

Good Monday Morning to my friends and family. It is time to continue looking into the Book of Proverbs. Come with me to a brief look at the Proverbs dealing with "anger." Now that is an issue every one of us has faced at some time ... how did we do? Let's see!

"MY TEMPER JUST GOT AWAY FROM ME!"

A Devotional prepared by Dr. Robert L. Morris

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"A quick-tempered man acts foolishly, and a man of wicked intentions is hated." (Proverbs 14:17)

What a foolish excuse we sometimes hear ... or perhaps have even used ... to define a troublesome situation in life. We generally think of "a hothead" as a person with a short fuse and a strong temper. These are some characteristics that combine together in a person and the result is often trouble. In other words, a hothead can be, and sometimes is a trouble-maker. We may not like to deal with this subject in a Devotional reading, but it is a very real issue in life. How this works in life is a part of our brief study in the Book of Proverbs.

Let's look at a few of the Proverbs that focus on this issue. These are rather pointed, to be sure, but King Solomon, with his God-given gift of wisdom, obviously knew something about the nature of people. The other people who wrote some of the Proverbs likewise had wisdom related to what life is all about. The contributions of God's appointed "writers" have given to us some choice and true, although difficult to find inspiring, some Proverbs. Instead of being highly inspirational, they should be considered "instructional," and we need to look at them.

1. "A wrathful man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger allays contention." (Proverbs 15:18)

2. "A quick-tempered man acts foolishly, and a man of wicked intentions is hated." (Proverbs 14:17)

3. "He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, but he who is impulsive exalts folly." (Proverbs 14:29)

4. "A man of great wrath will suffer punishment; for if you rescue him, you will have to do it again." (Proverbs 19:19)

5. "The north wind brings forth rain, and a backbiting tongue an angry countenance." (Proverbs 25:23)

6. "Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls." (Proverbs 25:28)

7. "An angry man stirs up strife, and a furious man abounds in transgressions." (Proverbs 29:22)

Awesomely challenging, aren't they? Now, note the powerful contrast, also found in one of the Proverbs inspired by the Spirit of God through the heart and pen of King Solomon.

"He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city." (Proverbs 16:32)

The Hebrew language is very picturesque. It is known for that characteristic. Each letter of the Hebrew alphabet is a representation of some object, living or inanimate. The whole language is built on this concept. For example, let's look briefly at a couple of the verses above and when we look at the Hebrew words the picture becomes a little clearer. For this we will look at the first of the proverbs used above:

"A wrathful man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger allays contention." (Proverbs 15:18)

The Hebrew word for wrathful is הַמָּדָה – (hēmāh) from the verb יָהָם (yāhām) meaning to be hot, to be hot with anger, to be furious, to be a heated spirit. Therefore, a wrathful man is one who is hot-tempered and therefore quick to react whereas the opposite would be one who would thoughtfully respond. Perhaps Proverbs 15:18 should be translated: "A man who is hot-tempered acts foolishly, and a man who responds thoughtfully alleviates contention."

From the second Proverb listed above, and the one selected as the key verse for this Devotional, the picturesque nature of the Hebrew language is even more evident. "A quick-tempered man acts foolishly, and a man of wicked intentions is hated." (Proverbs 14:17)

Here we look at the Hebrew word אַפַּיִם – ('apāyīm), translated "quick-tempered." It derives from the verb אָנַף – (ā'nap) that is translated by the English word "to breathe through the nose," "to snort." This is a compound word. The first part is the Hebrew word קָצַר – (q'šar) meaning "to be shortened." The grammatical form used in this Proverb is what is known as "the dual form," a part of Hebrew grammar that identifies two parts or elements of something. Therefore, what we have here is a reference not to two noses but rather to the two nostrils of the nose. Perhaps the most accurate translation is by the English words short-nosed. The idea however is not of having a short nose but rather of being a "quick-tempered" person who "flares the nostrils;" "breathes through the nose;" or "snorts" as it were. In other words, it is not difficult to observe someone who

is “hotheaded,” “quick-tempered,” or “reactionary.” The features on the face seem to change as the irritant, whatever it is, effects the person.

It is no wonder then that in the section known as Words of the Wise we find some carefully chosen words of advice: “Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul.” (Proverbs 22:24-25)

A question emerges immediately. “Is all anger sin?” The answer is just as easily found. It is “No.” The issue is, “what causes anger,” and “how do I respond to what, or to whom has caused the anger?” The Apostle Paul, though not the author of any of the Book of Proverbs, quoted what we may easily identify as a Proverb written by King David. In His Letter to the Ephesian Christians Paul wrote: “Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.” (Ephesians 4:26, 27; quoting Psalm 4:4 and referring to Psalm 37:8)

The Bible refers to the fact that there are times when even God is angry. Obviously then, there is “an anger” that is not in itself sin, for no one can charge God with sin. He is the absolute epitome of holiness, and whatever He does is in the parameters of that holiness. We can find many Scriptural references that speak of God’s anger. Let’s just use this one for this Devotional. Its focus is on the Children of Israel as they left Egypt, but disobeyed God. “The LORD’s anger burned against Israel, and He made them wander in the wilderness 40 years until the whole generation that had done what was evil in the LORD’s sight was gone.” (Number 32:13; HCSB)

But how can we define “anger” in the light of the intent of this Devotional? From various dictionaries I have put this definition together. It is the definition of the human anger against which King Solomon wrote in his Proverbs. It is the kind of anger the Apostle Paul referred to his Letter to the Ephesians, as quoted above. I suggest that anger is a human emotion or feeling of strong displeasure that has the potential of eliciting a response of hostility, antagonism, or even harm toward a person, persons, or an organization from which the irritant has emerged. The anger itself is not sin. That is to say that feeling “anger” is a normal response to various irritants such as words or actions that are contrary to the Word of God, and known to be harmful to others. But it is how one responds to that “anger” that makes the difference between normal Christian behavior and sinfulness. There are some actions of ungodly people, individually, collectively, or through an organizational context in the world against which a Christian rightly feels extremely negative, but that Christian is counseled by the Apostle Paul to not let that occasion result in an urge to retaliate and cause harm to others. The Holy Spirit is divinely creative and can bring to a praying heart a means whereby a solution to the troubling matter may be discovered, an answer to difficult questions revealed, and God’s grace for a calm spirit experienced. In it all, the problem may be solved and a life that is lived peacefully, victoriously, and triumphantly in spite of the problem will be the beautiful result. In this, the teaching of the Apostle Paul will be in place: “The peace of God, which surpasses every thought, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7; HCSB)

I want to close this Devotional with one of the great hymns of the Church. I love this hymn because in its six verses it packs a powerful collection of theological truth for our minds and hearts. I trust you will not only read it, but perhaps sing it, even though it is not the most familiar of the hymns. It was written in 1925 by Kate B. Wilkinson, and the most familiar music I know for this hymn was composed by A. Cyril Barham-Gould in that same year.

MAY THE MIND OF CHRIST, MY SAVIOR

1. May the mind of Christ, my Savior, live in me from day to day,
By His love and pow’r controlling all I do and say.
2. May the Word of God dwell richly in my heart from hour to hour,
So that all may see I triumph only thro’ His pow’r.
3. May the peace of God my Father rule my life in ev’ry thing,
That I may be calm to comfort sick and sorrowing..
4. May the love of Jesus fill me as the waters fill the sea;
Him exalting, self-abasing – this is victory.
5. May I run the race before me, strong and brave to face the foe,
Looking only unto Jesus as I onward go.
6. May His beauty rest upon me as I seek the lost to win;
And may they forget the channel, seeing only Him.