

Anger #4 (August 2)

From Flipping Out to Free: How to Change

INTRO: Well we're back in our series on Anger. And last week I told you how I have a history of failing when it comes to anger. And I admitted that though Jesus has truly changed me; I still have a problem with anger and need your prayer. *I didn't realize this series on anger was going to feel so much like an autobiography but my story is about how a merciful God changed an angry sinner.*

ILL: It all came to a terrible head in the summer of 2003. I was heading into grade 11 but during the summer I was up to no good and got myself into big trouble. I got into a street fight that caused my parents to send me to Manitoba to get outta trouble and start over. I moved in with my uncle who heard of my anger problems and though he invited me to stay with him. He also had some ground rules. He said, "since you're obviously angry, you're gonna play football now". And he also enlisted me into anger management counseling. So I was 16 years old, living with my uncle in a new town, with no friends but my main project was to fix my anger problem. As a part of the plan, I'd regularly meet with a counselor for anger management where we'd talk about my problems and try to figure out why I'm so angry and how to better respond to things when I'm triggered. I learned a few things about anger on the white board in that counseling room. But I found that when I was out of that counseling room in a real life situation I'd fail to apply the things I was learning. I'd flip out again. Maybe at school. Maybe at home. But then I'd come back to the next session with a story of how I still couldn't control my anger. I'd constantly be relapsing into my old way of doing anger.

TRANS: This led me to conclude that though there are some helpful tips and tricks in anger management, it lacked power to change me. It couldn't change the inside of me, the heart. It probably didn't help either that my anger management counsellor

was an angry man. My experience with anger management counselling was that it only got to the level of behavior. It doesn't change the heart. So the question I'm left with after all these counselling sessions is this: *Is there anything or anyone able to change the heart of an angry person?* And here's where Christ and Christianity shines like diamonds in the rough. Christianity believes in doing good to others. We believe that good behavior is a good thing. We also believe that sinning in anger is a sin. *And that sin is a power that dominates our hearts, until Christ comes in to set us free. We believe that the power to change is in believing the gospel. We believe God's power in Christ overpowers my desire to sin and the power that it used to have over me.* But we believe more too. We believe that when we trust Jesus for salvation we become new ppl. 'New Creations' is the Biblical language. New creations get new hearts with new desires, drives and goals. And our newness is evident b/c what's on the inside (our desires) comes out in our lifestyle. And those who believe the gospel will be transformed by the gospel at the roots of the heart and they'll bear fruit that looks totally different, totally "new". *And I hope to show you today that the gospel, unlike anger management, has the power to change us so deeply that we can actually put away and put to death the sinful anger in us.*

TRANS: So the question we want to answer today is this: *How do I change from flipping out to free? How do I go from impulsively flipping out when triggered to being someone who responds with the fruit of the Spirit? Change is possible through the power of the gospel. And the pattern of change that we're going to apply to anger can be applied to the other sins that ensnare and entangle you too.* Today, we'll learn that: **God changes us from our motivations (the roots) to our lifestyle (the fruits).** Or we could say: *God changes us from the roots of our desires to the fruit of our behavior.*

Let's **PRAY**

TRANS: We're going to spend most of our time in Colossians 3. So please flip there.

This text is good medicine for the person that's eager to change. Not only does it show us the dynamics of how we change, it also speaks of the dynamics of anger and some of anger's partnering sins. As we'll see, sinful anger doesn't travel alone. It operates with other sins. Think of our sin as actions and attitudes that travel in a pack. Moving like a gang with other shady relatives. Sin travels in a mob with other bad actors. And as we dig into this text today I want to ask that you'd put yourself under the gaze of God, let Him diagnose where you need change and let Him do some heart work by His word. Let's hear what He says about our heart problems and seek Him for the grace to change. The first thing we're going to see in this passage is that:

1. If God has changed us, we live with a new mindset and motivation now (v.1-4)

Let's **READ:** Colossians 3:1-4: "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

TEACH: Paul begins by saying, basically, 'if you're truly Christians, then live that way.'

