

Stay Calm and Don't Bite My Head Off

Is it just me, or does it seem like people today are way too angry? There have been three highly publicized incidents of road rage in our nation in the past seven days, including one on a New Orleans street that killed former NFL player Will Smith. Last week in Houston, two women began pulling each other's hair and punching each other in the parking lot of the Houston Zoo. They were fighting over a parking space.

And then there's the embarrassing video, now going viral, of a woman screaming at an American Airlines ticket agent on March 24 because her flight to Florida from New York was delayed. She felt she had the right to verbally assault the airline employee because she had been waiting a year to take her children on a Disney cruise.

I don't know what triggered this sudden volcanic eruption of national anger. Is it too much coffee? Are people not getting enough sleep? Is it social media, which now allows otherwise rational people to mount their virtual soapboxes and launch hateful tirades against the outrage-of-the-day on Facebook: Obamacare, illegal immigrants, racism in Hollywood, Hillary Clinton's emails, Donald Trump's tweets or Kim Kardashian's latest inappropriate Instagram post?

We may not have all the information about the topic we are angry about. But we are upset! We have an opinion! We will stomp our feet and drop F-bombs to make our points! WE WILL USE ALL CAPS AND MANY EXCLAMATION MARKS!!!

This tendency toward exclamatory outrage certainly characterizes the 2016 presidential election. We are so polarized now—Red v. Blue, Fox v. CNN, Trump v. Cruz, Hillary v. Bernie—that close relatives and good friends have stopped

speaking to each other. Verbal barbs, laced with profanity, are flying everywhere. Everybody is mad. We are at war, and it is anything but civil.

What grieves me most about this barrage of anger is that Christians are fueling it along with everyone else. In the name of “righteous anger” we lob our verbal grenades—not only at the evils of the world but also at each other when someone disagrees with us.

I want to simply remind my brothers and sisters of three biblical guidelines that are very relevant during this season of frayed nerves:

1. Think before you speak, and consider saying nothing at all.

The apostle James said it best: “But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger” (James 1:19). My Southern relatives often say of an argument that does not affect them: “I don’t have a dog in this fight.” You don’t have to jump into every debate. Oftentimes, the wisest man is the one who says nothing. Throwing in your “two cents” can sometimes cause a raging fire to spread. Just be quiet and let the fire go out.

2. Promote peace, not arguments. We are called to be “ambassadors” for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20). But the best ambassadors are those with tact. They don’t go around stirring up emotions, flaring their nostrils and rattling swords. Skilled ambassadors use wisdom to promote goodwill. This doesn’t mean they don’t confront wrong or bring correction, but their words are “seasoned with grace” (Col. 4:6). The apostle Paul told the earliest Christians: “So then pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another” (Rom. 14:19). Don’t let the devil use you to tear people down.

3. Frame your words with kindness. It is currently hip to be hot-headed, and this is true among both Democrats and

Republicans. But the last time I checked, Fox News was not commissioned by God to provide the standard for Christian behavior. Your favorite political pundit may be cheered for his verbal jabs and snappy comebacks, but that does not give you the right to be abrasive with people who disagree with your views. The fruit of the Spirit includes love, peace, kindness and gentleness (Gal. 5:22-23).

The Bible doesn't have good things to say about angry people. Proverbs 29:22 says: "An angry man stirs up strife, and a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression." Proverbs 22:24 warns that we should not be friends with hot-tempered people, while Proverbs 14:16 states bluntly that "hot-headed" people are actually fools. Meanwhile the book of James, which has been called the "Proverbs of the New Testament," declares: "For the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God."

Anger is in style today, and our culture may get so angry that the fury boils over in the streets. But those who follow Christ shouldn't be taking our cues from this outraged world. A soft answer turns away wrath. Let God filter your words before you say them. Let's respond in the Holy Spirit rather than react in the flesh.{eoa}