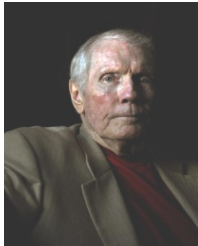




April 2014
Volume 18, Issue 4

A Measure of *Grace*

A Publication of Where Grace Abounds



R.I.P. Fred Phelps *by Roger Jones*

On March 19, 2014, the Reverend Fred Phelps died at the age of 84. For those who may be unaware, Phelps was the pastor of the Westboro Baptist Church, famous for its message of "God Hates Fags." Phelps and members of his congregation from Topeka, Kansas traveled around the country picketing various events with hate filled signs.

While Phelps and his congregants visited a number of different events, some 52,453 according to their website, their primary targets have been the funerals of AIDS victims and of soldiers who have died at war. Again, from their website, the message is explained:

"GOD HATES FAGS" though elliptical is a profound theological statement, which the world needs to hear more than it needs oxygen, water and bread. The three words, fully expounded, show:
1. the absolute sovereignty of "GOD" in all matters whatsoever (e.g., Jeremiah 32:17,

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- Isaiah 45:7, Amos 3:6, Proverbs 16:4, Matthew 19:26, Romans 9:11-24, Romans 11:33-36, etc.),
2. the doctrine of reprobation or God's "HATE" involving eternal retribution or the everlasting punishment of most of mankind in Hell forever (e.g., Leviticus 20:13,23, Psalm 5:5, Psalm 11:5, Malachi 1:1-3, Romans 9:11-13, Matthew 7:13,23, John 12:39-40, 1 Peter 2:8, Jude 4, Revelation 13:8, 20:15, 21:27, etc.), and
 3. the certainty that all impenitent sodomites (under the elegant metaphor of "FAGS" as the contraction of faggots, fueling the fires of God's wrath) will inevitably go to Hell (e.g., Romans 1:18-32, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 1 Timothy 1:8-11, Jude 7, etc.).

The only lawful sexual connection is the marriage bed. All other sex activity is whoremongery and adultery, which will damn the soul forever in Hell. Heb. 13:4. Decadent, depraved, degenerate and debauched America, having bought the lie that it's OK to be gay, has thereby changed the truth of God into a lie, and now worships and serves the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen! Rom. 1:25. But the Word of God abides. Better to be a eunuch if the will of God be so, and make sure of Heaven. Mat.

19:12. Better to be blind or lame, than to be cast into Hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched. Mk. 9:43-48. Abstain, you fools (accessed from godhatesfags.com).

Not surprisingly, Phelps and his church have caused many people great pain. They targeted (and continue to do so without Phelps) high profile events to get their message the broadest exposure. I myself have seen them at an event or two here in Denver. Fortunately, my encounters were at local church events, not at funerals. I cannot fathom how distressing it must be to have a somber event, intended to honor a loved one, turned into a circus of protestors and media. It would be profoundly troubling, to say the least.

It is difficult to comprehend how a person, let alone an entire congregation, could believe that such a message is a message from God. There are plenty of verses within Scripture that speak of the wrath of God (see quote above), but there are plenty of others that speak of His love, grace and forgiveness. The truth of God has been terribly distorted through this church's message.

Also not surprising, has been the response to Fred Phelps' death. Many have celebrated and, if only metaphorically, danced upon his grave. Protesters would likely have made an appearance at his funeral, had there

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Freedom From Anger ~ Part 2

by Mary Heathman

Nelson Mandela, when he was released after 26 years of imprisonment, said, “Yes, I was angry. And I was a little afraid. After all I’ve not been free in so long. But, when I felt that anger well up inside of me, I realized that if I hated them after I got outside that gate, then they would still have me. I wanted to be free so I let it go.”

In last month’s article, I presented a few of the facts about and causes of anger. This month, I want to conclude this brief look at the importance of freedom from anger by writing about the results of unaddressed anger and some possible responses.

Results of Unaddressed Anger:

Scripture has a good bit to say. Here are just a few biblical points regarding the effects of anger:

- *Unaddressed anger interferes with living our best lives in the Spirit.* The Bible warns against excesses like, “hatred,” “discord,” “fits of rage,” “dissensions,” and “factions” (Galatians 5:13-26). All of these are either outright descriptions of anger, or contexts within which anger is present and feeding the dissensions (problems).

- *Enabling someone’s unaddressed anger has its costs.* “A hot-tempered person must pay the penalty; rescue them, and you will have to do it again” (Proverbs 19:19).
- *Wisdom will usually defuse or redirect anger.* “Mockers stir up a city, but the wise turn away anger” (Proverbs 29:8).
- *Unaddressed anger invites evil influences into the picture.* “In your anger do not sin; do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold” (Ephesians 4:26-27).

