by our negative reaction to them or our positive response to them. I see now that when we put the blame on to them for our present states of mind—including anger—we are really saying, ‘I never had a chance. I never got my break. I have been restricted and frustrated.’

I strongly doubt that this is true, that it is the case with any one of us. Instead I believe that no matter how difficult these four elements may have appeared to be, they were our opportunities of rich training for our characters. The old cliché about these things proving either stumbling blocks or stepping stones is not really a cliché. It is true. In all cases our decisions regarding these four things have been the decisions which have helped to mould us to what we now are.

I think the deepest complaint of the human heart, if verbalised, would go something like this: ‘These four elements—parental upbringing, heredity, environment and circumstances—are things in which we had no say, and about which we could do nothing.’ To this point our verbalisation is basically correct. What we say following this is where we can go wrong, namely: ‘God is the one who can shape, arrange and handle these four elements and *he has not done this to suit my needs and to help me*. He may have done so for others—the lucky ones—but not for me. On this basis I judge him and find him to be lacking in personal concern for me. In fact I blame him for what I am, and I am angry with him and rightly so.’

That is where anger is really wrong, and bad. In this soil of

the mind, the seeds, plants and fruits of anger will be quickly seen. They can be horrific.

### **WHERE ANGER BREEDS**

We must not be wholly critical of people who think this way. Let us consider some of the factors involved in the four elements we have mentioned. Consider a person born maimed, with hereditary disease or disfigurement. Consider children brought up in the midst of cruelty, incest and bestiality, or living in an environment of fear, evil, and inhuman selfishness. Consider the under-privileged or the non-privileged, situations in concentration camps, under racial persecution, or just simply famine and prevalent disease. Think of people living in high density population, and the effects of population crowding. For example, we note that Hong-Kong has the highest density population in the world, and consequently the highest suicide rate.

When we begin to think in this vein—and we need to do that—then our hearts sink and we begin to ask ourselves, ‘Who, then, can survive?’ We are strongly tempted to think that God is uncaring. We may want to ask the Creator, ‘How come you seem to do so little about so much evil?’ Give us the same power that God is said to possess and we would quickly tidy up things! The truth is, of course, that if God could have done this he would have done it long ago. There must be something which in our simplistic way, we have overlooked.

What we have overlooked is that God never conscripts man’s will, nor undoes the dignity of man as commandants seek to do in concentration camps. God allows the human race corporately and personally to play out the things of will. Hence the evil that we have about us should be traced not to God but to evil powers and sinful humanity. The wonder is that God does not stamp out the foolish and rebellious human race: his patience seems infinite.

### **THE ANGER THAT BREEDS**

What does the human race do in its anger? The answer must be that the hideous violence we keep meeting is bred from anger, which in turn is bred from our wrong attitude to God, the basis of which is guilt for our own wrong doings. Thus we see the terrors of massacres, blood-lust to kill, cruelty breeding more cruelty. We see genocides, homicides, patricides, fratricides, infanticides, and—from anger against others and oneself—suicides. Mindless abortion, the rise of wife beating, husband beating, child beating, and other familial forms of cruelty, all spring from lack of impulse control, and the dreadful explosion of inner anger.

Those who do not express their hatred in these forms of extreme evil, may slay a husband, a wife, or a child (to say nothing of parents or a brother), by the cruel use of words. Characters are slain, mud is thrown, vilification is effective, and all such forms spring from anger. So too the steady killing by acts of attrition, the deadly dealing of words and moods, acts and utterances. Business competition, politics, personal betrayals, and underhandedness bring forms of cruelty that cannot be brought before a court of justice. So we could go on in this sad portrayal of human anger and its evils.

What is so strange, however, is that great leaders emerge from homes of poverty and from places of cruelty. Spiritual awareness is often found most in places of suffering. True love seems to breed where hatred is rife. Handicapped children grow to be adults of great character, and privileged children are often found with deep bitterness of heart and mind. A beautiful woman may be bitchy, and a homely woman rich with inner beauty of mind and character.

### **ANGER AND LOVE**

We are forced to conclude that no human being has the right

to excuse his (or her) anger. We must take responsibility for the use of all our emotions. As we have said before, we have to renounce human dignity once we excuse our decisions and blame them on the four things we have been discussing. We have to see that somehow our wills—with their choices—matter very much. We decide either to love or to hate, to be at peace or to be angry. What we may not realise is how much depends upon our right choices and our wrong choices, upon our reactions and our responses. Any human being may progress towards love or murder. His (or her) actions may trigger off greatness or meanness, compassion or cruelty. None of this can be off-loaded on to another, and certainly not on to God.

### **THE POWER OF A TRANQUIL MIND**

I make an appeal, then, on the material presented in this book, but much more on the facts themselves, that we desist from anger and progress in love and compassion. I know we are in the grip of powers even stronger than ourselves, and that desisting is not simply something of our choice. I believe our choice must be the fruit of Christ's Cross and the richly flowing grace of God via that Cross. I can see no other way. Good intentions will be soon overcome by our habitual hatreds and the tyranny of our own anger. Yet the matter is urgent. Clever minds and clever words are leading us along ways that are not good for our race. We are in the hands of the utopians, the perfectionists, the little (and would-be) messiahs. Their piety, their seeming compassion, and their brilliant words may lead us to secondary paths and to endeavours which, when they fail as they are doomed to do, will leave us with deeper anger, with cynicism and bitterness which will compound and further pollute the anger we now have. Only in the face of the reconciling Cross and the life-giving

Resurrection can the human race come to its senses, and to the gift of true tranquillity, ie. peace with God, with oneself, and all mankind, everywhere.

