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Reckoning with Our Rights

**Taming The Temper
(Part 3)**

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Series: Living Lessons from Proverbs

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REVIEW

We looked at the anger of God recently, and how that applies to us, and how it doesn't. We looked at the righteousness of man, and we didn't mind that at all.

And then we began looking at the principles of unrighteous anger. Then it got a little bit more tense. We look in particular at three kinds of Satanic anger that seem to plague the Christian, three Greek words in the New Testament that define anger and describe anger, and each of them defines a different kind of anger. We gave them some names to help us remember in a more practical sense what they are.

The first one is short fuse anger. Short fuse anger is what someone who lives with you has. (Something that you don't have.) But short fuse anger occurs when the distance between when the heat touches you and the occasion of the explosion is short. There's no time for the wind of reason to blow it out. Short fuse anger is the temper out of control. It is you will choosing to react to the demands of you emotions regardless of what the mind says from the Word.

The second kind of anger is more subtle. We call it teakettle anger. Teakettle anger is our eventual response to resentment; it's slow acting. It's a nursed grudge. It's a bitter spirit. It's been harbored. It's blame for life's disappointments and is transferred either to others or to God, and then it's resentment is left to fester until one day an unexpected spark ignites a heart soaked in the kerosene of bitterness. Then out of the disguise of pretended control, an angry man or an angry woman surfaces, and an ocean of regret follows. Teakettle anger. As long as it stays in the kettle, nobody knows. But one of these days, when the temperature gets just right, the steam comes out and the testimony goes down.

The third kind of anger is more subtle, but its subtlety only makes it more dangerous. We called it day in court anger. Now

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this anger is often resentments, it is often restrained, it is often reserved, and to many in our society it is considered respectable. It may even be the right kind of response to the wrong kind of situation. The wrong kind of situations is the is the demanding of your way, or responding with indignation that your rights or your reputation has been damaged.

We have already looked, then, at the issue of anger and the essence of anger. It's time to shift our attention to some of the answers to anger. It's time to shift our attention to some of the answers to anger. Most recently we looked at day in court anger—at two of the rights we claim which are not ours to claim. There are actually seven of them—things that are not rightfully ours. The thing we forget is that when Jesus Christ died for our sins, and when we asked Him to come into our hearts, we made a deal. What a deal! We took the title to our lives, and we signed it over to Him. In exchange for that, we gave Him all of the rights therewith attached. He, in turn, gave us His life instead. We got everything; He got nothing. But we are still trying to cling to those rights, day by day, that are not ours. We signed them over to Him. Many of them He gave us back as privileges. But privileges, remember, are a gift—a source of gratitude, a cause for humility, and a cause for thanksgiving.

So when those privileges are threatened or taken away, what right do we have to be angry? That's the issue.

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The problem of anger is easy to identify. The solution to it is not as easy. Step one in dealing with day-in-court anger is to reckon with our rights. Many so-called “rights” surface in the life of the Christian. These “rights” are things we presume prior to our conversion to be rightfully ours. But when God in his mercy purchased us, he transferred the title of ownership of our lives back to himself, and with it went the title to all of the “rights” to which we cling. God in his grace has returned many of those “rights” to us as privileges, but privileges are a gift, a source of gratitude, a cause for humility, and a cause for thanksgiving.

Therefore, when those privileges are threatened or taken away, we have no cause to get angry.

We have already considered two of those “rights.” The first was the right to our possessions, the things we “own.” But we do

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not own them—they are on loan. It's not our car. It's God's car. So when someone bumps into God's car and mistreats God's car, it's cause for concern, maybe even cause for action, but never cause for anger. The plumbing breaks down in God's house. It's our job to get it fixed, but it's no reason to be angry. "The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away."

So we must change our perspective. Our possessions are a gift from God. Sometimes He gives, sometimes He takes, but it's all His, and He can give or take as He chooses.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

(Philippians 2:5-7)

Assume this attitude—His attitude—and it is this: He made himself of no reputation. Jesus became a slave. A slave doesn't have a reputation. He doesn't have one. A slave doesn't demand respect, he does what he's told. It's up to his master to answer charges against him. If someone challenges his master's reputations, he has a right to be angry because he has been bought with a price, and the one who owns him is being ridiculed, but the slave himself has no reputation. He'll take whatever is handed him; so long as he is free to do the master's bidding. You gave up your reputation at Calvary, so when someone challenges it, leave it to Him.

