

Slow to Anger Is Better

Proverbs 16:32

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“He that is than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.” – Proverbs 16:32 (Cf. 14:17, 29; 15:18; 25:15).

As is the case many, many times throughout the Book, Solomon groups his comments together basically by theme. Here in chapter 16 he has grouped his teaching along the theme of “The better way of life through glorifying and serving the Lord”. His basic idea at this point is that contrary to the many, in our day and age (as well as back in Solomons’) who would say it is good to vent one’s anger, Proverbs advocates being **slow to anger**. Only a **mighty** person, likened to the person who is strong enough to take a city, is capable of controlling his anger (referred to as “**rules his spirit**”).

The Bible has a great deal to say about anger and how we must think of it:

1. First, and well-known – Anger is basically Forbidden, if unjust or uncontrolled.

Eccl 7:9 Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, For anger rests in the bosom of fools.

Matt 5:22 But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.

Rom 12:19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.

We are exhorted to be those who control our tempers and not to allow ourselves to be moved by circumstances to displays of emotions given what goes on around us. It is either godly or glorifying to God.

2. One of the reasons for this is that anger is a work of the flesh.

Gal 5:20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,

In Paul’s discussion of the things that demonstrate sinful, fleshly indulgence, anger, in its various forms are clearly shown to be distasteful to God and to be avoided in the lives of His children!

3. Along this same line, Solomon, speaking as a Prophet of God distinctly tells us that indulgence in anger is a characteristic of fools.

He does this several times:

Prov 12:16 A fool's wrath is known at once, But a prudent man covers shame.

Prov 14:29 He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, But he who is impulsive exalts folly.

Prov 27:3 A stone is heavy and sand is weighty, But a fool's wrath is heavier than both of them.

Ecc 7:9 Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, For anger rests in the bosom of fools.

4. Connected with

We're also told that the demonstration, the giving in to anger and letting it show itself in our lives is connected with several other distasteful aspects of human sin:

- It is a function of Pride.

Prov 21:24 A proud and haughty man—"Scoffer" is his name; He acts with arrogant pride.

- It demonstrates Cruelty.

Gen 49:7 Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; And their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob And scatter them in Israel.

Prov 27:3-4 A stone is heavy and sand is weighty, But a fool's wrath is heavier than both of them. 4 Wrath is cruel and anger a torrent, But who is able to stand before jealousy?

Clamor and evil speaking.

Eph 4:31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.

Malice and blasphemy.

Col 3:8 But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.

- It virtually always results in some form of Strife and contention.

Prov 21:19 Better to dwell in the wilderness, Than with a contentious and angry woman.

Prov 29:22 An angry man stirs up strife, And a furious man abounds in transgression.

Prov 30:33 For as the churning of milk produces butter, And wringing the nose produces blood, So the forcing of wrath produces strife.

5. Anger is pretty much never something that is profitable, but rather it always seems to Bring its own punishment.

Job 5:2 For wrath kills a foolish man, And envy slays a simple one.

Prov 19:19 A man of great wrath will suffer punishment; For if you rescue him, you will have to do it again.

Prov 25:28 Whoever has no rule over his own spirit Is like a city broken down, without walls.

6. Also, Solomon tells us anger can be a result of the use of what he calls “Grievous words” which, he tells us often stirs up anger in those to whom we speak thus.

- There are illustrations of this in the Bible to drive this truth home:
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Judg 12:4 Now Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead and fought against Ephraim. And the men of Gilead defeated Ephraim, because they said, “You Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites and among the Manassites.”

2 Sam 19:43 And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, and said, “We have ten shares in the king; therefore we also have more right to David than you. Why then do you despise us—were we not the first to advise bringing back our king?” Yet the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel.

Prov 15:1 A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.

7. Also, the Bible tells us that Anger is something we can control and so we ought not allow it to betray us into sin.

Pss 37:8 Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; Do not fret—it only causes harm.

Eph 4:26 “Be angry, and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath,

8. Along that same line, Scripture tells us that in prayer we, in spite of our human and fleshly natures, can be free from anger and its’ terrible and ungodly effects.

1 Tim 2:8 I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting;

9. Further more, the Bible tells us that Anger may be averted by the proper use of wisdom.

Prov 29:8 Scoffers set a city aflame, But wise men turn away wrath.

10. As in some many circumstances and situations, Scripture tells us that proper meekness pacifies anger.

Prov 15:1 A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.

Eccl 10:4 If the spirit of the ruler rises against you, Do not leave your post; For conciliation pacifies great offenses.

11. Though anger and the provocation of other is never acceptable, we're told that Children should never be provoked to anger.

Eph 6:4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

Col 3:21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.

12. Of course, we can never just “be rid” of the human weakness that leads to anger, but we can build the capacity to be sure and be slow to become angry.

Prov 15:18 A wrathful man stirs up strife, But he who is slow to anger allays contention.

Prov 16:32 He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

Prov 19:11 The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, And his glory is to overlook a transgression.

Titus 1:7 For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money,

James 1:19 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;

13. Anger Being such a negative quality, Scripture tells us that we ought to avoid those given to anger (fall into it frequently or easily).

Gen 49:6 Let not my soul enter their council; Let not my honor be united to their assembly; For in their anger they slew a man, And in their self-will they hamstrung an ox.

Prov 22:24 Make no friendship with an angry man, And with a furious man do not go,

14. All of this being said, the scripture does give some illustrations of Justifiable anger – this is Illustrated by

1. Our Lord.

Mark 3:5 And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts, He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored as whole as the other.

