

Anger, Jealousy, and the Goodness of God

More often than not, I'm quite level-headed. I'm not one for conspiracy theories, I'm seldom troubled by irrational thoughts; I'm able to think my way through circumstances, looking at an issue from many sides. I'm level-headed.

I wish I could say that I was level-headed, but I'm not. I may not get too "up" or too "down;" I don't swing from jubilation in one moment, to crushing despair the next. But I cannot stop myself from responding emotionally—none of us can.

This week I've been thinking about how powerful emotions are. My emotions evoke emotions in others; your emotions evoke emotions in me. There's nothing wrong with this, in principle, it's how God has made us to function. No one is an island unto themselves, all of us live in a complex web of relationships; we profoundly affect one another.

And so, when you see someone experiencing joy—a child running, playing, shrieking with delight—it does something to us; we feel something. We might smile, chuckle to ourselves, and feel a surge of joy well up within us. But depending on what we see, and when, and how we happen to be doing at the time, seeing someone else experience joy, might evoke a very different emotion—perhaps disdain. We might say to ourselves, *"What are you so happy about? Settle down, or at least, keep it down...you're disturbing my bad mood."*

We may not even know the person who is experiencing (and expressing) joy, they are a complete stranger, and yet their emotion

evokes emotion in us. The emotions of others are powerful; they have a profound effect on our own state of being.

Let me ask, when you see and hear anger in another person, when their anger is directed your way, what emotion does it evoke in you? It depends, doesn't it? On who it is, the reason for their anger, and the way they express it?

Someone else's anger may evoke fear in you. When a person directs anger at you, you might feel rejected, like you failed them somehow. Or, when anger is directed your way, it might evoke your own anger. Needless to say, my anger affects you; your anger affects me.

Over the past 7 weeks, we've been making our way through a teaching series entitled *Describing God*. This series aims to achieve the basic purpose of theology, namely, to describe God's being, character, and activity. We've talked about God as Trinity. We've talked about as being Good, He is Love, He is Holy, He is Trustworthy.

This morning I want to speak with you about anger, jealousy, and the goodness of God. Is God ever angry? If we take the Bible seriously, the answer to this question must be "yes".

Old Testament professor, Iain Provan, writes, "One of the aspects of God's character that renders him 'unsafe' in biblical thinking is his anger. Abraham fears it in Genesis 18..., Moses experiences it in Exodus 4..., and it is unleashed against the Egyptians in the exodus...Later, it burns against God's own people Israel (Exodus 32:11)...Yet the anger of God is clearly understood by our biblical

Anger, Jealousy, and the Goodness of God

authors as also being bound up with God's goodness.”¹

In the Bible, the jealousy of God is a subset of His anger, and it too is tied to God's goodness. As strange as it might sound, what I am saying is this: it's a good thing that God gets angry and jealous. In the time that remains, I want to explore the connection between God's goodness, anger, and jealousy.

Anger: There are three things that I want to say about God's anger this morning, but first, it might be helpful to consider our own. We've all experienced anger—we've seen it, heard it, and even felt it in our bodies.

As we all know, anger creates a physiological reaction in our bodies. When angry, we may experience a clenched jaw or fists, tense muscles, and shallow breathing—our skin temperature begins to rise. Anger activates adrenaline, our blood pressure may go up, our pulse rate increases, and blood flows from the brain and central organs out to major muscle groups. Physiologically, when angry, our body is preparing to run or to fight.

While we may be unable to articulate it, there is always a reason for our anger. When our expectations go unmet, when something is “unfair,” when someone puts a limit on our freedom, we might experience anger.

illus: When my daughter (Anna) was 3 years old, and she didn't get

what she wanted, she would become angry. Often, she was reduced to loud tears; as you can see from the picture, it was terribly cute!

Many people experience anger when they feel foolish—I know I do; it stems from my insecurities. We may be angry at those who threaten us, because we don't like feeling afraid. Anger frequently follows the experience of rejection, or failure. There is always a reason for our anger.

This leads to the first thing I want to say about God's anger...

1. His anger has its reasons too. Provan writes, “it is an anger that is not a matter of whim...or spite. God does not get angry because his pride is hurt, or because he is envious of human beings. The anger of God is never arbitrary; it is always directed at what is evil. It is the anger of a good Person outraged by the corruption of the world.”²

This is what we see in Genesis 6:5-6. In the time of Noah, we read, “*The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.*” God is grieved, He becomes angry when the good and beautiful is in jeopardy, or, being destroyed.