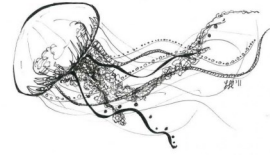
As well as affecting our relationship with God, unaddressed anger affects the whole person and their environment. Just a few ways in which it manifests itself are:

- *Physically*, unaddressed anger is understood to be a significant factor in formation of diseases like high blood pressure, heart disease, headaches, ulcers, and muscle tension.
- *Emotionally*, unaddressed anger can be the underlying cause of tension, depression, self-hate, self-pity, bitterness, and anxiety.
- *Mentally*, unaddressed anger is often called the “chief saboteur of the mind” resulting in ineffi-

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Reflections: Thoughts From a WGA Leader

By Nancy Hicks



Jellyfish

*A beached jellyfish.
A gelatinous blob
of salty translucence,
stuck in the detritus
at the edge of the shoreline.*

That's what I told God I felt like in the vast scheme of the world: repulsive and a little scary and definitely to be avoided.

This description was especially tragic because I love jellyfish. The first time I saw a tank full of them at the Denver Aquarium, I was mesmerized. I was transfixed by their undulating, slow motion, synchronized dance. They seemed to be made of tissue paper, but the most complex and detailed tissue paper I had ever seen. Trailing tentacles, as thin as hair, floated behind each bell, effortlessly curling and twirling and embellishing the dance of the fragile bloom.

I saw jellyfish at the aquarium in Boston too. The variety there was awe inspiring: iridescent colors, massive bells with mushroom stem manubriums and ornately lacy tentacles, tiny compact jellies that had to be magnified to be seen, jellies that defied the floating status quo and instead turned upside down and sat on the floor to photosynthesize their own food, spotted jellies, striped jellies, jellies with strings of neon Christmas lights running up and down their sides. The scope of their creative complexity took my breath away.

My identification with a beached jellyfish, then, filled me with grief: this was death of beauty, death of purpose, loss of support and structure.

Then as I sat in this quiet conversation with God, in my mind's eye, a wave licked the edge of the line of residue and the next washed over it. As the tide came back in, the jelly was gently scooped back into the water, by the water. I could see the water fill its gills like a hot air balloon being inflated. Limp tentacles began to twitch and curl. Gradually the jelly resumed the fullness of its diaphanous beauty in the environment it was created for.

The message was clear to me. I am not intended to live on the beach. It is not my natural environment. I am intended to live and move and have my being in the vast expanse of the Holy Spirit. It is in the Spirit that I move with beauty. It is in the Spirit that my fragile life has definition and freedom. It is in the Spirit that I have power and can function as I was intended to function.

So for the past few months, I've been trying to carve out 10 or 15 minutes daily to be this spiritual jellyfish. I quiet myself and let the reality of the Holy Spirit buoy me up, fill me, and I realize that I am a breathtaking creation. For those minutes everyday I am aware that it is enough just to be. Just to float. That is my worship.

(Anger continued from page 3)

ciency, critical attitudes, and unclear thinking.

- *Socially*, unaddressed anger manifests itself in physical/verbal abuse of others, and is often a factor in loneliness, selfishness, and crippling isolation.
- *Financially*, unaddressed anger results in loss of work time, inefficiency, drain of resources in “revenge causes” (without necessarily counting the cost, or even thinking through their options, some activists are pouring money and energy into political and social policy issues; some people will pay a lot for revenge).
- *Spiritually*, a person who holds unaddressed anger is often riddled with guilt, blames God, has an inordinate inability to experience God’s presence, or relationship with Him. The result is to create what George Fox called “mental Christians” – all in the head and no heart knowledge of spiritual things.

Anger can be like cancer—it can slowly kill you in so many ways! So, it matters how we respond to our anger. For my purposes for this article, let’s take a look at three hurtful and damaging responses and one healthy response.

Three hurtful and damaging responses:

- *Repress it.* This is often an unconscious internalization, where we are not even aware of emo-

tion, maybe especially anger; it is blocked out of our minds entirely. I remember when I was 27, working as a customer service rep and got so many compliments because I never lost my cool with a customer. Nothing ever made me mad then (there are upsides to this in the short-term, it seems). It was years before a life-time of anger came boiling to the surface with a vengeance! Not a pretty sight.

- *Suppress it.* This is when anger is internalized and we know we are doing it—conscious internalization. We are knowingly denying it: knowing it’s there but holding it in, refusing to express it. This is where we often escape via TV, work, and addictions of various kinds. My own indulgences when I am suppressing emotions are to immerse myself in a psychological thriller novel, or much food with empty carbs. NOTE: Repression and suppression: “clamming up,” hurts us. If we pretend we have no anger and/or try to bury it, it will bury us in some way, some time we least expect it.
- *Express it in unhealthy ventilation:* This would be the recognizable tantrum – yelling, throwing things, abusing others, etc. This sort of expression, sometimes called “blowing up,” hurts others and our relationships with them suffer.

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One Healthy Response: CONFESS IT!

