



Into the Light

All things are possible with God

March—April 2010

Anger?

By Bob Van Domelen

³ Know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself; the Lord will hear when I call to him. ⁴ In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. ⁵ Offer right sacrifices and trust in the Lord. (Psalm 4.3-5)

To be right upfront, I grew up unsure of how to handle anger. The phrase “Don’t you get angry with me!” spoken with deliberate focus, but no raise in my mother’s voice, rings easily in my memory whenever my anger surfaces. I am pretty sure I read much more into her statement than she meant it to carry, but what did I know. I was just a kid.

Over the years I have shared a lot of different emotions in these newsletters. I have written about issues that have been raised in the mail I get. But I cannot recall writing about this topic. Is it fear? Is it an uncertainty of what to share? Whatever, anger is a valid feeling demanding a valid response and I know that I am not alone in my uncertainty as to how best to approach it.

In the January issue of this newsletter (“Oaks of Righteousness”), I shared the problems many of us have receiving good things because we somehow feel we have given up the right to feel good. After all, that is the underlying theme of community response whenever conversation includes the topic of sex offenders.

There is also the element of a need to be seen walking around in sackcloth, calling out “Unclean, unclean.” From this comes the notion that sex offenders are the modern day lepers. It is not an inaccurate description, at least from the public point of view. A fair description though? Absolutely not! The description portrays offenders as having done nothing to change behaviors or thought patterns. Left unchallenged, offenders become like the mug shots taken immediately following an arrest—portraits that are rarely flattering and certainly not inviting.

At some point, we must be able to put on that garment of praise I mentioned in “Oaks” for it is a garment that “bears the stain of human failing.” And because our sins created the stains, we are *all* called to repent and seek God, not just non-offenders. For it is, as I wrote, those things that become the “cleansing agent” for the garments we wear.

I don’t believe that all of Christian society denies salvation for sex offenders, but there might be many who whisper “Well, if it were *my* decision.” The anger of society is, I think, at its core rightly placed. Of all that we hold dear, children are at the top of the list. To molest them and to betray that sacred trust an adult has with a child is hard for anyone to accept. When abuse happens, the result is anger, a justifiable anger.

In your anger do not sin

Though it might be difficult to convince some people, there is inappropriate anger directed at sex offenders, an anger that does not allow for reconciliation or restoration. It is rooted, I believe, in an inability to forgive and fueled by the sin of abuse itself. “If I forgive the offender,” some may reason, “then I am forgetting the harm done to the victim, and that is something I will never do.” Unresolved anger.

I have to ask myself “How is holding someone to their sin not sinful on my part?” Yet I know there are people in my past for whom I still have deep resentment. They wronged me, never said they were sorry, and left me to pick up the pieces of myself that they deliberately shattered. When I think about this, I see those who have not forgiven me in a different light, yet actually the same light. The inability to forgive and to release another from the bond of a sinful behavior is wrong. Period.

when you are on your beds, search your hearts

Without a doubt, those of us who have offended against God’s children should not be asked to deny our own anger, especially if it is justifiable anger. I don’t have to look very far for things that would make the list. Just using issues shared with me in letters, you would see

- molested as a child (“Who helped me?”)
- absent or abusive parents (“What does love look like?”)
- churches quick to condemn, slow to support (“You cannot be here because of the children who attend.”)
- programs that deny offender childhood trauma (“This isn’t about you. It’s only about your victims.”)
- being ineligible for any parole
- denied halfway houses (“Too close to places where children might congregate”)
- residency restrictions that refuse to account for any possibility of change despite statistics that show low recidivism rates (“If we don’t do something, our city will be a dumping ground of sex offenders”)
- civil commitment (clearly “Life without parole”)

The list could go on but the point is simple: Anger that exists must find a healthy resolution.

Search your hearts and be silent

As a child, I was taught “When you get angry, count to ten.” David’s solution was much the same but better, I think, because counting is only an alternative activity, something to do instead of fume. Somehow, I sometimes see God as placing a finger to His lips and then going “Shhh.” My mouth opens, then closes. Silence.

One of the most frustrating aspects of being silent is that I come face to face with a simple truth: I can do nothing to change the heart of another.

