

Song of Solomon 1: 6b; "The Keeper of the Vineyards", Sermon # 8 in the series – "I am my Beloved's", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on July 12th, 2009, in the Afternoon Worship Service, and again on August 12th, 2012.

Here in this 2nd phrase of verse 6 we find that responsibility has been assigned to this believer who is Christ's bride, to care for the vineyards of others; when, as she looks at herself, she doesn't see that she has done a very good job of keeping her own vineyard. This assignment was given to her, it says here, by "her mother's sons". This afternoon we want to see that other people around us do have a great influence on us. The Lord is the One who helps us to react righteously to the anger of people around us, in order to teach us the way of Christ; His good and holy way. Sinful anger can never be justified. Righteous indignation over unrighteousness can be justified in ourselves if our heart is right, because we are primarily concerned with God's glory and His honor being established in the obedience of people around us. So we want to look at the subject of anger this afternoon. Especially the anger of people around us against us, because they do not see us keeping our vineyard. We are not being seen as fulfilling our own responsibilities. Here in our text these people who are angry with the Shulamite Bride are called, "her mother's sons". In applying this to ourselves we want to understand them as those who are called our "brethren" in the Christian faith. They are either those who go to church with us, or they are others who are professed Christians who do not go to our church, but they think that they have reason to be angry with us. Why are the Bride's mother's sons angry with her? I think that there may be more than one reason for this anger, and so I want to try to open up the meaning of this verse from that vantage point. There are 3 possible reasons which I would like to bring to your attention, why they were angry with her. And I will mention these and open up the truth of the reasons, and then I will make applications as to how a true Christian should react to this anger, and also how they ought to be seen by others.

1st of all – We will look at the unrighteous anger of some who think they are Christians but are not.

"My mother's sons were angry with me...." Sometimes those who in the same household, and are all called brethren, are led into situations where their love for each other is tested. I am thinking now, of the house of God as being composed of persons who go to church but some of these, who think that they are spiritual brethren, really are not. I am thinking now about Joseph with his brethren in Genesis Chapter 37 as a type of this. They were all born of Jacob; they were all in the same house, but they were not all of spiritual Israel; at least not yet. If you will turn with me to Genesis 37, you will find that verse 3 says, "Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age." "Also he made him a tunic of many colors." "But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him." Then the next few verses tell us about how Joseph told them of one of the dreams that he had, and the brothers understood the interpretation of the dream and said in verse 8,

"Shall you indeed reign over us?" "Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?" "So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words." Now when you think of yourself as a Christian, you should understand yourself as having received from your heavenly Father, grace and a special love and favor that He has bestowed upon you. Joseph, receiving this kind of love and favor from his father Jacob, is a picture of this. You are told in the Bible, that this is true of all Christians. It is found in many places, when you read the New Testament.

But let me remind you of one of these places. Hold your place in Genesis while I read to you from Ephesians 1: 3-6. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love. (I think that the period of this sentence ought to have been put after the word "Him". This is how it is in the NAS) So it would go on to read, "In love He predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will (according to kind intention of His will), to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved." Joseph knew a special love from his father Jacob. It was because Joseph was "the son of his old age". Jacob bestowed a coat upon him; a coat of many colors. All this is a picture of what I am trying to speak to you about in this point. Joseph's brothers were envious of him, and they hated him. Why? Because he had come to know a special love from their father. They did not think that this was fair or right for their father to show Joseph this special love, and they not be shown it too. They believed in the doctrine of fairness, which all people in their sinful state love more than the doctrine of Election, which the Bible clearly teaches.

