

## SABBATH THOUGHT 2024-03-09—GRACE INSTEAD OF ANGER

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Every war is motivated by anger. Ironically, peace treaties and international alliances are formed on the basis of a common anger toward other nations. Politics has always been a dirty business and the history of every nation that has ever existed testifies of the anger that is behind the fight for all positions of authority from kings and presidents down to lowly mayors. It has always been this way. In fact, we are only shocked when anger is NOT a part in the world around us. There have always been angry people but they generally did not express it so openly and with such extreme irrational and uncontrolled behaviors as is done today.

However, religion is the foundation for almost all of the anger. Religious beliefs underpin every single institution of this world and set the bounds of everything from individual nations to social gatherings. People associate with others based upon common beliefs whether they are Protestants, Catholics, Muslims, atheists, or agnostics. (Atheism and agnosticism are both religions. If God does not exist, then why do these people get insanely angry at those who believe in God?<sup>1</sup> Is it because they actually know there is a God and hate Him?) The intensity and displays of anger grow with the size and public awareness of the association or institution. For example, anger in a local election is usually much less overt than at the state level, which is but a shadow of the extent of vitriol expressed in national forums.

Religion actually *breeds* anger. Some belief systems, such as Islam, openly teach it to their adherents. But anger is also the result of those with nice sounding doctrines of peace such as those of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Shintoism. The former bred India's anger toward Pakistan. The latter was the national religion of Japan before WW2 but those teachings of peace did not prevent the anger behind the terrible atrocities on a massive scale. The same can be said for every single religion because religions breed an adversarial view of non-adherents.

Anger is even found among those who believe they are the true Christians. Does that surprise you? Well, consider how many identify with one of the plethora of religious organizations generally referred to as Churches of God. Even those who do not belong to or attend with them take upon themselves the title of 'Independent', which is a group in and of itself. (Although much less 'organized', they still tend to align themselves according to a common belief system.)

It might seem overreaching to accuse everyone of anger, but what is the difference between a religious organization and a political party? Both consist of multiple groups who oppose others with contrasting beliefs. The 'platform' of the COGs are their doctrines, which they publish as sizeable documents on every topic imaginable. Even the independents assess others based upon differences of beliefs.

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<sup>1</sup> A prime example is Richard Dawkins who has dedicated his life to denying God.

What is wrong with that? Does that justify saying they are all angry? Well, there may not be the extremes of political groups but that is how Satan works:

MATTHEW 12:25-26 But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: “**Every kingdom divided against itself** is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. 26 “If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?

Satan means adversary, which is simply someone who works against others. Someone is an adversary for only one reason—they are opposed to those who hold contrasting beliefs. Without some means of redirecting this satanic and adversarial view of others, it leads anger. It is what led Paul to persecute the *ekklesia*:

ACTS 8:1-3 Now **Saul was consenting to his [Stephen’s] death**. At that time a great persecution arose against the [ekklesia] which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. ... 3 As for **Saul, he made havoc [lit. brutally ravage or maim] of the [ekklesia], entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison**.

Saul did not simply consent or agree to Stephen’s murder, the Greek indicates he was GRATIFIED by it. Paul saw everyone whose beliefs contrasted with his as enemies and his anger led him to persecute and murder them—and Paul knew it:

ACTS 9:1-2 Then **Saul, still breathing** threats and **murder** against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest 2 and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Therefore, I stand by my claim that an adversarial stance against those with DIFFERING beliefs is, at the very least, a catalyst for anger. It may not start out that way, but it can become anger if we allow it. So, how do we avoid anger? More to the point, how should we think and feel toward others who have differing beliefs? There will NEVER be complete unity of beliefs among God’s people. Such was the case even for the apostles<sup>2</sup>. Avoiding anger toward God’s children should be easy compared to the differences with Protestants or the vast antithesis with Muslims.

