Do Not Confuse Your Bad Temper With the Burden of the Lord

It is true that Jesus drove the money changers out of the temple and overturned their tables. It is also true that He called the hypocritical religious leaders snakes and blind guides.

But He was the Son of God and we are not, and all too often, mean-spirited Christians point to His example in order to justify their carnal behavior. This is a dangerous mistake to make.

We confuse human anger with righteous indignation and our bad temper with the burden of the Lord. We think that the louder we shout, the more fearless we are, and the more extreme our rhetoric, the deeper our devotion.

In reality, we are sometimes out of control, speaking in the flesh, posting whatever pops into our minds, and giving place to our own frustration and anger. This is anything but the Spirit of the Lord. Put another way, there is a massive difference between venting and being God's voices.

The fact is that we can be bold without being brash. We can be anointed without being obnoxious. We can be courageous without being carnal. We can be immovable without being idiots.

But in many circles these days, if you're not nasty you're considered weak. If you're not mean-spirited you're deemed spineless. If you don't curse your enemies or call them names you're a compromiser. How on earth did we get so confused?

Jacob (James) said it like this: "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human

anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires" (Jas. 1:19-20, NIV).

Even if the cause is right, if we approach it in the wrong spirit, we will not get the results that God desires.

Are there times when we are to rebuke and correct? Absolutely.

Are there times when we must call out evil? Without a doubt.

But there is a right way and a wrong way to do it, a right spirit and a wrong spirit. God forbid that we use spiritual jargon and "Christianese" to justify our lack of self-control.

This is especially important for ministers of the gospel, since we, to a particular degree, are looked at as the Lord's representatives. How dare we attribute to His Spirit our fleshly behavior.

Paul gave these clear instructions to his spiritual son Timothy: "And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will" (2 Tim. 2:24-26, ESV).

To be contentious and quarrelsome is to be dominated by the flesh. And flesh will only produce more flesh. Count on it.

And note this carefully. This is the very same Paul who wrote to this very same Timothy in this very same letter, "preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2).

We *can* be confrontational. We *can* correct and rebuke with boldness and clarity. But we do it with divine restraint. We do it with a broken heart. And we do it with love. (If you

don’t truly love the person you are rebuking, you do not have God’s heart, and if we’re not patient, we’re not walking in the Spirit.)

That’s why Paul gave these directives to the believers in Rome: “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. … Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ To the contrary, ‘if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:14, 17-21).

Yet we are so often reactionary, becoming just as ugly as the thing we oppose and sounding just as bigoted as the ones we call out as bigots.

Somebody (or something) pushes our button, we vent and go on a tirade (maybe even quoting a Scripture verse or two along the way), then we justify it as holy boldness or righteous indignation.

In reality, it is nothing more than pride, immaturity and lack of self-restraint.

And what happens when someone comes to give us loving correction and calls us to step higher? We castigate *them*, calling them spineless cowards, claiming they are afraid of confrontation, and equating their godly opposition with persecution. “You’re not going to stop me from preaching what God tells me to preach!” we thunder. “No way I’m backing down.”

We think we’re being so bold. In reality, we’re just being babies.

I encourage you to read through the Book of Proverbs, marking every verse dealing with the tongue or with our words. Then mark down every verse dealing with anger or lack of self-restraint.

Then, use those verses as guidelines for what to say and how to say it. It might just change your life. As it is written, “Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin” (Prov. 13:3). {eoa}

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