

Cross My Heart, Part 3

Have you ever had a wasp in your car? A mouse in your house? A raccoon in your garbage can? A hive of bees under your front step? Here at CCC, we've had a snake in the foyer and a tarantula in the office wing (that one was intentional!). If you did, you wouldn't think of just leaving it alone, you would deal with it!

But we leave things lodged in our hearts for years that are extremely dangerous to our relationships! That's just plain stupid!

Proverbs 4:23 (KJV) Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

Proverbs 4:23 (NLT) Above all else, guard your heart, for it affects everything you do.

We are tempted to treat the symptoms that stem from an unhealthy spiritual heart while ignoring the deeper issues. But as is the case with the physical heart, **eventually the root problem will become the real problem**. Just as a heart attack can destroy your body, spiritual heart disease will eventually destroy you and your most valuable relationships.

Today we're going to continue studying four specific factors that attack our spiritual heart. Each one of them causes an imbalance that makes us "sick." **And each one of them creates this imbalance through a DEBT – DEBTOR relationship**. Think about when somebody owes you money that they haven't paid – it causes an awkward imbalance in the relationship ("an elephant in the room") because there's a debt.

Last week, we talked about GUILT. Guilt says, "I owe you." Today, we're going to talk about a second factor that actually works the opposite way:

CODE RED: ANGER SAYS "YOU OWE ME."

Ephesians 4:26 Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath:

"Be ye angry" – for some of you, that could be your life verse! The problem is not getting angry, it is carrying anger into our relationships. The commandment here is not "don't be angry!" It doesn't deal with HOW YOU FEEL, it deals with WHAT YOU DO.

And remember that Paul wrote this Scripture from prison – he had definitely been treated unjustly! In doing so, he proves to us conclusively that anger is not an issue of CIRCUMSTANCE, it is a HEART issue.

Anger is the result of not getting what I want or deserve from others – YOU OWE ME! You stole my reputation, my purity, my childhood years; you owe me friendship, a happy marriage, a second chance.

It's easy to believe that the remedy for anger is PAYBACK. After all, people ought to pay what they owe! So often you and I spend much of our lives waiting for debts to be paid that actually can't be paid. And if anger gets lodged in my heart, I will eventually come to believe that EVERYBODY owes me. That's why anger leaves a trail of destruction in its wake – because an angry person approaches life and relationships looking to be PAID BACK.

"Let not the sun go down upon your wrath" means CARRY YOUR ANGER AS SHORT A TIME AS POSSIBLE! Don't carry anger from one relationship into another! Don't carry anger from one season of life into another – let the sun set on that painful season!

Ephesians 4:27 Neither give place to the devil.

When you carry anger, you actually open the door of your heart to the devil ("accuser") and invite his influence into your life!

Anger is an **OPEN ACCOUNT** (a debt – debtor relationship) in your heart. The problem is that most times you have forgotten the original source of your anger, and you have turned it on others. But they can't help you close the account because the account is not with them! It's like they're accidentally bumping up against old wounds – and you explode!

That's why the closer someone gets to an angry person, the more likely it is that they will get "dumped on" for no apparent reason. That's why you can't please an angry person – even if you are not directly the cause of their anger. They can't let you "get it right" or they would lose their excuse to complain about life in general.

If you feel compelled to excuse or defend your attitude, if you feel compelled to tell your side of the story – then you are an angry person! You like your tale of woe because it forces people to cut you some slack, and it explains your tendency to over-react, to say cutting things, to lash out, and to be moody. You think your anger not only explains your behavior, but justifies it. **BUT YOU ARE WRONG!**

YOUR ANGER IS A CRUTCH. You are nursing an old injury that should have healed by now, but your "limp" has become a way of life.

Anger likes to hide in the dark corners of the heart, with its actual causes unexplained and unidentified, because your "real story" loses its potency when it is exposed to the light.

Ephesians 4:31 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

Paul lists every relational wedge he can think of. He says to clean out the garbage that is in your heart! **Close the account on your anger!**

If you just received a cancer diagnosis, your main concern would not be “how did I get it?” Your main concern would be “how do I get rid of it?” That’s the way it must be with your anger. The issue is not “who is responsible?” The issue is “how do I get rid of this anger?”

THE ONLY CURE FOR ANGER IS FORGIVENESS. Forgiveness closes the account, shuts the door, cancels the debt, and breaks the power of anger. “But if I forgive them, it lets them off the hook!” That’s exactly right – getting rid of anger bypasses “fairness,” overlooks “payback,” skips “resolving it,” and refuses “telling your side.” But it is still the best (and only) option, because remember that they can’t pay you back anyway!

Ephesians 4:32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

When I cancel the debt, I **DECIDE** that you don’t owe me any more! That’s hard, but it’s exactly what Jesus did for us – even when He didn’t share in the blame (like you do!). After we see what He did for us on Calvary, then maybe we can ask “now what was your story again?”

IF GOD CAN CLOSE THE ACCOUNT ON ME, THEN I CAN CLOSE THE ACCOUNT ON YOU.

Yes, life has been unfair to you – and people have been unfair to you. If we listened to your story long enough, we might even be tempted to join your crusade for fairness! Paul could have (and should have) felt the same way. **The bottom line is that you can choose to be a VICTIM.**

- Victims are powerless
- Victims always have an excuse
- Victims have no control over their lives and their feelings
- Victims are at the mercy of others
- Victims can only react
- Victims are held prisoner by their circumstances

In time we come to believe the lie that it’s okay to be angry ... **BUT YOU CAN BE A VICTOR INSTEAD OF A VICTIM.**

1. Identify who you are really angry with (look back a few seasons).
2. Decide what was taken from you (know what is on the account).
3. Cancel that debt (maybe burn it or bury it literally – “gravesite”).
4. Stay in the habit of canceling all debts from this point forward.

In Matthew 18, Jesus tells the story of two debt – debtor relationships. In the first, a servant with a debt of several million dollars is totally forgiven by his king. But in the second, a servant with a debt of a few thousand dollars is refused forgiveness – by the same forgiven debtor! As a result, the first debtor is placed back under the bondage of his original debt by the king. **And Jesus says, “that’s what God will do to you if you refuse to ‘close the account’ with those who ‘owe’ you!”**

Forgive, or YOU will pay dearly. If you demand payment, YOU will pay. To refuse forgiveness is to choose self-destruction. But if you cancel the debt, YOU will be set free along with your debtor! (Some of the feelings may remain for awhile, but you DECIDE to cancel the debt.)

How long will you choose to keep that account open?

Yes, you have every RIGHT to remain angry – but do you really want to? You don’t have to let your past control your present and your future!

THROW AWAY YOUR CRUTCH!

CODE RED: ANGER

IS EVERYTHING OKAY WITH YOUR HEART TODAY?

Matthew 18:23-35 (NLT) ²³ For this reason, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. ²⁴ In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. ²⁵ He couldn’t pay, so the king ordered that he, his wife, his children, and everything he had be sold to pay the debt. ²⁶ But the man fell down before the king and begged him, ‘Oh, sir, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.’ ²⁷ Then the king was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt. ²⁸ But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment. ²⁹ His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. ‘Be patient and I will pay it,’ he pleaded. ³⁰ But his creditor wouldn’t wait. He had the man arrested and jailed until the debt could be paid in full. ³¹ When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him what had happened. ³² Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴ Then the angry king sent the man to prison until he had paid every penny. ³⁵ **That’s what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters in your heart.**