He's showing us the immense privileges of being a Christian. If you've been raised with Christ, then set your minds on realities that are yours, above, in Him. He's seated at the right hand of God, meaning His work of salvation is finished through the cross and resurrection, for you. So set and keep your mind on Him. In short, since your identity and security are in Christ, in heaven, be heavenly minded now! But to be clear, being heavenly minded doesn't mean we're absent minded. It doesn't mean that we don't pay attention to practical affairs, like church, family, work and even

relationships with those outside the church. He'll get to these themes later. We're to be heavenly minded while remaining earthly good in all those spheres.

TRANS: But the things on earth that we're not to seek seem to be the sins that we'll learn about in v.5. These sins tend to capture our attention and affections. Tempting us to drift away from setting our mind on Christ. If we're Christians, we're to think and live like Christians. In all of life, not just while we're at church. A qualitative change of identity has already occurred in the lives of believers. Through the finished work of Christ. It now only remains for them to bring their behavior into line with their new identity in Christ. We're commanded to "seek" and "set our mind" on things above b/c we've 'been raised with Christ'. The fact that I'm a new creature is the basis for my new behavior. And the power to live like a believer in this world is by setting my mind on the resurrected Savior. V.1, "I've been raised with Christ". V.3 "I've died and my life is hidden with Christ in God." And I'm told in v.4, that 'Christ is my life and when He appears, I'll appear with him in glory'. Being "raised with Christ" is the source of power for living the new life. Our new identity as Christians brings with it a new mindset and motivation for life. We must indeed redirect the desires of our heart towards Christ! Clinging to Him is where we get the power to change.

TRANS: And as glorious as our status and standing is, the true status of believers remains concealed to the world. "We are hidden with Christ in God". Who we really are is hidden from the world's perception and observation. What we have in Christ is ours forever, what we will be is sure and secure and yet it remains concealed to most ppl. As men and women called and connected to Christ by faith the world doesn't recognize us. As we go about our days in obscurity doing ordinary things, we look like

a bunch of dull and boring nobodies according to the world's standards. But it's ok, God made us alive with Christ, He is our life now (v.4).

ILL: So the next time someone comes up to you and asks, *what do you do for a living?* Tell them you live for Jesus. Christ is your life. Now I'll admit this may make you the most awkward guest that night. But I say that b/c I want you to think about what's most important to you and what's most important about you. Most of us think our value is based on what we do. And sadly we think God does too. Like products on a shelf we think our importance is based on our performance. But this is not what God says is most important about us. Our worth isn't based on our utility and usefulness. God created man and woman in His image with dignity and importance apart from what they do. What you do doesn't define you or your worth. Our worth in this world is based on what God says about us and what Christ has done for us and in us. If you truly believe that then you'll be changed. And your behavior will too. So believer.. find your identity in Christ not in what you do, and let that change your mindset and motivation for life.

APP: B/c who are Christian's if they aren't defined most basically by their relationship with Christ, right? That's the most important thing about me. And it's the most important thing about you, believer. We belong to Jesus. And since that's true, we're new. My experience and problem with anger management is that it doesn't have the power to change how I do anger b/c it can't make me new. It can't change my behavior b/c it can't change my heart. It can't change the true me. For that I need Jesus. For that I need something greater and better than breathing techniques, healthy relationships, exercise programs, and good sleep routines. I need a new identity. A new heart and a new life. A new mindset for now and a new motivation for

eternity. That's what we have in Jesus. And He's come for you, even if you're an angry sinner, today.

ILL: Now I'm going to introduce you to a better way to change, when it comes to your anger. I'm going to show you a counseling diagram. It comes from the book "How People Change". It's commonly known in Biblical counseling as: "The Three Trees Model". It's based on the Passage in Luke 6:43-45 where Jesus says: "For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, ⁴⁴for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. ⁴⁵The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks."

TRANS: The principle is that you reap what you sow. I show you this to show you how you can change from flipping out to free. Notice that there are two trees on each side of the cross. One has bad roots and bad fruit: thorns. Symbolizing the old man, in sin, in Adam with all his vices in the old way of life. The old heart has evil desires that grow into evil deeds. The other tree has a heart with good roots and good fruits. Symbolizing the new life and new man by faith in Christ. With new virtues coming out of a new heart based on our relationship with Christ.

