

## CONTROL YOUR ANGER

### **Introduction**

Back in 1952 Mr. Newbold Morris was appointed by the president to a very important post. It was his duty to keep a close check on crime and mismanagement in government affairs. On one occasion, however, Mr. Morris himself was called to appear before a Senate sub-committee to answer questions concerning an inappropriate business deal.

The interrogation became intense and emotions ran high. At the peak of heightened emotions, just when a roomful of angry Mount Versuviuses were about to erupt, Morris recalled a note his wife had given him that morning. He reached into his pocket, pulled out the piece of paper, called for the attention of the assembly, and declared, "I have an important announcement from my wife, she says, 'Keep your shirt on!'" (*Our Daily Bread*, 8/24/93)

"Keep your shirt on!" This is very good counsel. It is also very biblical counsel.

Our next topical study from Proverbs deals with the subject of human anger: What happens when we lose control? How should we handle those provoking situations? Mrs. Morris' advice to her husband may well serve as a guiding theme for our next topical study: Keep your shirt on! Control your anger.

### **I. Control Your Anger, and So Spare Yourself from Foolish Behavior (Proverbs 14:17; Proverbs 14:29; Proverbs 19:19; Proverbs 29:22)**

***A quick-tempered man will do foolish things ...*** (Prov. 14:17a)

When you lose your temper you also lose your reason and your long-range perspective. Later, when the flames of your anger have been extinguished, when you return to your senses, you regretfully survey the damage: hurtful words that leave deep wounds; broken relationships cut off by deep and wide chasms; stupid decisions that sometimes can never be undone.

When you surrender to your temper, remember what else you are surrendering: your reason, your long-range perspective—and remember what you are getting in exchange: the painful consequences of foolish behavior, some of which consequences may last for a lifetime.

***He who is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty spirit exalts folly.*** (Prov. 14:29)

If you act impulsively, if you cast off self-restraint, you are going to exalt folly. That is to say, you are going to lift up and honor foolish, mischievous and even

evil behavior. The Hebrew word translated “folly” (אָוֶלְתַּת or אָוֶל) has not only the meaning, “to be silly or stupid,” but also has the root meaning, “to be perverse.” When you act impulsively, when you allow yourself to be controlled by your anger, you become a slave to folly. At your own expense and to your shame you let folly rule.

Note the directive we are given in Romans 6:12-14,

*... do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. <sup>13</sup>Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness; <sup>14</sup>for sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. (Rom. 6:12-14)*

***A man of great wrath shall bear the penalty, for if you deliver him, you must do so again.*** (Prov. 19:19)

When you surrender yourself to your temper you are handing yourself over to the devil for his destructive use; but afterward **you** receive “the bill” for damages done! Often times you must deal with such consequences as remorse, regret, guilt, shame, and alienation.

The latter part of this proverb indicates that this pattern will continue to repeat itself unless you deal with the root cause. Unless your temper is harnessed and surrendered to the control of Christ, it shall continue to run roughshod wrecking havoc, no matter how many times your friends pick up the pieces and do damage control. Indeed, unless your temper is harnessed it is inevitable that you shall eventually pay the price for damages done—no matter how often your friends seek to intervene on your behalf.

***An angry man stirs up strife, and a wrathful man commits an abundance of transgressions.*** (Prov. 29:22)

If you approach a volatile situation with an angry spirit, or in such a situation you allow your anger to be ignited, it is like throwing a lit match into a pile of kindling wood. By way of illustration: The neighbor’s son has broken your window with his baseball, now you pay a visit to your neighbor with the ball in hand and your temper rising, what is going to be the likely outcome?

The message of Proverbs is that we should be on guard to be slow to anger, and thereby spare ourselves from foolish and regretful behavior. Consider the insight of Proverbs 16:32, *“He who is slow to anger is greater than the mighty, and he who controls his spirit is greater than he who conquers a city.”*

## II. Control Your Anger, and Thus Make a Godly Response to Provocation (Prov. 15:1; Prov. 15:18; Prov. 16:32; Prov. 21:14; Prov. 22:24-25)

***A contrite answer turns away wrath; but a harsh word stirs up anger.*** (Prov. 15:1)

In a highly charged emotional situation, the response that is gentle, kind and **contrite** is the kind that turns away rising anger. The Hebrew term sometimes translated “*a soft answer*” (נָדַבַּר) literally means “*a contrite answer.*” In other words, the admission of guilt when one is at fault and the seeking of forgiveness from the offended party.

