

Overcoming Anger Through Self-Control Part I

James 1:19, *'Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.'*

The tragic story is told of a teenage baseball star in the United States. He appeared to be quite popular with his friends, was doing well at high school and seemed to be happy in his home-life. Suddenly he had a falling out with his parents. Late one night he returned to his home in a fit of rage and murdered his father and mother. What could have caused him to commit such a horrible act? Possibly drugs, alcohol or violence on TV may have influenced him. He may have been the victim of bullying at school or harsh treatment, but what finally caused his murderous act was **ANGER**.

Uncontrolled anger is becoming more and more common today. How often do we hear on the news of examples of road-rage, people being offended at the driving habits of others and as a result visibly exploding in rage at one another! The Scriptures, as a sign of the nearness of the last days, even speak in 2 Tim 3:3 of men being *'fierce'*. Conflicts and disagreements are a part of everyday life which cannot be avoided. However, with the help of the Lord, we can control our reactions to these. Let us ponder on the topic

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We shall see

- I. Anger and its Consequences; *and*
- II. The Importance of Practising Christian Self-control.

I Anger and its Consequences

The verses of our text speak of the sin of anger. We read in James 1:19-20, *'Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.'*

What is anger? A religious author writes:

'Anger is an emotional state, experienced by everyone, but impossible to define precisely. It occurs in varying degrees of intensity, from mild annoyance or aggravation to violent rage. It begins in infancy and continues to the later years. It may be hidden and held inside or expressed openly and freely. It can be of short duration, coming and going quickly, or it may persist for decades in the form of bitterness, resentment, or hatred. Anger may be destructive, especially when it persists in the form of aggression or revenge... Anger is aroused when we feel threatened, demeaned, or blocked in our progress toward some desired goal. Usually we know when we are angry, and others know as well. Sometimes, however, anger is kept hidden behind a calm and smiling façade, or buried someplace in the recesses of our brains. It always involves a physiological arousal that the angry person may not recognise consciously...

'Along with hostility, anger has been called "the chief saboteur of the mind", and "the leading cause of misery, depression, inefficiency, sickness, accidents, loss of work time and financial loss in industry... No matter what the problem – marital conflict, alcoholism... child's defiance, nervous or physical disease – elimination of hostility is a key factor in its solution".'

'Some have argued that the entire course of world history has been shaped by anger and the struggle for emotional control.'

There is such a thing as **righteous anger**. Of Jesus we learn in Mark 3:5, that seeing the unbelief of the Jews, *'He looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts.'* The anger of God over sin, of parents over the disobedience of their children, of the Government towards the evil doer, is a righteous anger. Here the Lord warns us (Eph 4:26), *'Be ye angry, and sin not.'*

Yet that there is a **sinful anger** we learn in Prov 14:17, *'He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly.'* Anger of the heart shows itself outwardly in vengeance seeking, verbal abuse, bitter outbursts, and even in a refusal to talk to others. Anger can be direct, like that of Nebuchadnezzar, filled with wrath that Daniel's friends did not bow down before his image (Dan 3:19). It also can be passive, like the brooding hatred of Saul for David (1 Sam 18:8-11). Such often shows itself by nasty remarks, putting down the neighbour, or by the spreading of gossip harming the

name of others. Anger may also be redirected, like the employee who takes out the frustrations of work on the family when he gets home.

What causes anger? Many will blame their family background, their internal makeup, or the actions of others. But above all the cause of anger is man's stubborn, rebellious and sinful heart. Jonah was angry that God did not punish the Ninevites after his preaching (Jonah 4:1). Herod was angry that the wise men did not report back to him concerning the whereabouts of Jesus (Matt 2:16). The ten disciples were angry with James and John for asking higher positions in the Lord's coming kingdom (Matt 20:24). All these were filled with the anger forbidden by Col 3:8, *'But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.'*

What are the consequences of anger? In James 1:20 we read, *'For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.'* Anger results in hurt and bitterness. It can affect one's personal health. It can drive away friends and family. It can disrupt relationships between husband and wife, parents and children. It can lead to many other sins, bitter words and hurtful actions. It can result in much misery and heartache, both for the angry person and for those around him. James 3:3-10, which states the dangers of an uncontrolled tongue, shows also what can happen as a result of anger uncontrolled. Through anger, Cain brought the death of his brother, as well as misery to himself and his parents (Gen 4:5). Haman's anger towards Mordecai the Jew brought his own death by hanging (Esther 3:5). The anger of the residents of Nazareth towards Jesus (Luke 4:28) brought the loss to the people of the Saviour's words. The Sanhedrin in their anger caused the death of Stephen (Acts 8:57).

