

## SOMETHING TO CHEW ON

Have you ever noticed how often the Bible warns against the sin and folly of being hot-tempered, of losing control of ourselves and doing something rash when someone offends us by word and deed? Failure to discipline our temper may cause us to act recklessly and bring lifetime sorrow and suffering.

Moses, was "very meek" (Numbers 12:3), and yet he was so "provoked" by the rebellion and murmurings of the children of Israel "that he spoke unadvisedly with his lips." (Psalm 106:32,33.) He paid heavily for his failure to bridle his temper and his tongue.

James warns us that though the tongue is a little member, if uncontrolled it can do incalculable harm. Untamed, "it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." (James 3:4-8).

Under great provocation Moses lost his temper and sinned grievously. God told him to speak to the rock, from which water would flow abundantly; but in anger he struck the rock twice. "Hear now," he cried in great wrath; "must we fetch you water out of this rock?" Because of his failure to glorify the Lord he was not allowed to lead Israel into the Promised Land (Numbers 20:7-13).

We are repeatedly told that the Lord is "slow to anger." (Nehemiah 9:17; Psalms 103:3; 145:8.) This is seen in His long-suffering with Israel. Even after Jerusalem had been looted and its leaders carried into captivity, the prophet Jeremiah felt that Israel deserved to be entirely destroyed and abandoned forever. But God loved them with an "everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3), and the prophet could therefore say, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness." (Lamentations 3:22, 23). In later years the apostle Paul likewise commented on the "goodness and forbearance and long-suffering" of God. (Romans 2:4; 3:25).

We are told to be "swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man works not the righteousness of God." (James 1:19-20). Those who keep anger under control are highly commended for their wisdom and self-control. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that rules his spirit than he that takes a city" (Proverbs 16:32), for "a soft answer turns away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger." (Proverbs 15:1). The man whose anger is well-disciplined is declared to be of "great understanding." (Proverbs 14:29).

Anger is not forbidden, for there are many occasions when we have just cause to be angry. Yet even if we have good reason to be angry, great care must be taken to keep our temper under control lest we sin and do more harm than good.

Many parents have cause to regret that they behaved irrationally through loss of temper when a son or daughter committed an offence, and the child has been alienated ever since. (Colossians 3:21.) "If angry, beware of sinning." (Ephesians 4:26).

On one occasion it is recorded that our Lord was angry with his critics who were waiting for an opportunity to lay a charge against him. But the explanation is given immediately - he was "grieved for the hardness of their hearts." (Mark 3:5.)

If all our anger were grief for sin instead of arising from envy, wounded pride, or impatience, the emotion would not displease God; for we would act wisely and justly and overcome evil with good. If we loved others even as Christ loved us, our anger would be like his. (1 Peter 2:20-24).

Too often we find after reflection that we were angry without just cause. When we know the true circumstances, we feel remorseful for being unkind and too hasty in our judgement. We are warned not to strive hastily, lest our neighbour put us to shame. (Proverbs 25:8-9). He who has strict control of his temper saves himself worry of mind and perhaps injury of body. He also helps to maintain a peaceful atmosphere in the home and among those with whom he works.

The quick-tempered person "exalts folly." (Proverbs 14:29.) He acts foolishly, like the elder brother in our Lord's parable of the prodigal son. In his pride of heart that young man exalted himself far above his brother. Not only did he reveal hatred for his brother, he also condemned his father for showing him such affection and restoring him to the family circle in such a loving, joyous spirit.

Anyone who fails to govern his temper knows little happiness. The two elements of happiness are wanting: he is seldom at peace with either his neighbour or himself. Anger turns to hate, to evil thoughts and imaginations, and to revenge. Out of harmony with God and man, he who nurses wrath in his bosom is ever restless and unhappy. (Isaiah 57:20-21.) For our own peace of mind we are exhorted, as far as possible, to "be patient toward all men" (1 Thessalonians 5:14), to "live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18.) How much nobler it is to endure provocation in a spirit of meekness, to curb the rising temper, to repress the passionate word. "The ruler of his own mind is the only real ruler."

All that fosters and strengthens anger - pride, envy, greed, prejudice - may be extinguished best by letting in upon it the love wherewith God has loved us. He so commended His love toward us in that "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8.) Open the door of the heart and let God's love take possession, and any angry, revengeful thought will be quickly quenched like a spark plunged into a running stream.

Remember how cruelly the Lord Jesus was provoked, yet there was no thought of retaliation. "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to Him that judges righteously." He has left us "an example," that we should follow in his steps. (1 Peter 2:21-23.) We should therefore bring each thought and each temper beneath his control.

"Let not the sun go down upon your wrath." (Ephesians 4:26.) Master it as quickly as possible, and at sunset your heart will be at peace with God and man. A tranquil mind will induce restful and refreshing slumber. An eminent writer said, "Call for the grandest of all spectacles, what is that? It is the sun going down to his rest. Call for the grandest of all sentiments, what is that? It is that man should forget his anger before he lies down to sleep." The secret of tranquillity by day or night is found in Ephesians 4:31,32. "Let all bitterness, ... and anger, ... be put away ...: and be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you."

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