I hear a rustling. Could that be those who are shouting "Stand up and fight! Take them to court! Sue!?" I don't disagree with the notion of righting a wrong but shouldn't that kind of action be taken because it is right to take it? Should anger be the foundation of the fight?

All I can tell you is what I feel, and what I feel is that righteous anger does not attack. It resolves. Righteous anger speaks, but it also listens.

I serve on a committee that has been attempting to educate people. Residency restrictions are not a solution nor do they protect anyone, so this committee has been speaking out to any who would listen. We don't do what we do because we are angry over how offenders have been denied basic rights. We speak out because the restrictions are wrong.

It has been over 21 years since I was released from prison, yet I am subject to the same legislation that is faced by someone released now. Twenty one years should count for something and when it doesn't, I feel angry. When I am silent, though, I wonder about the offender just released. Is it any more just for that person to go through what is happening in many communities than for me to be free of that just because of 21 years? The point is that the residency restrictions are wrong. I don't have to be angry to know that, and I don't have to be angry to serve on a committee.

Know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself; the Lord will hear when I call to him

This is the first verse but it really is the key. Despite the inequity of many situations, I believe with all my heart that God does hear our plea. How things will be resolved or even if they never get resolved should not alter how we deal with the anger they produce. Anger is a good thing, a motivator. But when we are consumed by anger, it is a most destructive force.

Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful. (John 14.27)

Bits & Pieces

The following are all from letters I have received in recent months. As always, I hope something you read will bring you encouragement and hope.

It's been on my heart to be more involved in evangelism for several weeks now. God has opened a door. I feel very inadequate. I must always remember that it's not a debate but that I am, as best as possible, to allow the Holy Spirit to speak to [his] heart through my words and my love.

As an inmate, I will always be pegged as the weak, white, gay guy and no matter how nice I am to others, this stigma will always cause others to be wary of me. Nothing I can do can change their perception of me, so the best I can do is be true to myself and live my life faithfully to God.

During the lockdown I enjoyed reading one of your recent articles about freedom from our pasts. It was really good about letting it go and moving on. Even though my past

continues to creep up to bite me in the rear, still I can be free of it by letting it go. I don't have to own that shame.

I've lost a great deal of material and financial wealth but those are not important in the big picture. I'd trade it all in a heart beat to have the love and acceptance of my family.

It remains an issue for me—dealing with the shame and inferiority while allowing God to transform me into the likeness and purity of His Son. I cry out "God, have mercy on me, a sinner!" and in the next breath call to Him "Abba! Father!" knowing I am His child. I can't live in the past because I am a new creature in Christ. But I can't pretend that I am not responsible for so much pain to others. The only time the contradiction seems resolved is when I am praying, especially for my victims. It's then that the sins of the past and the life of Christ in me can co-exist without confusion.

"But you were washed" -- God washed away our sins. "But you were sanctified" -- we were set apart for God's use. "But you were justified" --we were declared righteous in Christ Jesus. Sometimes we don't feel like God could love us because of what we have done, but Christ came to save sinners and not the righteous. "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Read Paul's letter to the Romans.

My most important mission while here isn't getting out or finding suitable housing, but growing into the special relationship with Christ and my fellow man that is the best it can be. I wish to learn to love the way God loves as much as possible in my flesh.

I get down a lot since I lost my family and my only son. I really feel like crap but since I've been off of lockup I go to church every Sunday. If it wasn't for talking to the chaplain and sharing with you, I would probably be in the crazy ward.

We were assigned the task of writing a letter to our victims as though they were sitting before us. It was an opportunity to take all we had learned in our time together doing the house cleaning and surrendering to the truth. As I read that letter out loud to the group, there was a lump in my throat and tears came. I finally comprehended the immense damage I had done to the lives of my innocent and trusting young victims, their families, and my own family. By reading out loud, our words and thoughts came to life.

I always say my life is an open house and my closets are clean. I don't want anything in my house or closets that would make me ashamed to have Christ live in it. He is the owner anyway. I am just a tenant who will move out one day to a better home.

When I disclosed what I had done to those children in group, the only thing I was questioned on, no, judged on was if I tried to sugar coat anything or try to make it less than it was. I made myself say it. To know my own words, my own voice, and to do so in front of them knowing their silence would be collective support for the truth, I did not have to face the truth alone. Not once did I come away from

group wanting to kill or hurt myself for what I had said in group about what I had done. I felt what I was supposed to feel. Had I felt this way before I did what I did to [my victims], I may not have done those things.