Sadly anger often brings its **bitter results in family life** as well. Husband and wife, parents and children may genuinely love each other, but are constantly picking at each other, finding fault, calling nasty names, refusing to forgive, and even blasting one another in fits of rage. Can they be truly happy by acting in this way? How will those children grow up when constantly living in such an environment? If one suddenly dies, how will they feel knowing they have treated one another in such a horrible way? How many families have been torn apart through untold strife caused by anger? To them the words of Rom 2:8,9 apply, *'But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil.'*

Especially the qualifications of a faithful *pastor* point out (Titus 1:7), *'For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry.'* A pastor can destroy the work of the Lord if he allows fits of anger to come to the fore in his public and private office. The eternal consequences of anger are pointed out by Jesus Himself when he states (Matthew 5:22), *'But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.'* How vital it is that we confess before God that we too are guilty of such sins, and in true repentance go to the foot of Jesus' cross, clinging in true faith to the comforting promise of forgiveness He offers us. Jesus' blood and merit washes away all our sins, also those of anger in our daily lives. (To be continued.)—GLW

Overcoming Anger Through Self-Control Part II

When young *Daniel* and his three friends were carried away to the city of Babylon, they were taken far away from their parents and homes, from their place of worship and their fellow believers who had helped sustain them in the Christian faith. Yet they did not allow this to cause them to stray away from their Saviour, but by God's grace they practised self-control, strictly avoiding those temptations which would snare them for Satan.

Every Christian is subject to such temptations, whether from the devil, the world, or the evil thoughts of his sinful flesh. Also his passions are often stirred to anger, either sudden outbursts of wrath, or a brooding bitterness that poisons the mind and soul if not overcome.

As we look at

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let us for a few moments ponder upon:

II The Importance of Practising Christian Self-control.

In the previous verse, the holy writer, James, had just spoken of the believer's conversion, *'Of His own will begat He us with the Word of Truth.'* Just as a child is born of the father, so our heavenly Father regenerated us into the Kingdom of God through the Scriptures, the Law and Gospel. Realising that because of our sins we were lost and condemned, the Holy Spirit brought to us the message of Christ the Saviour from sins, working true faith in Jesus in our hearts. Verse 18 also states the consequence of this faith, *'that (Greek: resulting in that) we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures.'* Just as the Jews brought along the first fruits of their crop in thankfulness to the Lord for the harvest to come, so God wants us to offer up our lives as a sacrifice of thanksgiving to Him for the rich harvest of His blessings He gives to us.

As a part of this offering of our sanctification, the writer commands us as his *'beloved brethren, let every man be swift* (Greek: eager, quick) *to hear.*' Swift to hear what? The Word of God and its instruction for our Christian lives. We read in Proverbs 15:31, *'The ear that heareth the reproof of life abideth among the wise.'* After speaking the parable of the Sower, the Lord continues with the words, *'Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given'* (Luke 8:18). It is alone the message of the Word that can change our hearts and lives for the better.

Next we are commanded, to be, *'Slow to speak.'* Before we begin speaking, we should carefully consider what we are about to say. If it is sinful, or in danger of giving offence, then we have time to avoid making the offensive comment. The Psalmist says in Psalm 34:13, *'Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile.'* James 1:26 tells us, *'If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.'* Likewise we are urged in 1 Peter 3:10, *'For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile.'* When Jesus was before the High Priest and Pilate, He often held His peace, knowing that giving an answer to their mockery could achieve nothing but only be used against Him. In Ecclesiastes 3:7 we are told there is, *'a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.'*