ACCEPTANCE

We also get angry when our right to acceptance or success is challenged. We have no basis for this anger, either. Some new kind of philosophy has found its way into twentieth-century theology and convinced many that, as God's children, we deserve to be on top, to be accepted, to be successful, that our efforts ought to be crowned with visible, tangible evidences of success. This philosophy implies that God ought to see to it that we get that promotion. The truth is that he can, and he may, if it is best for us, but he does not owe it to us!

As always, Jesus is our best example. To presuppose that God owes us more on this earth than he bestowed upon his own Son when he walked this earth is utter blasphemy. Then what

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gives us the right to be accepted? Isaiah described the Messiah's lot in life:

He was despised and rejected of men. (Isaiah 53: 3)

John added,

He was in the world and the world was made by him and the world knew him not. He came unto his own and his own received him not. (John 1:10, 11)

Now that is rejection! He was the Creator of the world, yet he was unrecognized by it. He was the Savior who came down from his throne in heaven to die so that God's people might live. Although Jesus himself faced crucifixion for crimes he did not commit, his own people were given a choice: release him or release Barabbas, a known, convicted thief, a common criminal. John recorded,

Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but (release) Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber. (John 18:40)

Pilate then took Jesus and scourged him and the soldiers plaited a crown of thorns, and put it on his head and said, "Hail, King of the Jews."

They slapped him disrespectfully with their hands.

They spat on him and mocked him.

They gambled over his robe.

They laughed, "He saved others; himself he cannot save!"

Ask yourself, have you felt rejected like that?

He prayed, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." (from Matthew 27, Mark 15, John 19, Luke 23)

Ask yourself, have you felt rejected like that? If someone at the office snubs you or ridicules you or ignores you, do you get angry? Do you have that right? No! "Let this mind be in you which was also in him."

And what about the right to succeed? Jesus went from the royal courts of heaven to the dusty confines of a carpenter's shop. Then he became an itinerant preacher with not so much as a place to lay his head. He chose a twelve-man team to carry out his ministry. One of them was a traitor, and when the heat was on, the other eleven forsook him and fled. And the chairman of the board, the spokesman for the group, cursed and denied he had so much as known him. Success? Not on this earth; not in this kingdom.

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What about the Apostle Paul? A proud Pharisee of the tribe of Benjamin, a man destined for greatness, he spent the most productive years of his life in a Roman prison for a crime he had not committed. A success?

Few churches in America today would call him to be their pastor as he was too controversial. He had a prison record. We today expect success, acclaim, acceptance in this world, as though these were by-products of the Christian faith. When the slightest roadblock appears on the highway that leads to our self-appointed objectives or ambitions, we get angry!

And we demand our rights—the right to be accepted, the right to be successful, the right to be appreciated—rights which Jesus never claimed, nor did he give them to us.

That does not mean that God never wants us to succeed. What this means is that we do not know the true meaning of success. We are taking the world's grid, the world's standard, and applying it to God's kingdom. It is popular today in the Christian media to do that. It appeals to the senses. "Look what God can do for us," they seem to say. "He will make us rich, make us healthy, make us successful, if we have enough faith." He is able—that is true. But God has done much more than that for us. He has given us his life—spiritual riches no one can take away: eternal health, a resurrection body that will never experience pain, spiritual success, and a guarantee of eternity in the presence of the King.

When you come to understand these things, you will not be so quick to get angry.

PLEASANT CIRCUMSTANCES

Another right we claim is the right to pleasant circumstances that unseen, unspoken law of man that says bad things should happen to the other guy. This law, improperly applied to Christianity, misuses a few promises from the spiritual realm, applies them to the physical realm, and says God owes Christians good health, financial prosperity, good relationships, no long lines, no fender-benders, no broken pipes, no crowded freeways, no rude clerks.

Jesus, of course, did not say that. He gave us a formula for dealing with one of life's most unpleasant circumstances—our enemies, and he concluded with this:

He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matthew 5:45)

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Jesus said that God is no respecter of persons in regard to life's sunshine and life's showers.