**APPENDIX****AN ESSAY ON COPS AND ROBBERS,  
INJUSTICE AND ANGER**

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**A SIMPLE AND NAIVE OBSERVATION**

The writer, whose one-time occupation was short-story writing, knows a trifle of what people look for in the form of literature. He has also been interested in forming a layman's analysis of what it is that attracts people in cops and robbers and, for that matter, Westerns (cowboys and Indians, ranchers and rustlers, etc.). His conclusion is that it is *all a matter of justice!* Let us examine any typical script to see if *this is* the case.

In the beginning of a script the robbers, the cowboys and Indians, or the rustlers (or suave, cultured gangsters) commit an act of horrible cruelty and injustice. The Indians wipe out a camp of simple and unprepared settlers, the bank-robbers shoot a defenceless person, preferably a noble soul or a helpless woman. The suave and law-protected gangsters beat up (via their slaveys) a poor shopkeeper who refuses the organised protection racket; or, unbelievably, the hero-cop is horribly wounded and his life is despaired of. Maybe the rustlers have treacherously shot the ranch-owner by some sneak operation. Maybe the ship's crew have murdered a handsome ship's officer and have cast their dreadful eyes on

the captain's daughter. No matter what it is, it is enough to keep the adrenalin flowing, and this from beginning to end. We pant in expectation until justice is done. Our indignation will keep us in hot pursuit of retribution, even if the film takes hours.

With this key to the principle of insistence upon justice, we can understand why so many people get hooked on these plots. Few plots move far from the appeal to justice. So then, *our anger is easily roused by injustice*. As we have said, we will follow the film or TV videotape through to the deadly end. Of course we know how it will be; how it must be. The police cars will be there, sirens wailing, lights flashing. The insolent gangster will be humbled to the dust, the rustler will turn out to be a rat of a man, the crew will drop its eyes as the strong third officer (disguised under-cover man) brings them to surrender, and the captain's daughter flashes an adoring smile of gratitude and expectancy. The Indian chief surrenders nobly, and justice has been done for the night. The family has had its run-through of vicarious justice-done, and may now go, empty-minded, to bed.

This may be the regular scenario, but in life it is little different. We suspect God has not been as quick in his justice as we would be. Indeed, sometimes we feel ourselves more just than he. We would have moved Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin and Idi Amin off the scene quicker than he has done. Our record—given the same power—would outclass his!

*In all of this matter of justice, love is entirely forgotten.* Black is black and white white. Right is right and wrong wrong. There are no ameliorating circumstances. We don't understand why men become robbers, or rustlers, or mutinous sailors. We have no thought for the plight of the Indian. It is a fact that a vast amount of human anger is not wholly justified. Whilst it is true that men do unjust things, and that the law must be respected and even enforced, nevertheless we must understand the evil of man, and that without forgetting

our own natural evil. It is also a curious thing that we do not mind violence being done in the name of justice! It is just that *our side is* justified in doing violence. In fact it is not violence. It is keeping law and order. If violence—for the most part—is anger expressed, then we need to be sure that we, too, are not violent in anger, even for the sake of justice.

Another point often missed is that man can easily delight in violence. In Genesis 9, God commands that the beast or man who kills a man must also be killed because man is the image of God. *Violence then is often expressed anger against God under the guise of anger against man.* It is human anger expressing itself in an attack upon God through another human being. We saw in the story of Cain and Abel that the more man is like God, ie. the more he reflects the image of God, the more he is liable to the hatred of evil men, and the more he may suffer violence. Yet it is not the notoriously evil man who necessarily gives vent to violence. It is often the seemingly mild man who suddenly becomes homicidal. Others may exercise no violence themselves but arrange for it to be done by proxy. Yet others use verbal violence, the violence that violates the human mind, or kills the character of a person. [his can be expressed, vicariously, in cops and robbers, for those who view are often those who identify with justice, and look for justice.

Vandalism is a related subject. Vandals are generally angry persons, expressing themselves in senseless acts. It is to be noticed that they generally attack beautiful or expensive things. Is this because that which is beautiful communicates God more directly to them? Certain it is that vandalism is related to the image of God in creation. Today there is also talk of language vandalism, mental vandalism, and the like. There is certainly a vandalism of cynicism. Anything of beauty, peace, joy, goodness, truth and holiness is mocked in this vandalising way.

These thoughts should cause us to reflect when we admire

ourselves as great upholders of justice. This may be true, of course. It may also be true that we are men of anger, women of wrath, working out these angers through the lives of others. Violence, too, may be in our blood. What we may be doing is expressing passion in these ways.

This all underlines what Isaiah once said:

*‘The wicked are like the troubled sea,  
for it cannot rest,  
and its waters cast up mire and dirt.  
There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked’.* (Isaiah 57:20-21).