In Exodus 22:22-24 we read, “*Do not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear*

¹ Iain Provan, *Seriously Dangerous Religion: What The Old Testament Really Says And Why It Matters*, 68.

² Provan, 68.

Anger, Jealousy, and the Goodness of God

their cry. My anger will be aroused...your wives will become widows and your children fatherless.”

In God’s anger we see His concern for the oppressed, and a commitment to bringing justice to the oppressor. Provan writes, “It is right that God should be angry about such things, our biblical authors believe...It is particularly good news that than an *all-powerful* and *sovereign* God is angry about such things, because it gives grounds for hope—hope that justice will be done. God cares enough about his creation to *be* angry about evil-doing **and to take action against it.**”³

By implication, we too are right to feel anger when we see injustice and oppression; where God is angry, and committed to justice, so too should we.

illus: In recent days, I have been reminded of something Martin Niemoller once said. As Adolf Hitler rose to power, and the agenda of the Third Reich began to emerge, Niemoller—a German pastor—was disturbed by what he saw. When Niemoller began to speak out, he was quickly arrested and spent seven years in Nazi concentration camps—he wasn’t released until after the war.

He is perhaps best remembered for the following post-war words,

“First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.”

Niemoller was making the point that he, along with all Germans, were complicit in the Nazi agenda because they had remained silent; they said nothing as the Jews were being purged from Germany.

Silence is a funny thing. When there is nothing to say, choosing to remain silent is wisdom itself. But when there is something to say—when something needs to be said—and we remain silent, eventually, our silence condemns us.

A few weeks ago, George Floyd died at the hands of a police officer, sparking fresh outrage at the systemic inequity between black and white Americans. Anger erupted and people took to the streets; no doubt you have seen video footage of riots and protests. The “*Black Lives Matter*” movement has been taken up in cities all over the world, including Vancouver.

Just a few days I was down at Fen Burdett stadium, running on the track, and I noticed that someone had taped up a “*Black Lives Matter*” sign on the change room wall. Subsequently, someone had edited the sign, crossing out the word “Black” and substituted the word “All”. It no longer read “*Black Lives Matter*,” but “*All Lives Matter*”.

Both statements are true of course, but here’s the problem: until Black lives matter, it follows that All lives don’t matter. In a racially charged America, everyone *knows* that white lives matter—the power and privilege they enjoy is the evidence—it’s the value of black and Hispanic lives) in America that remains in question.

³ Provan 68.

Anger, Jealousy, and the Goodness of God

Here's my question: As Christians, how are we to think, feel, and act, in light of racial inequality?

When we describe ourselves, we typically make use of basic categories like gender, ethnicity, and nationality. I am male, caucasian, Canadian, but there is a more fundamental category. I am human. So are you. And every human—regardless of ethnicity—has been made in the image of God. When we lose sight of this truth, inevitably, we begin to mistreat one another.

All been made in God's image, we **all** stand in our need before God, and we're **all** loved by God. When God the Son became human, our collective humanity—in all of its ethnic variety—was caught up in the humanity of Jesus. In the incarnation, Jesus takes our humanity, sanctifies it, and then gives it back to us.

Racial inequity, discrimination, and oppression are not uniquely American problems, nor is it limited to whites and blacks. This is a human problem and it exists in every heart. The problem exists in our neighbourhoods. We are right to be outraged when we see racial inequity, discrimination, and oppression. But we must do more than feel outraged; we must act. God's anger is more than a feeling, it's connected to His goodness, and it results in a commitment to justice, to action.

We are right to repent and make reparation when we discover the part we have played in systemic injustice. Until we change, everything will stay the same. The question is, *what does godly anger, properly expressed, look like? What does repentance, reparation, and justice look like?* God has good reason for His anger; it's always directed at what destroys His good creation.

The second thing I want to say about God's anger is that...

2. God's anger is slow. One of the difficulties in describing God is our tendency to think about Him as simply being a bigger—and better—version of ourselves. And so, for example, we might think about God in terms of the most loving person we know, and then multiply by a factor of 5, or 50, or 5,000. When we describe God through the lens of our own human experience, we create all kinds of issues.