God not only did not promise us freedom from unpleasant circumstances, he told us that as Christians he would guarantee us that

In this world you will have trouble. (John 16:33b NIV)

Not only are we guaranteed tribulation, but we are also guaranteed persecution. Jesus said that if we walked in his steps, his enemies would be our enemies:

Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. (John 15:20 NIV)

Jesus was saying, I can guarantee you tribulation, and I can guarantee you persecution. Yet often our anger and resentment are fueled by misdirected expectations. We are angry at life's tragedies and setbacks. We get angry at society, angry at people, angry at God. Do we misunderstand the basic concept of the kingdom of God? Do we, like the disciples before Pentecost, think that the kingdom promises are physically fulfilled?

Do we forget that God's kingdom is a spiritual kingdom, and that the promises are spiritually fulfilled? God is not concerned just with circumstances. God is concerned with character. Are not the very unpleasant things in life which make us so angry, in reality God's preordained tools to make us over into his likeness?

Jesus promised,

...In this world you will have trouble (grief, sorrow, testing).
But take heart! I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

Does that mean no trials? No, he just guaranteed us trials. It means that there is *purpose* in the trials that we grow in *character* from the trials.

At the beginning of that verse Jesus said,

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble.

Jesus was saying that we are living in two worlds at once. One is physical, filled with hardships, trials, and unpleasant circumstances. The other is spiritual, filled with the things that count, such as inner peace. You cannot avoid the physical trials,

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but you can avoid being defeated by them. In fact, those very trials, which crush you, will be the tools God will use to change you. So you can't lose. And you have no basis for anger.

Did not God both initiate and allow Satan's attack on Job? His purpose was to develop Job's character; Satan's was destruction. Satan is marching to and fro throughout the whole world looking for ways to make this life miserable circumstantially for the Christian.

If you were an unbeliever, why would Satan bother? Why drive you into Jesus' arms? But now that you are Satan's enemy he will seek to discourage you at every turn.

God never promised us a rose garden on this earth. On the contrary, he said the rain of circumstances in this life would fall on the just and the unjust alike. He promised that, as Christians, we would have both trials and persecutions. He even occasionally allows Satan to let the winds of adversity blow with intensity against our lives. But it is always with a purpose, that we might through engaging in war find real peace, through tasting hate find real love, through losing that which is physical find that which is spiritual, through facing the fleeting uncertainty of the temporal we might with joy come to anticipate the eternal.

Do not be angry over those things you cannot change—that rude clerk on the phone, that sickness that stopped your world, that pain that will not cease, that abuse you suffered, that traumatic event that took you by surprise, that accident that changed your life, that setback that dampened your hope. Satan meant it for evil, but God means it for good.

Relax. Rejoice. What you are gaining is everlasting, and that is the kingdom Jesus came to bring us.

And Jesus understands. His was a life filled with unpleasant circumstances. Isaiah said,

He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

(Isaiah 53:3)

Crawl up into his arms when your life falls apart at the seams, but don't turn your sorrow into anger. It will negate all that God designed that sorrow to do.

PRESUMPTION

Another right we cling to is the right to presume upon the will of God. Often our anger is the result of disappointments that need never have been disappointments at all. It works like this: we want something so badly we pray for it and assume it to be the will of God. In doing so, we develop unjustified expectations. Either what we expect does not happen, or it takes forever. And we get angry. Usually it's teakettle anger. Boiling resentment builds into bitterness and is fueled by comparing our lot with someone else's.

Singles get angry over their singleness, because they prayed for a husband or a wife and nothing happened. But what if marriage is not God's will? What if it is not God's time?

Young couples get angry over their financial problems. Couples get angry over the normal problems of life, such as sick children, job changes, the economy, or an ungrateful boss. Children get angry over their parents' authority and become resentful and bitter.

Jesus knew better. Even when he was facing the Cross he prayed honestly, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not my will but thine be done." (See Mark 14:35,36 and Luke 22:42.)

Jesus as a man would not have chosen the Cross, but as a man filled with God, he chose to do the will of God. The will of God included the Cross.

Paul would not have chosen prison, but he chose to do the will of God, and the will of God for Paul included prison.

Beware of building spiritual sand castles, of determining what is and is not the will of God based on your expectations. If you do, when the rains of reality fall and your castles crumble, you may yield to the sin of anger.

RIGHT TO LIFE

The sixth right we cling to is the right to life itself. Life could be defined as a *limited experience in time designed to prepare us for eternity*. You have heard of a limited warranty, in which a manufacturer offers certain rights but limits them to prescribed boundaries.