If we really want to stay healthy and not allow the destructive consequences of unaddressed anger, I believe we must make a decision not to let our anger become an opportunity for the enemy to harden our hearts. We must decide to let it be an opportunity for God to heal and soften our hearts. A few thoughts:

- Use your anger. One writer calls it “harnessing” anger to glean all of its positive purposes and none of its downsides.
- Confess. This is a simple, God given and mandated solution. We can admit to ourselves and admit to God that we have anger. He will teach us what is righteous and what we can do about it. He will show us our sinful responses and forgive us as we acknowledge our any we may have.
- “Put away” the anger and any unhealthy fruits associated with it, by dealing with the root cause (Ephesians 4:31, 32). Is there:
 - * a need to forgive someone? Then do so.
 - * a need to close off the enemy’s access points (footholds)? Resist the enemy and he will flee (James 4:7).
 - * Cut off unhealthy associations. Hanging out with angry people usually makes it harder for me to keep a handle on my own.

(I pray the Lord will make us all aware of who are the best people to have in our lives and how to be the best influence for others in our relationships.)

- * Release expectations; ask God to meet past and present unmet needs?

These last few bullet points don’t take up much space, but they represent a huge investment of heart and mind as you allow the Holy Spirit to change your heart and show you how you can cooperate with Him as your mind is renewed in Him. And as we wait we can trust God to give us a new heart as He promised (Exekiel 36:26).

To wrap up, I would just like to challenge each of us to pay close attention to how we respond in our emotions. Don’t shut them down, don’t ignore them, but offer them to God and He will help, teach, heal, forgive, comfort, guide and direct our following of Him. And I hope we will all keep in mind that the world is watching. We are witnesses to how the Lord loves. Sometimes that fact is really depressing to me.

Recently I read a blog entry in which the author had stated an opinion respectfully and reasonably, I thought, with a stated acknowledgement that she could be wrong. I didn’t agree with her conclusions, but I was glad to have a clear understanding of her position and the rationale behind it. As I

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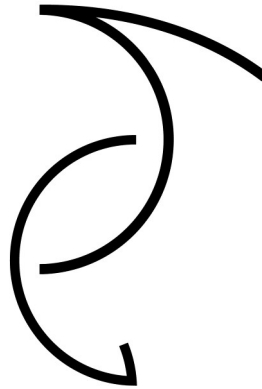
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read the response section, however, I found myself sick at heart. With very few exceptions, the comments were vitriolic.

I am not exaggerating. The Encarta Dictionary defines "vitriolic" as "filled with or expressing extreme bitterness and hatred toward somebody or something." The worst part of the scenario I just described is that the author of the blog was not a professing believer, but many of the commenters were. With a few wonderful exceptions, they were hurling disrespectful, furious, contemptuous words at the author (and one another if they had doctrinal or scriptural interpretive differences.)

Maybe we could keep in mind the way God works in the world and we might be better witnesses. I heard a speaker say one time that "Christians tend to put pressure on non-Christians to accept the Lord; but God some-

times puts pressure on Christians and asks the world to look in." Maybe under the pressure of responding to hurtful, unbiblical, anti-Christian rhetoric in online blogs and Facebook pages, we could take a moment to pray and offer a soft answer to turn away wrath. Let's challenge each other to speak with "wisdom of a serpent and innocence of a dove." That's how I will be praying for us all!



(R.I.P. Fred Phelps continued from page 2)

been one. Sadly, the message of Westboro Baptist Church continues, despite its leader's demise. A few people have stepped up with "counter-protests," carrying signs that read, "Sorry For Your Loss." These signs were brought to one of the locations that the church was protesting following Phelps's death.

Meanwhile, the Westboro Baptist Church's website keeps adding to its

statistics. Their website has a counter that, as of the time of this writing, says there are "4,069 people whom God has cast into hell since you loaded this page." The counter seems to go up by the second.

I read a quotation online that seems a fitting ending to this article. "Rest in peace, Fred Phelps. May you find the peace in death that you never found in life."



March In Review

March 8th: ReNew group started, focused on addiction

March 15th: WGA Event—Game Night

March 29th: Friends and Family gathering

April And Beyond

April 16th: WGA Board Meeting

May 3rd: Intercessory Prayer meeting, 8:00 am at the WGA offices. Come join us as we pray for the needs of the ministry

May 10th: WGA event, Game Night

May 23rd: Friends and Family of Persons Convicted (or Charged) of a Sex Offense (FFPCSO) group will be meeting. Please contact the WGA office if you would like more information about this group.

On April 8th WGA Staff was interviewed for Boundless. Access the podcast at www.boundless.org. The podcast title is *It's Complicated: Episode 323, Segment 1*

Thursday Night Group

March 6th: 25 people

March 13th: 31 people

March 20th: 29 people

March 27th: 28 people

Orientation meeting: 4 new people

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Where Grace Abounds exists to guide and support men and women who seek to understand sexuality and relationship, and to inspire all people to know and personally appropriate God's plan for their sexuality and relationships.

Printed in the USA
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