When wrath is stirred up against us our first reaction is to defend ourselves and justify ourselves. But if we pause to listen and reflect, we will often times discover that there was some just cause for the anger directed against us. If upon making such a discovery, we respond with a humble and contrite reply—honestly admitting our fault and expressing our regret and seeking forgiveness—we will be doing a great deal to alleviate the situation and open a door for reconciliation.

With regard to this matter, consider the following passages of Scripture:

*If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.* (Rom. 12:18;) i.e., do all that is within your power to live at peace with your neighbor.

*Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.* (Rom. 14:19)

*Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other ...* (Jam. 5:16)

***A wrathful man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger pacifies contention.*** (Prov. 15:18)

If you exercise self-control and demonstrate a quiet spirit, you put strife to rest. Conversely, if you allow your anger to be ignited, you cause strife to flare up into an uncontrollable conflagration. Consider Proverbs 15:16-18, “*It is better to have a little with the fear of Jehovah than to have great wealth with turmoil. <sup>17</sup>It is better to have a meal of vegetables where there is love than to feast on a fattened calf with hatred. <sup>18</sup>A wrathful man stirs up strife; but he who is slow to anger pacifies contention.*” Note how Isaac exemplified this behavior, this response to a provoking situation:

*Isaac reopened the wells that had been dug in the days of Abraham his father, because the Philistines had plugged them up after the death of Abraham. He gave them the same names his father had given them. <sup>19</sup>When Isaac’s servants were digging in the valley they discovered there a source of spring water. <sup>20</sup>But*

*the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, The water belongs to us. So Isaac named the well, Esek [Contention], because they contended with him. <sup>21</sup>Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that one also. So he named it Sitnah [Enmity]. <sup>22</sup>He moved on from there and dug yet another well. And they did not contend for it. So he named it Rehoboth [Room for us], declaring, Now Jehovah has made room for us and we shall be fruitful in the land. (Gen. 26:18-22)*

Rather than strive with the herdsmen of Gerar over possession of the wells, Isaac moved on and dug for water elsewhere. Why was he able to be so forbearing? The answer lies in the experience Isaac had earlier in his life, the incident described in Genesis 22 where he became the willing sacrifice laid upon the altar:

*After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, Abraham. And Abraham replied, Here am I. <sup>2</sup>And God said, Now take your son, your only son, the son whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah. Offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I will tell you ... <sup>9</sup>Then they came to the place of which God had told him. There Abraham built the altar, and arranged the wood upon it. Then he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. <sup>10</sup>Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. (Gen. 22:1-2,9-10)*

Once you have given up your life unto God, it becomes so much easier to give up anything else. Once you have died to the world, you tend to look at the things of the world in a new light and from a different perspective. Once you have experienced God's faithfulness, you have greater confidence in His promises and a greater conviction that you can trust Him to take care of you, meet all your needs, and eventually grant to you the fullness of His promised blessing. Rather than strive with the herdsmen of Gerar, Isaac trusted in the LORD to fulfill His promise in His time and in His way, note Genesis 13:14-15, "*Jehovah said to Abram, 'Now lift up your eyes from the place where you are and look northward and southward and eastward and westward; <sup>15</sup>because **I will give to you and to your descendants forever all the land that you see.**'"*

Note: The example of Isaac's forbearance does not necessarily mean that a Christian may never stand up for his rights, as we see in the case of Abraham recorded in Genesis 21:25, "*Then Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech's servants had seized.*"

***He who is slow to anger is greater than the mighty, and he who controls his spirit is greater than he who conquers a city.*** (Prov. 16:32)

The story is told that the reason the great baseball player, Babe Ruth, was called "The Babe" was because he never grew up—he never learned to exercise self-control, he never attained emotional, spiritual and moral maturity; he ever remained "The Babe."

In our self-directed, self-centered culture, people are no longer required to “grow up;” rather than progress toward maturity, they are encouraged to regress back to infancy—one prime example of this is the counsel of psychology John Bradshaw:

Bradshaw insists, “we are all infants with needs.” And those needs *must* be met, even if that means returning to the womb. As recipients of Bradshaw’s “treatment,” grown men and women sit around holding teddy bears, listening to maternal heartbeats, while Bradshaw urges them to imagine themselves back in the womb and as infants. ...

Saint Paul may have put aside the thoughts of a child when he reached manhood; Bradshaw wants to reverse the process.