2. Jacob.

Gen 31:36 Then Jacob was angry and rebuked Laban, and Jacob answered and said to Laban: “What is my trespass? What is my sin, that you have so hotly pursued me?”

3. Moses.

Ex 11:8 And all these your servants shall come down to me and bow down to me, saying, ‘Get out, and all the people who follow you!’ After that I will go out.” Then he went out from Pharaoh in great anger.

Ex 32:19 So it was, as soon as he came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing. So Moses’ anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain.

Lev 10:16 Then Moses made careful inquiry about the goat of the sin offering, and there it was—burned up. And he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron who were left, saying,

Num 16:15 Then Moses was very angry, and said to the LORD, “Do not respect their offering. I have not taken one donkey from them, nor have I hurt one of them.”

Nehemiah.

Neh 5:6 And I became very angry when I heard their outcry and these words.

Neh 13:17 Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said to them, "What evil thing is this that you do, by which you profane the Sabbath day?"

Neh 13:25 So I contended with them and cursed them, struck some of them and pulled out their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, "You shall not give your daughters as wives to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves."

15. There are also Biblical Demonstrations of Sinful Anger – These are Illustrated by:

1. Cain.

Gen 4:5–6 but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. 6 So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?"

2. Esau.

Gen 27:45 until your brother's anger turns away from you, and he forgets what you have done to him; then I will send and bring you from there. Why should I be bereaved also of you both in one day?"

3. Simeon and Levi.

Gen 49:5–7 "Simeon and Levi are brothers; Instruments of cruelty are in their dwelling place. 6 Let not my soul enter their council; Let not my honor be united to their assembly; For in their anger they slew a man, And in their self-will they hamstrung an ox. 7 Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; And their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob And scatter them in Israel."

4. Moses.

Num 20:10–11 And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?" 11 Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank."

5. Balaam.

Num 22:27 *And when the donkey saw the Angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam; so Balaam's anger was aroused, and he struck the donkey with his staff.*

6. Saul.

1 Sam 20:30 *Then Saul's anger was aroused against Jonathan, and he said to him, "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of your mother's nakedness?"*

7. Ahab.

1 Kin 21:4 *So Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him; for he had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers." And he lay down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no food.*

8. Naaman.

2 Kin 5:11 *But Naaman became furious, and went away and said, "Indeed, I said to myself, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.'*

9. Asa.

2 Chr 16:10 *Then Asa was angry with the seer, and put him in prison, for he was enraged at him because of this. And Asa oppressed some of the people at that time.*

10. Uzziah.

2 Chr 26:19 *Then Uzziah became furious; and he had a censer in his hand to burn incense. And while he was angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead, before the priests in the house of the LORD, beside the incense altar.*

11. Haman.

Esth 3:5 When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow or pay him homage, Haman was filled with wrath.

12. Nebuchadnezzar.

Dan 3:13 Then Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed- Nego. So they brought these men before the king.

13. Jonah.

Jon 4:4 Then the LORD said, “Is it right for you to be angry?”

14. Herod.

Matt 2:16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men.

15. Jews.

Luke 4:28 So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath,

16. High priest, etc.

Acts 5:17 Then the high priest rose up, and all those who were with him (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation,

Acts 7:54 When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth.

Let’s talk for a moment about the simple matter of the interpretation of our verse here...“*Slow to anger*” is opposed to quick-tempered or irascible. He that rules his spirit is one who is master, not only of his temper, but of all his passions. The first deserves more praise than a hero in war. The second effects a nobler conquest than the general who takes possession of a city.

We have already talked a bit about various illustrations of anger and the Bible's thoughts on anger, on both sides of matter, positive and negative.

- Job, by his patience under exceptional provocation from wife and so-called friends, was more worthy of admiration than
- Samson, that mighty slaughterer of the Philistines, who would seem to have been more or less governed by passion, even when doing the Lord's work.
- Gideon's rule over his spirit was more to his credit than even his victory over the Midianites.
- David was a greater man when he conquered Saul by generosity than when he slew Goliath; and by staying his hand from avenging himself upon Nabal than if he had spoiled his house.
- The meekness of Moses was the more remarkable considering the energy of his nature and his high position.

Thinking by way of application – I think we can readily see that one is apt to admire the world's "heroes", and to call those "great" who, at the expense of others, have exalted themselves. But these, for the most part, have been miserable slaves to their own passions. As a believer in God's Word, I must accept *His* judgment as to what constitutes true greatness, and I find it to be *self-conquest*. Far more difficult is it to subdue the enemy *within* than one without. "Revenge is sweet" to the natural man, and so is the glut of any strong desire. The voice of nature pleads, "I do well to be angry." The battle-field is the heart, whereon, "without observation," praise, or earthly gain, must be fought and won this battle. None know its cost save God and one besides. And none but God can aid in this warfare,—not the conflict of a day, but of life. However, to him who, in dependence upon God's grace and out of love to Christ, sets himself to fight this battle and to conquer self, the victory is assured. So long as he fights manfully under Christ's banner, and wears his spiritual armor night and day, let him not fear defeat. Present victories will be his, culminating in final and complete success. "To him that overcometh" is the promise. To be "more than conqueror" is the reward, "*more than*," because, once free, nothing shall ever need conquering again, nothing ever separate him from the love of God (Rom. 8:37, etc.). Self-conquest is the secret of power. It will give me the blessing of "the meek"—to "inherit the earth." It will give me to sit with Christ on His throne (Rev. 3:21).

Only let me fight till death, for until then "there is no discharge in this war" (Eccles. 8:8)!