First, it is vital to recognize *why* anger arises toward those of opposing beliefs. Anger is actually a sign that we think OUR beliefs are the ONLY truth. While there some very critical beliefs required for salvation, all others are inconsequential. But should we be adversaries of those who have differing salvational beliefs? Is that not a matter between them and God? How is it that we think we have any role in their relationship with God or have authority over THEIR salvation?

There are many topics in the Bible that will never be completely understood in this life and it not gotten easier in the last two thousand years. How much is lost

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<sup>2</sup> Acts 15:36-40.

because of linguistic incompatibilities, cultural vagueness, and missing historical sources? To highlight these things I often ask, what is the difference between “no work” and “no servile work” on Sabbaths and holydays? Or, what constitutes work? It takes longer and requires more effort to get dressed than it does to boil an egg. Not knowing makes it difficult to keep those days as God intended.

An adversarial response to differing beliefs has spread among God’s children to the point that non-salvational differences in understanding of prophecy, the meanings of holydays, et al causes the *ekklesia* to partition into many, many separate identities who not only view outsiders as lesser believers but, many times, utterly refuse to associate with them. Why? Because they are angry they have differing beliefs. How many times have you heard a group leader say, “We have more truth than all the other organizations?” There is a lot of pride and anger behind that statement. But disunity was NOT the prayer of Jesus Christ:

JOHN 17:9-11, 20-22 “**I [Jesus] pray for them.** I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. 10 “And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. 11 “Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, **that they may be one** as *We are*. ... 20 “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 “**that they all may be one**, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; **that they also may be one** in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 “And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, **that they may be one** just as *We* are one:

Jesus repeated this plea to His Father several times, indicating He knew how adversarial God’s children would be and it greatly troubled Him that we are NOT one with each other. **NO ONE can be unified with God the Father and Jesus Christ if they are angry toward others.** So, what is the answer in light of the fact that there will NEVER be a consensus of beliefs in this life?

It begins with humility, recognizing that no one—not one single person—has all understanding. Anyone who believes that God has revealed more to them than everyone else actually is testifying that God does not regard them at all because they are overcome with pride<sup>3</sup> believing they know God’s thoughts:

ISAIAH 55:8-9 “For **My thoughts are not your thoughts**, Nor *are* your ways My ways,” says the LORD. 9 “For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.

ISAIAH 66:2 For all those *things* My hand has made, And all those *things* exist,” Says the LORD. “**But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit**, And who trembles at My word.

The other preventative for anger is grace:

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<sup>3</sup> Also Ps. 34:18; Isa. 57:15.

PROVERBS 3:34 Surely He [God] scorns the scornful [*lit. those who scoff/sneer/mock/ridicule others*], **But gives grace to the humble.**<sup>4</sup>

Scripture demands that we show grace toward those with opposing beliefs even if they are mistaken:

2 PETER 3:15-18 and consider *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, 16 as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are **some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.** 17 **You therefore, beloved,** since you know *this* beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; 18 but **grow in the grace** and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory both now and forever. Amen.

HEBREWS 13:9 **Do not be carried about with various and strange [different or new] doctrines.** For **it is good that the heart be established by grace,** not with foods [*beliefs and doctrines*] which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.

Grace is free and unmerited favor toward others. God has shown unimaginable grace unto all in this world but especially those of the *ekklesia*, so He expects us to be vessels of grace toward others regardless of their affiliations or beliefs. Grace is the result of agape love; therefore, anger is the enemy of grace because it is in OPPOSITION to—an adversary of—love.

Who seriously believes they have perfect understanding even in salvational matters? Even if that were the case, why does it matter if someone disagrees? God judges all so leave that to Him. Grace is result of agape love and humility—recognizing the preeminence of God and that no one is without ignorance or sin. A name tag with the name of a church organization (including 'independent') does not assure eternal life. Do not be angry toward anyone with differing beliefs even if they are salvational. God's grace is evident in "love covers all sins"<sup>5</sup> but to receive His grace, we also must give grace—especially to those of the *ekklesia*.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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<sup>4</sup> Also Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5-6.

<sup>5</sup> Prov. 10:12; Jas. 5:20.