TEACH: We Christians want to live consistently on the fruitful tree side by living in the Spirit. Not on the thorn tree side living in the flesh. And the only way to move from the old tree to the new tree is through the power of the Redeemer in the middle tree (the cross). Transformation/real-heart-change takes place through believing the gospel. But the change that happened to me at conversion isn't the only change that God does in me. He keeps working on me. And notice at the top, the "heat". The heat is the situations, temptations, trials or triggers that we face in life. We respond to the

heat in our life either in the old way of life or in the new. Either with the thorns or the fruit that come from the good or bad tree roots. If we're responding in the old way of the flesh, we aren't being who we are as Christians, setting our mind on things above, in Christ who is our life.

TRANS: Now let me try to make a personal connection. In the book "The heart of Anger" Steve Midgley and Christopher Ash argue that humans tend to have four triggers for anger. And at our worst we'll pull the trigger if we don't have these things. They are control, reputation, sex or possessions. So when my plan for one of these is frustrated by you or something else I flip out. The heat that I respond to is when someone gets in the way of one of those things. If that happens, you get the thorns.

What are the thorns that come out in your life when you're sinning in anger?

ILL: Maybe you ignore people, ghost them, brood in resentment. Kids, maybe you sulk at your parents' rules. Parents, maybe you snap at your kids sulkiness. Siblings, maybe you cheat so you can win and beat your brother or sister. There are several ways sinful anger comes out of us. Our task at the moment is to consider our hearts and move towards the Redeemer in His power and grace to change us from our stubborn and sinful ways.

TRANS: Look once more at the roots of the trees. What are the roots and desires in your heart that you think will make you happy? Sex? Control? Possessions? Reputation? Has anyone ever called you greedy? Controlling? Obsessed with your titles or things? Seek the things above instead of those things on earth and you'll start to change. Next we see that:

2. If God has changed us, we live with a new identity and ethic now (v.5-11)

⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

TEACH: So Paul tells us to seek the Lord and that mindset is motivated by a love for and desire to be connecting with Jesus our Redeemer. But Paul now gets very specific with these Christians about those earthly, sinful impulses, habits and behaviors that come out of their hearts. This passage shows us that the powerful impulses of sin that plague us can be overpowered only by putting it to death in the power of Christ. So we kill sin, with one eye on our sin and the other on our Risen Savior. What is he talking about? V.5: "Sexual, immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness which is idolatry." These are some of the old man's vices that need to be put away, since we're Christians. But notice since Christ work was done for us, that doesn't mean these sins automatically leave us when we get saved, we still have a responsibility to eradicate and eliminate the remaining sin in our lives. Sin deserves the wrath of God. And His wrath is coming on all who don't repent of sin and believe the gospel. V.7 says, we they, like us, once lived and walked in sin before Christ. This phrase "walk" refers to moral behavior, to a lifestyle and ethic.

ILL: For some of us Saturday nights are hard b/c they remind us of the old man and his old ways in the old days. Clubbing, partying, doing all nighters and all manner of evil deeds. We Christians aren't called to run away from the world we live in. We're not supposed to escape life here because it's hard and full of temptations, sins and troubles. Instead we're called to live in fellowship with God by obeying him, now.

APP: So believer, remember who you are today. When it comes to how you “do anger” remember, that’s the old you. In the power of Christ’s resurrection put that sin to death, kill, the old way of life; its values, customs and practices. *Put away that old way of life with those old vices instead put on the new virtues since you’re new now.*

TRANS: Now what does all this have to do with anger? Let me show you the answer in the text. I want you to see a connection between v.5 and v.8. These are two of the lists in this chapter. There are 3 lists of 5 qualities in this chapter. Two are bad lists of vices, in v.5+v.8. The other is a good list in v.12 which has 5 virtues. [Please show Tree Diagram] It seems to me that the list in v.5 shows us a list that we might call the evil desires list. Bad roots. B/c it captures a cluster of drives, desires and cravings that come from the heart. And then v.8 shows us the what we might call the evil deeds list. *Those are the thorns that come out of us. Things like, anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.* ‘Wrath’ means fury, we get furious. Malice means ill will. Slander= same word used for blasphemy. Obscene talk means foul or abusive speech. Finally, let me tell you a connection that might be helpful. *These evil deeds in v.8, seem to be the shots that come out when we don’t get the evil desires we want from v.5. Sadly, even, we Christians can sin in all these ways, can’t we?* But let me remind you that when you do. You’re not being who you are. That’s the old you. That’s not you anymore. That’s not who you are now! Maybe you carried some secret sin with you through all of your life. The old man’s music. The old man’s blunts. The old man’s websites. Even if you carried them into your Christian life; this command isn’t here to shame you, but since you’re in Christ, you have power to change now. Be who you are. Be the true and new you by living for Christ now.