I said as I began that I tend to be more level-headed than I am level-headed. At times I can be impulsive. At times I overreact; nowhere is this more true than when I am angry. My own anger often catches me by surprise, and before I know it, I've said something without thinking, expressing my anger in unhealthy ways. When people encounter this impulsive kind of anger, they too are surprised, saying things like, *"Calm down! Where did this come from?"*

The point I'm trying to make is that we cannot think about God's anger in terms of our own. For example, God's anger is not impulsive. God's anger has a different fuse than our own. This idea is captured well in Exodus 34:6-7; God will not leave the guilty unpunished but He is *"slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness rebellion and sin"*.

When we are angry with someone, we either get in their face, or, we tend to withdraw from them. In either case, we frequently withhold our love and support until our anger has passed, or until the person has learned their lesson. Not so with God! He doesn't withdraw, He

Anger, Jealousy, and the Goodness of God

doesn't cease to love, He doesn't withhold provision. We do much to arouse God to anger and He still takes care of us; He's gracious, He's patient.

And third...

3. God's anger does not last forever.

In Isaiah 54:7-8 we read, “*For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back...I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you, ' says the Lord your Redeemer.*”

Lamentations 3:32-33 says, “*Though He brings grief, He will show compassion, so great is His unfailing love. For He does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone.*” We see in God's anger a kind of “reluctance;” His anger, while good and necessary, is not His first choice. His anger is frequently constrained by His love, and when He finally does express anger, it is momentary. There is always opportunity to return, to repent, to be reconciled.

There is one final aspect of His anger that I want to address before I conclude, namely, the jealousy of God.

Jealousy: In Shakespeare's *Othello*, jealousy is described as “the green-eyed-monster,” and it's an apt description because jealousy consumes both subject and object. Often, human jealousy stems from

our insecurities and unfulfilled longings. *I want what you have.* Even if I don't want what you have, I don't want you to have it. Jealousy extends beyond material possessions to beauty, reputation, knowledge, skill, relationships, influence. Just as a fire relies on the presence of oxygen, jealousy is fuelled by comparison. Who has more? Has accomplished more? Who is better? Who is worse?

In an article written for Psychology Today's, one author writes, “Jealous people are often perceived as unreasonable, controlling, troubled, possessive, and dangerous.”⁴

In Deuteronomy 34:14 we read, “*Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.*” Our experience of jealousy is almost entirely negative; how then is jealousy, in God, a good thing?

It's interesting to note that in both the Old and New Testaments, “jealousy” can also be translated as “zealous”. God is zealous—eager, committed—to protect what is precious.⁵ God isn't needy or insecure; He isn't jealous of what others have. And He isn't possessive in an abusive and controlling way. Just like His anger, God's jealousy is an active expression of His goodness. Charles Spurgeon suggests something we all know to be true, there is such a thing as “virtuous jealousy...[God's] jealousy is ever a pure, holy, flame.”

From a biblical perspective, as the One, True, God, only He is worthy

⁴ Noam Shpancer, *Jealousy Hurts Love, or does it?* <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/insight-therapy/201504/jealousy-hurts-love-or-does-it>

⁵ <https://bible.org/seriespage/21-jealous-god>

Anger, Jealousy, and the Goodness of God

of our exclusive loyalty. But God's jealousy is not born of narcissism, His jealousy is born of love for us. Other gods cannot save us, other paths cannot satisfy us, and sin only destroys us. God wants what's best for us and so He burns with jealousy—following Him allows us to experience the highest good.

Spurgeon writes, “The Lord Jesus Christ... *is very jealous of your love*... Did He not choose you? He cannot bear that you should choose another. Did He not buy you with His own blood? He cannot endure that you should think you are your own, or that you belong to this world. He loved you with such a love that he could not stop in heaven without you; He would sooner die than that you should perish; He stripped himself to nakedness that He might clothe you with beauty; He bowed his face to shame... that He might lift you up to honour and glory”.⁶

Conclusion: What I've been saying this morning is that God's anger is a good thing—it's directed at that which is evil, false, destructive. God's anger is slow—He is patient with us. God's anger is momentary. And His jealousy, far from being petty or controlling, is evidence of His love—He is zealous to protect you because you are precious to Him.

Because God is perfectly good, loving, holy, and trustworthy, we have no reason to fear His anger or jealousy. God is for us, not against us; when we fight against Him, we end up fighting against what is best for ourselves.

Do you know how much you are loved by God? He is patient with us, indeed, with the world, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.⁷

Let's return to Him. Let's throw off everything that hinders, and the sin that so easily entangles, that we might run the race with Him, for Him.

Pray

Worship

Benediction

⁶ C.H Spurgeon, Sermon: *A Jealous God*.

⁷ 2 Peter 3:9