People in their natural state, even those who are trying to be Christians without being converted to Christ, will naturally be angry with those who are true Christians, for portraying to them in word and deed, that they have received a special love from God; that they have been chosen by God, drawn by the Father, changed by His grace, and that they now wear the robe of righteousness which has been freely given to them by the heavenly Father; not because of works of righteousness which they have done, but because of His mercy and love in Christ. They can't stand the thought of the special favor and grace of God being shown to one, and not to another. But you and I, even though it will bring us into disfavor with people around us, must share with them the truth of our conversion; of our being brought into favor with God on the basis of grace and not because of our works. The brothers of Joseph were keeping the flocks; they were doing the work that their father had assigned to them to do. And they thought that Joseph was a dreamer. But Jacob sent Joseph to find them; to seek their welfare. Here is the picture of Christ; and here is the picture of the true Christian, seeking to do his Father's will. We would love our brethren and seek their welfare, but we must realize that there may be many who call themselves Christians who are not really Christians. Theirs is a works-righteousness. And theirs is the doctrine that God must do everything that He does in strict fairness; that all men be shown the same favor and the same grace from God.

Verse 12 - "Then his brothers went to feed their father's flock in Shechem." "And Israel said to Joseph, are not your brothers feeding the flock in Shechem?" "Come, I will send you to them." 'So he said to him, 'Here I am." "Then he said to him, 'Please go and see if it is well with your brothers and well with the flocks, and bring back word to me." "So he sent him out of the Valley of Hebron, and he went to Shechem." Could we not also add, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life?" Could we not further add John 1: 11, "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him?" But verse 18 of Chapter 37 of Genesis says, "Now when they saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him." "Then they said to one another, 'Look this dreamer is coming!" "Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we shall say, "Some wild beast has devoured him." "We shall see what shall become of his dreams!" Oh, dear believer, I do not say these things to discourage you from witnessing for Christ and His grace. I do not say it to prevent you from declaring your Reformed faith, the legacy of God's sovereign grace in the salvation of sinners. I say it to promote your being encouraged to continue to do both of those things. There are people who claim to be Christians who are not, and they will be angry with you in their hearts, and that anger may even spread to their actions in time. They may think of you as very spiritual when you first tell them of your conversion. They may tell you that you need to become a minister because you have taken an interest in spiritual things, and in that sense they may even make you "keeper of the vineyards". But when they realize that you are preaching and sharing the truth of God's sovereign grace in salvation, they will not like it. They will be angry. But do not be afraid. This is the path that the Lord leads His faithful followers on, so that you will become more like your Savior.

Do not think it a strange thing if it is so. Christ was wounded in the house of his friends. (Zechariah 13: 6) In Luke 4: 16 and following we find Jesus preaching in Nazareth. And He preached to them of His ministry to heal, and to give spiritual and physical sight to the blind, and to free the spiritual captives. And in verse 22 it says, "So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth." But a few moments later, His brethren became angry with Him when He told them in Luke 4, verse 23, "You will surely say this proverb to Me, 'Physician heal yourself!" "Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in Your country." "Then He said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country." "But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; but to no one of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow." "And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." There is the sovereignty of God's grace. And what was their response? "So all those in the synagogue who heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down

over the cliff." This was Jesus' home town and this was his brethren who were angry with him.

Now 2ndly – We will look at the anger of immature Christians who may expect too much of those who are called to the ministry.

"They made me keeper of the vineyards...." I want to focus, here, for a few moments upon the way that true Christians view others whom they see as spiritual. There are some in the Bride of Christ who have gifts of preaching and teaching. There are some who have been appointed by God and have been raised up by God and they are ordained to the ministry to be "keepers of Christ's vineyard", the Church. These persons are the pastors of the church who "tend the garden of the Lord", His vineyard. There are also others in the church who are spiritually-minded, who are also concerned for the Lord's work in people's hearts and lives, and they also support this work of the ministry. They watch out for the spiritual welfare of God's people by their prayers and their counsel. All of this is very good, and it is something that God has appointed in the Church. It is something that He is pleased with. But the thing that I want to bring to your attention is this. Sometimes young and immature Christians do not understand that those persons who have been given grace to become mature, and to become leaders in the church, are simply men and women whom the Lord has given grace and wisdom to attempt to be faithful to His word in all things. They are not strong in themselves, but they are strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus. Sometimes even older Christians, who should know better, may also forget this; that it is grace that makes the man or the woman that they are looking at strong; not their gifts or natural abilities. Sometimes when this truth is forgotten; Christians become angry with other Christians, because they are disappointed that those who are keepers in Christ's vineyard have not lived up to their expectations of them. They have repositied a trust in those who they believed were more spiritual than they are; and because of this, they have come to expect too much of them. They forget that it is God who gives the leaders in their lives the strength to do any good thing. They cease to pray for them if they make mistakes, or if they have errors in their judgment, as they see it. Then they become critical of them and they begin to speak about them behind their back to others, and they even consider leaving the church. Perhaps they do leave the church.