Likewise, you have been given an unconditional eternity but a

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limited life. No one promised you a hundred years, eighty years, or seventy, or sixty, or fifty, or even forty, or *any* number of years. God prescribed for his own Son only thirty-three earthly years. Once his mission was complete, once his journey was finished and an even greater purpose could be accomplished by his death than by his life, God lifted him back out of time into eternity. He will do the same for us. When his purposes are fulfilled, he will call us home.

Stephen seemed so young to die, but through his death he ministered life. As a bonus he got to go home to be with the Father.

Once again, we get confused between the two worlds. This life is just a brief experience in time to prepare us for eternity. Our real life is yet to come. Therefore, death, when it comes, is no cause for anger.

BEAUTY OR STRENGTH

Another right is our right to beauty or strength—the right to be pretty, the right to be handsome, the right to be an athlete, the right to be a genius. Often in counseling, one finds an inner anger boiling in someone’s life because God made the “shell” in which he placed that person’s life too short or too tall, too lean or too heavy. Some complain about having a nose too long, ears too big, hair too dark, or eyes too weak. They never quite trust God again because he seemed to make such a mess in designing them.

However, God does not build bodies to show off his ability to create beauty. God builds character to demonstrate his beauty. The more perfect the package, the more difficult it is for the real beauty to be seen. When the package is perfect, the eye stops at the physical and marvels, but misses the character God wants to shine through the package itself.

Jesus was the most beautiful person who ever lived. Whenever people looked at him, they saw God, and God is perfect beauty. But Jesus’ beauty was from within. Isaiah wrote,

He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

(Isaiah 53:2b)

God’s strength is perfected in weakness; God’s beauty is revealed when man’s beauty does not interfere. We must care for ourselves, honor God by our appearance, but never question the raw materials he gave us to work with. When we do, we get

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angry, resentful, feel cheated, and our anger robs God of the joy of letting real beauty—his beauty, be seen.

These are just a few of the rights we are wrong to assume we have. Others are the right to friendships, the right to be heard, the right to take up an offense for others, the right to avoid reaping what we have sown, and the right to be right (to have others know you know the answers).

Lastly, there is the right to see results or right behavior in others. Jesus labored three years and saw virtually no results from his ministry. God has remained faithful to Israel for generations, although the results have been disappointing much of the time, which is true in our ministries too. Some of us sow, some water, some reap. God gives the increase. Some sowers never see the harvest. They labor by faith.

Even when you pour yourself into people, they may fail to be faithful, and you may get discouraged and then angry. Yet how faithful God is with us! God's children rebel, his church falters, his disciples wander, but he remains faithful. He is long-suffering, slow to anger, plenteous in mercy. However, if we do not see immediate results, we often are quickly angered, impatient, lacking in mercy. We think we have the right to results instead of trusting the results to the Righteous One.

Much of our anger comes from claiming rights we do not have. The violation of those imaginary "rights" brings about a response in us that God never intended us to have. The result is that we demand our day in court, or boil with resentment, or explode into a rage because we have assumed the place of God, and we are not equipped for the part.

It is quite possible that nothing in this chapter is new to you. I make no apologies for that. Our purpose is to ask God to change our lives. He has told us to put away satanic anger once and for all. The question is, "Could this be the day we begin to do something about it?"

God wants to tame the temper. God wants us to become men and women of self-control. So I'm going to suggest a project. (Please don't get angry!) We're supposed to stop being angry. I'm going to ask you to concentrate on the wrongs of our rights and give them back to God. We are not to be just hearers of the Word. Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, basically just gave a series of projects for people to do. If we read this, to take in but not do

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it, if we hear this to take in and not do it, we are missing it all. If you have a problem with anger, or know somebody who does, this is what I'd like you to do: I want you to take a few weeks and think about and actually implement steps of action to put an end to claiming the rights that make you so angry.

1- Take a notebook and put 14 sheets of paper in it, one for each day of the next 14 days. Put the date at the top of each page. (So far you can do that, right?)

2- On two identical sheets of paper list the rights we have recently looked at, or any other rights you can come up with.

3- Put one of those two copies in the front of your notebook as a checklist so you can see what rights you have violated during the day.

4- Take the other copy and build an altar, maybe an imaginary one, or maybe in the backyard, or somewhere in the house.

5- Now physically take those rights and lay them before God. Maybe you will want to use index cards, put each right on a separate card, and then tear them up as you give them up, or scratch them off, or burn them in the fireplace, or whatever. Once and for all, as a decisive choice, worship God and say, Lord, I want to remind myself and I want to give back to You, right now, all of these rights. They're yours anyway. When You came into my life, I gave You my life, but, Lord, here they are. You own them.