ILL: I remember back when I was dating Liz. We were out on a walk at a park. But it was getting dark and we noticed a guy trying to steal a bike. He was clearly trying to

rob the bike. He had the tools and everything. But we were on the other side of the fence so we weren’t able to physically stop him. So, I yelled at him telling him to stop it and not try to jack that bike. But, when I spoke up and got in his way, he was furious. He immediately stopped what he was doing but instead of saying “yeah, my bad”. He got frustrated and started cussing at me as he took off. *This reminds me that if I’m not living for Christ and someone frustrates my plan to do evil, I may even respond with more evil. I may even try to get even with you by getting even more evil against you.*

ILL: And that’s not b/c something wrong came over me, it’s that something wrong came out of me. (point to thorns and roots). And that’s b/c something wrong was inside of me. When I sin that’s b/c what’s on the inside of me came out. Sinful thorns come out of me and my tree b/c there’s sin at the roots. This means that if you’re acting crazy that’s not b/c you’re from a crazy family. You’re acting crazy because there’s crazy inside of you.

APP: So what about you? Who or what is frustrating your plans to do evil right now? What evil deeds do you usually respond with when your plans get frustrated? Are you sick and tired of your sin? Are you seeing its evil faces and side effects in your life? Seek the Lord by confessing this to Him. Jesus motivates and moves us to change by melting our hearts in His mercy. Though the list of vices are strong. And they may have a strong hold on you. Christ is more powerful than all of them. For those of you who aren’t Christian, do you have an anger problem? Are you feeling hopeless to change? Do you feel like you can’t change? True you can’t change. You need the power of the Resurrected Christ to save and change you. But there’s hope for true and lasting change in Him! There’s room at the cross for you. Jesus is mighty to save

and change all who call on His name. Have you believed in Him? He's the only expert and specialist in transforming angry sinners like me and you.

TRANS: Now Paul says the things that come out of our mouths ought not to be lies, since that's the way of the old self. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. ¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all."

TEACH: And now he points to the way God keeps changing His people by renewing them "*after the image of its creator*". I love that phrase! Being renewed indicates that the transformation of Christians is an ongoing progressive process. His Spirit comes to live in me and He points his flashlight of conviction at the resident evil that I need to evict from my heart. And when I do that, I become more like Christ. He'll produce Christlike character then conduct in me, b/c Christ is in me. Christ is my life. He is the source and standard of life. And He's the pattern for my recovery and renewal, I grow after the image of Christ's perfect life. What a privilege! I'm growing to be more like Christ b/c I belong to Him. Christ is my life and Christ is all in all. Meaning, He's all that ultimately matters to me now. And if I'm growing to be more good and virtuous like the Son of God, bearing good fruit, the Glory goes to Him and the joy is mine. He who created and recreated me, is committed to working renewal in me. But not only that. In the church community Christ dwells in all His ppl. He unites us together, with all our differences and idiosyncrasies. Whether you come from rags or riches. Whether you come from far or near. Whatever your ethnicity. Whatever your class and

caste. Christ is all and in all. He is the most important thing about us. And He's all that ultimately matters to the Christian individual within the Christian community.

CONCL: So believer, you are new now. That's the truth. [Please show The Three Trees Diagram] You have a new heart with new desires and God desires for you to be fruitful for His glory; wherever you are. Put on the new self like clean clothes, daily. And put your old self to death, with its practices by coming to and staying connected to Christ your Redeemer. If He's made you new, you don't have to respond with sinful anger anymore. That's the thorns that the old you produced! But out of the abundance of the new heart comes new fruit. More on that, next week.

PRAY