But I would have us all of to consider a few verses, so that our perspective of those whom we have great expectations of, will be right. Turn with me to Psalm 118, verse 5. "I called on the Lord in my distress; the Lord answered me and set me in a broad place." "The Lord is on my side; I will not fear." "What can man do to me?" "Therefore I shall see my desire on those who hate me." "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man." "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes." Where is your ultimate trust in living your Christian life? Is it in putting confidence in men? Even the most spiritual of men? If it is; it should not be. No; it should be found in your putting your confidence in the Lord. When you do this, then your perspective on men becomes clear and right. It is the Lord who has put all the spiritual people in your life, to help you in the right way. He has

put you together with others in this church. But if our confidence as a church is in men pre-eminently, then we will often fail in the things that we try to do for Christ. Turn with me to 1st Corinthians 3, verse 18, and you will see this again. "Let no one deceive himself." "If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise." "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God." "For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their own craftiness'; and again, 'The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.'" "Therefore let no one boast in men." "For all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come--all are yours." "And you are Christ's and Christ is God's." How good it is for us to understand this blessed truth, and not put our trust in the most spiritual of men, but rather in God. For God who is the One who has given both the men and the gifts, and He is the One who is building spiritual men and women into His likeness.

Then 3rdly - There may be brethren who are mature, who become righteously indignant at the keeper of the vineyard, who does not fulfill his responsibilities.

"My mother's sons were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept." It behooves us all, all who would be of use and service to our Lord Jesus Christ, and helpers of each other's faith, to realize that it really does matter whether we guard our hearts or not. It really does matter whether you guard the truth of the word of God or not. "Guard your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the issues of life." It really does matter to God, whether you bear fruit to Him or not! Your heart is a vineyard which is cultivated just as much as the Church is a vineyard which Christ cultivates. I want to close this sermon by having you turn over to Isaiah Chapter 5. Bearing good fruit to God, through and by the grace of Christ is the sign of real life in every person claiming to be a Christian. "Now let me sing to my Well-beloved a song of my beloved regarding His vineyard: My Well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill." "He dug it up and cleared out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine." "He built a tower in its midst, and also made a winepress in it; so He expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes." "What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it?" Old Testament Israel fell under God's judgments, and they were taken away into captivity, because they did not cultivate the garden of their hearts, so that good fruit could be brought forth. There is a righteous indignation that comes to mature brethren when they see those Christians whom they love not exercising good Biblical discernment in the doctrines that they hold and teach, or when they are not bringing forth good fruit; especially those leaders who others look to as an example. The Word of God must be handled rightly. The Corinthian church had great gifts and they were cultivating them as much as they could, but still, they did not have the discernment necessary to see that they needed to excommunicate the man in their midst who had his father's wife as his lover. And Paul was righteously indignant on God's behalf, over this, and he reproved them. And they repented and excommunicated him. In fact in 2

Corinthians 7, verse 11, he later said to them, "For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication!" "In all these things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter." Let us learn in closing; that if those who are mature and leaders in the church are righteously indignant over your slothfulness in keeping your heart, then you ought to take it to heart, repent of your carelessness, and learn to keep your own vineyard. If the leader or leaders in the church do not handle the word of God rightly, should it not beget in us a righteous indignation that they would repent where they are wrong, either in doctrine or practice? A wise leader will look to himself to see whether or not he is keeping his own vineyard. And will we not; each one of us, consider how we might better tend our own garden so that we might bear fruit to God? "My mother's sons were angry with me; they made me keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept." O may we have grace, each one of us, to be able to say, "I am keeping my vineyard (my heart) for Christ". "I am paying attention (I am taking heed) to myself and to my own doctrine so that I might save both myself and those who hear me".