Rather than seeing maturity as a cure for the endless demands and frustrations of the inner child, gurus like Bradshaw proclaim the necessity of turning inward and backward into the absolutism of the mythical and perfect womb life. (*A Nation of Victims*, Charles J Sykes, pp.142-143)

Note that in Proverbs 16:32 the one “*who is slow to anger*” is further described as the one “*who controls his spirit.*” In other words, being slow to anger is an exercise in self-control. It is an evidence of spiritual and moral maturity; the type that the Apostle Peter calls upon the Christian to cultivate:

*... giving all your effort, add virtue to your faith, and add knowledge to virtue, <sup>6</sup>and add self-control to knowledge, and add perseverance to self-control, and add godliness to perseverance, <sup>7</sup>and add brotherly affection to godliness, and add love to brotherly affection. <sup>8</sup>If you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will prevent you from being either useless or unfruitful with regard to the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Pet. 1:5-8)*

Self-control is also a fruit of the Holy Spirit, an attribute that is developed in our lives as we yield ourselves to the Holy Spirit and His work of grace: “*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, integrity, <sup>23</sup>meekness, self-control*” (Gal. 5:22-23.)

***A gift given secretly pacifies anger, and a bribe concealed in the cloak pacifies great wrath.*** (Prov. 21:14)

This proverb is simply stating a fact of human nature and human interaction: You cannot long remain angry with someone who gives you gifts; especially when the kindness is done quietly and without fanfare (“*secretly,*”) thereby demonstrating the sincere and generous motive of good will as Proverbs 21:14a indicates. By way of example, note Jacob’s gift to Esau and the affect it had upon their relationship:

*[Jacob] spent the night there, and from what he had with him he selected a gift for his brother Esau: <sup>14</sup>two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two*

*hundred ewes and twenty rams, <sup>15</sup>thirty female camels with their young, forty cows and ten bulls, and twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. <sup>16</sup>He put them in the care of his servants, each herd by itself, and said to his servants, "Go ahead of me, and keep some space between the herds." <sup>17</sup>He instructed the one in the lead: "When my brother Esau meets you and asks, "To whom do you belong, and where are you going, and who owns all these animals in front of you?" <sup>18</sup>then you are to say, "They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a gift sent to my lord Esau, and he is coming behind me." <sup>19</sup>He also instructed the second, the third and all the others who followed the herds: "You are to say the same thing to Esau when you meet him. <sup>20</sup>And be sure to say, "Your servant Jacob is coming behind us." He thought, "**I will pacify him with these gifts I am sending on ahead; later, when I see him, perhaps he will receive me.**" <sup>21</sup>So Jacob's gifts went on ahead of him, but he himself spent the night in the camp. ...<sup>4</sup>... Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept. (Gen. 32:13-21, Gen. 33:4)*

An honest biblical application of this principle is expressed in such passages as these:

*But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup>bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. (i.e.; those who treat you with malice, contempt or hatred) (Lk. 6:27-28)*

*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom.12:21)*

***Do not become friends with a quick-tempered man, and do not associate with a wrathful man, <sup>25</sup>or you may learn his ways and become ensnared.*** (Prov. 22:24-25)

Verse 24 warns us to avoid developing a friendship or even cultivating an acquaintance with a man who allows his anger to control him.

Verse 25 supplies the reason. Whether we realize it or not, we tend to become like the company we keep—and suffer the inevitable consequences of the behavior we learn from them.

The message of Proverbs is this: Control your anger, and by so doing you will be making a godly response to provocations:

*Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry; <sup>20</sup>for man's wrath does not bring about the righteousness of God. (Jam. 1:19-20)*

### III. Control Your Anger, and Leave Vengeance to The LORD (Proverbs 20:22)

*Do not say, "I will repay evil!" wait for Jehovah, and he will deliver you.*  
(Prov. 20:22)

We may not engage in personal acts of vengeance and retribution; because by so doing we are sinfully usurping a prerogative God has reserved for Himself: *"Do not avenge yourselves, beloved, but allow God to express his wrath, for it is written, Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the LORD"* (Rom. 12:19.)

We are to be imitators of our Lord Jesus Christ: *"When they insulted him, he did not insult them; when he suffered, he did not threaten; rather, he committed himself to him who judges righteously"* (1 Pet. 2:23.)

The message of Proverbs is this: Control your anger, and leave vengeance in the hands of the LORD:

*God is just; He will pay back affliction to those who afflict you <sup>7</sup>and give relief to you who are afflicted, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. (2 Thess. 1:6-7)*

### Conclusion

Remember the very good counsel Mrs. Morris gave to her husband: Keep your shirt on! In biblical terms, Control Your Anger. By so doing, 1) you will spare yourself from foolish behavior; 2) you will be making a godly response to provocations; and 3) you will rightly be leaving vengeance in the hands of the LORD.