Verse 19 also urges us to be, *'slow to wrath* (anger), *'*Some find their anger easy to control. Others find they are of a nature that their anger quickly flares with little warning. In Psalm 37:8 we are urged, *'Cease from anger, and forsake wrath.'* Likewise Proverbs 16:32 says, *'He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.'* Namaan was quickly stirred to anger when told to bathe in the Jordan River to receive healing from his leprosy (2 Kings 5:12). His anger almost caused him to miss out on God's blessing. But he listened to the persuasion of his servant, and in faith humbly obeyed the voice of Elisha. He learnt the truth of the words of Ecclesiastes 7:9, *'Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.'*

We learn further from our text in James 1:21, *'Wherefore lay apart* (Greek: put off as a dirty garment) *all filthiness* (Greek: moral uncleanness) *and superfluity of naughtiness* (Greek: wicked-ness which is abounding), *and receive with meekness the engrafted* (Greek: implanted) *Word, which is able to save your souls.'* Anger can be controlled, but only by following the principles of the Divine Word. Firstly, anger must be acknowledged. Just as a drunkard cannot be helped unless he realises he has a problem, so a person over whom anger has control. Secondly, anger must be confessed to the Lord as a sin, and His forgiveness sought and obtained. 1 John 1:9 tells us, *'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'* Likewise we are urged in James 5:16, *'Confess your faults one to another.'* Dear reader, have your sins been cleansed at the foot of the cross? Thirdly, from faith God want us to restrain and control outbursts of anger. The God who has forgiven us our many sins, will give us the strength out of love to Him to do this. The common practice is to 'get it off one's chest.' However this will often cause much bitterness and heartache. Rather the believer will overcome and curb such outbursts. Proverbs 15:28 reads, *'The heart of the righteous studieth to answer: but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things'* Finally, we must resist the temptation to brood over the upsetting things others do to us, just as Jesus on the cross forgave His persecutors for their wrong to Him. Of Him it is said, *'Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously.'* (1 Peter 2:23).

The Christian, with the Saviour's strength must strive to practise SELF-CONTROL. In 2 Peter 1:5-6 we are urged, *'And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temper-ance* (Greek: moderation and self control). *'*Self-control refers to the God-pleasing control of our emotions and passions so that they do not get out of hand. We cannot stop our old adam from tempting us, but God can help us to fight against him when such temptations arise. So Paul stated in 1 Cor 9:27, *'But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.'*

There are different ways to learn self-control. The Christian will endeavour to grow spiritually through constant study of God's Word. Gal 5:22-25 tells us, *'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.'* As our faith and Christian life grows and matures, there will be a similar decline in strife, jealousy and anger. He will also do his utmost to slow his reactions, as Prov 15:1 teaches, *'A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.'* The good advice to, 'count to ten', could be changed to, 'Count to one hundred'. Christians often find that later they are glad when they have stopped themselves from saying a hasty word, thus avoiding the hurt of their loved ones in the home. The Christian will avoid adopting a negative mindset, always being critical of the words and actions of others. Phil 4:8 urges us, *'Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.'* Rather than being constantly critical of others, seeking revenge and harbouring bitterness, let us forgive and pray for them. A sincere praying heart will find it hard to harbour anger against others. Also, if we need to approach another, rather than using 'You', statements ('Why did you do that?') which point the finger of accusation at others, let us rather use 'I' statements ('I was hurt by... 'I am concerned about...').

Especially married couples, if their marriage is to be a happy one, must learn control of anger. Husband and wife cannot avoid disagreements, but if they follow their old Adam their marriage will soon be torn apart or even destroyed. The following are fine points of advice to follow. If there is an argument that needs to be resolved by someone giving way, do not wait for the other person to make the first move. You be the one. Col 3:19 teaches, *'Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.'* Do not repay evil with evil; but return kindness in response to evil. Settle matters as soon as possible, remembering the words of Paul (Eph 4:26-27), *'Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil.'* Cultivate a forgiving spirit in your heart, heeding the words of Col 3:12-13, *'Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.'*

To those who in faith pursue the ways of the righteous, the Lord gives the promise, *'To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life... But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good.'* (Rom 2:7,10). May God in His grace grant these blessings to us. Amen.

—GLW.

(Taken from Steadfast, 2004, Nos 4,5, pp38-39, 50-51)