I feel that to ban a former sex offender (who has become a Christian) from church is to put the blood of Christ on trial. Denying a sex offender is to say that the blood of Jesus only covers certain sins and that He isn't all-forgiving.

I am constantly at war with my hurt emotions because so many of my family don't stay in contact with me. I want to feel loved, accepted, and a part of their lives, but they seem to choose to not correspond. The irony of my family situation is that these family members could never meet my emotional needs or expectations, so I am constantly setting myself up to be hurt.

I can't change who I was or what I did—that's a given. But by placing Jesus in those awful times and knowing what He accomplished for us, the meaning of the abuse changes from "You're worthless and deserve this pain" to "The Lord is with you. In Him is rest for your soul."

Even in my happiest times I had a strange feeling of unworthiness. There was always this feeling that the good could be taken away at any second.

I still struggle with my prayer life and I wish I could say that I don't have bad sexual thoughts. But the only thing I can say is that every day I try harder to do better than the day before. Every day I struggle to do the good that I want to do and not do the evil I do not want to do. Some days I do quite well; some days I am a total failure. However, that's not important. What is important is to realize that God looks at the intent of the heart.

This newsletter is made possible by the donations of its readers and would cease to exist without that support. Please consider a tax-exempt donation to Broken Yoke Ministries, PO Box 5824, De Pere, WI 54115-5824. And if you cannot contribute, please pray!

All things are possible with God!



Our Prayer Corner

Prayer is an incredible gift we can give one another, for there is no better thing than to lift our lives, hopes, and dreams to the altar of the Lord.

Let us pray . . .

- First and always foremost, for our victims, that each day for them is a new day, a day without fear, and a day of healing.

- For those facing parole hearings, that they recognize the constancy of God's love in all decisions that are made.
- For those who feel God does not love them, that they meet someone each day reminding them that God *does*.
- For those who feel called to challenge laws against sex offenders, that their motivation is based on seeking what is right and not on the anger that motivates the laws.
- For those who reach out to all inmates, that they will see the fruits of their labor.
- For those who struggle with positive self-image, that they clearly see themselves as God sees them.
- For media, that reporters remember to present all points of view fairly and without bias.
- For all with age-inappropriate attractions who have not acted on those attractions, that they are able to find the support and encouragement needed to deal with those attractions.
- For those who know that their own inner child needs healing, that they feel God's grace and direction.
- For the families and friends of victims, that they will continue to show support in love or come to understand how important their support is.
- For those who feel hopeless, that they might experience the blessings that are theirs—that we serve as blessings to one another.
- For churches, that the word of God and the example of Jesus opens the door for more and not less ministry to those considered modern day lepers.
- For Bob and Cathie, that they continue to live each day with the same trust and faith in God that they've had from the start.
- For this ministry, that Broken Yoke Ministries continues to be blessed with the financial support needed to meet basic expenses like this newsletter.
- Finally, for those who are still abusing and are reading this newsletter because God made that possible, that they will do whatever it takes to stop the cycle of abuse and harm caused to their victims.

A Special Prayer

Good morning, Holy Spirit!
I am counting on you to see me through this day.
You know my needs and my weaknesses.
Lead, guide, and direct me into all truth.
Strengthen me in everything I put my hand to.
Help me to avoid and resist temptation
and to meet every challenge I face.
Give me the words to speak
and show me the path that I am to walk in this day.
To God the Father be the glory.
Amen

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A Little Humor . . .

A man in his 60's bought a new BMW and was out on the interstate for a nice evening drive. The top was down, the breeze was blowing through what was left of his hair and he decided to open her up. As the needle jumped up to 80 mph, he suddenly saw flashing red and blue lights behind him.

"There's no way they can catch a BMW," he thought to himself and opened her up further. The needle hit 90, 100.... Then the reality of the situation hit him. "What am I doing?" he thought and pulled over.

The cop came up to him, took his license without a word and examined it and the car. "It's been a long day, this is the end of my shift and it's Friday the 13th. I don't feel like more paperwork, so if you can give me an excuse for your driving that I haven't heard before, you can go."

The guy thinks for a second and says, "Last week my wife ran off with a cop. I was afraid you were trying to give her back."