6- Now you've destroyed that list before God. On the other copy, that you're going to keep in your notebook, write at the bottom, "once and for all given to God" and date and sign it. The reason is, Satan will hassle you, and you need a reminder of a place and a time to point back to. That's why God told Joshua to build an altar out of stones so that when the children of Israel would say "what is that for?" He could say, "Let me remind you what God did."

7- Then ask God before you leave that altar to open your heart and make you more sensitive to what rights you're clinging to. Then if somebody takes your pen, you write down the right to my possessions. If someone bumps into your car, (possessions); somebody insults you, the right to my reputation; the sky begins to fall and you begin to get angry, the right to pleasant circumstances. When someone lets you down, remember you

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have no right to good behavior in others.

At the end of the day list on the 14 pages in your notebook the incidents that provoked you to anger. This is important. List whatever right you claimed that tempted you to anger. Then look for patterns to emerge. Do you find that every day you're listing the same rights?

Search out your life for root problems. What is it that makes that right so attractive to you? Maybe it's always your right to possessions; maybe you never had anything growing up, so when you began to accumulate things, you began to clutch at them. Now that has become a right you think God owes you.

Maybe your right to beauty is still a problem; maybe you're bitter at how God made you because you have a sister you think is twice as pretty as you are, and you don't think that's fair. You're bitter towards God. Deal with the cause so you can get to the cure.

Set aside a regular time each day (this is important) either your quiet time or some other time, just to praise God at He is dealing with your anger. You say, "Well, I don't feel like He is." That isn't the issue. You are not praising Him because of how you feel, you're praising Him because of who He is and because you have asked Him to deal with your anger. Scripture says to "be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplications with thanksgiving.

Then lastly, be sure not to listen to the Enemy. He's going to try to sell you a million lies. He going to say you've always been angry, your father was angry, your grandfather was angry and you're going to be angry. *That's a lie!* He'll whisper discouragement. He may be doing that right now. He wants you to waiver in your faith because he that waivers is like the wind of the sea that's driven and tossed, and receives nothing he asks for. Satan's goal is to blow your every failure into hopelessness. God's goal is to use your every failure to teach you.

So I beg you to take the next 14 days and *give up your rights*. Let your anger diminish. It could lead, Beloved, to a lifetime where the absence of anger becomes increasingly present in your life and the presence of the Mind of Christ begins to overpower you and overtake you as you let the one who owns your life, rule your life.

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Paul said it one time in Colossians 3 that you walked in disobedience; you lived in rebellion, but not anymore. Then you can put off these things once and for all: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, and filth. Don't lie anymore, Paul said, the old you is gone, put on the new you, which is created in Christ Jesus in righteousness and true holiness.

What Paul is saying to you, Beloved, is the old you is dead and gone. No more temper tantrums, no more lingering resentment, no more clinging to your rights. That part of you is dead. Instead, put on (clothe yourself) with the Mind of Christ. Put off wrath, anger, malice, and begin living in the victory of life that is free from anger. He wants us to put off that angry spirit; that's what God's call includes. Lay aside, once and for all, that sin which so intrudes. Lay aside the rights you claim. Give them back to Him. Tell Him that you see that curse, call that anger *sin*. Find the things you clutch at and give them to the Lord. Find instead the freedom He's promised in His Word.

Put away that anger.
It does not need to be.
Leave that anger at the Cross,
And let God set you free.

FOCUS ON APPLICATION

1- Scan the chapter and list the imaginary "rights" that sometimes lead to anger. Make a separate page for each of these "rights."

2- At the end of each day, list any incidents that provoked you to anger. Write them under the appropriate heading, i.e., acceptance, pleasant circumstances, presumption.

3- Look for patterns to emerge. Try to seek out what "rights" continually surface for recognition in your life.

4- Set aside a regular time each day to praise God that he is in the process of surfacing the causes for your anger.

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PROJECT

Build an imaginary altar, and list on separate pieces of paper the “rights” to which you are clinging. Tear them up one by one, thus acknowledging to God that they are no longer yours.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Make a chart listing the “rights” we claim and the corresponding Scripture passages which indicate that these were rights Jesus did not claim. Memorize the key passages for further meditation

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