

## PROVERBS 15

## A SOFT ANSWER AND TRUE HUMILITY

**A soft answer (verse 1)**

*“A soft answer turneth away wrath; but grievous words stir up anger.”*

We greatly need an instrument that is capable of turning away wrath, for there is much wrath in the world to be turned away! It is assumed here that the anger is sinful in character, or excessive in degree; but there are some occasions in which a good man may do well to be angry. It is recorded of Jesus once, in the days of His earthly ministry, that He was angry; but this explanation is immediately added: He was “grieved for the hardness of their hearts” (Mark 3:5). It is safe for a disciple “to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.” If all of our anger were grief for sin, and our grief for sin were our only anger; then the emotion would neither displease God nor disturb men. If our love were like Christ’s; then our anger would be like His, too. But sadly, most of the anger that prevails is sinful and dangerous. On that side, there is special need for watching and prayer, lest we enter into temptation.

We are on dangerous ground when we are contending for our own cause. A man may indeed, through Divine grace, rule his spirit properly even there; but it is wise for him to be extremely watchful over himself. A great part of the danger lies in the suddenness of the explosion. To obtain a delay of a few moments is half the victory. “He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding; but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly” (chapter 14:29). Some knowledge of human nature is displayed in the advice once given to a passionate man – to count to 100 when he felt the fire burning within, before he permitted it to blaze forth by his lips. The wise man calculated that in many instances, the passion would cool down during the interval; and then the explosion would be entirely prevented. But we will suggest an improvement even upon that wise advice. Instead of merely securing an empty interval of time, fill up that time with an air that the flame of anger cannot live in! Fill it up with prayer, both for yourself and for your opponent. After praying to your Father for your offending brother and yourself, you may then speak to him safely. Pass your resentment through a period of communion with Him Who bought you with His blood, and then your anger will come out like Christ’s – a simple grief for a brother’s sin, and a holy watchfulness for truth.

This is how we should treat our own anger, but how shall we deal with the anger of other people? Turn it away by a soft answer! The most important practical rule to guide us when we are under provocation is to not consider how hard a blow we can deal in return, but rather – consistent with a character for Christian meekness – to see how far we can yield without being faithless to truth and to our God. And in this matter, as well as in all others, we must look to our Great Example! In Jesus, we learn the answer from heaven to the anger of earth! He is God’s soft answer to the wrath of mankind. The answer is soft, and yet it

is the greatest power that can be applied. In fact, it is the only power that will prevail to turn wrath away, and to win the wrathful back to love!

### **Holiness and love (verses 16-17)**

*“Better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.”*

Solomon said in the foregoing verse that he who does not have a large estate or a great income, but simply a cheerful spirit, has a continual feast. Christian contentment and joy in the Lord will make one’s life easy and pleasant. But here, the wise man tells us what is necessary to that cheerfulness of spirit which furnishes even a poor man with a continual feast – namely, holiness and love. If we manage what we have, enjoy it in the fear of the Lord, and serve Him faithfully with the little we have; then it will be more comfortable and more profitable than great treasure which – apart from the fear of God – brings trouble with it. But next to the fear of God, peace and love among the brethren is also necessary to the comfort of this life. Although the food may be common, and their means so small that they can afford no better; yet love will sweeten it, and they may be as merry over it as if they had all dainties!



### **Before honor is humility (verse 33)**

*“The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom; and before honour is humility.”*

Humiliation of soul always brings a positive blessing with it. If we empty our hearts of self, then God will fill them with His love. He who desires close communion with Christ should remember this word of the Lord: “To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word” (Isa. 66:2). We must grow downward, so that we may grow upward; for the sweetest fellowship with heaven is to be had by humble souls, and by them alone. The Lord will deny no blessing to a thoroughly humbled spirit. “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” with all its riches and treasures! The whole “bank account” of God shall be made over, by deed of gift, to the soul who is humble enough to be able to receive it without growing proud because of it. When a person is sincerely humble, and never ventures to touch so much as a grain of the praise; then there is scarcely any limit to what God will do for him! True humility is a flower which will adorn any garden. This is a sauce with which we may season every dish of life. Whether it is applied to our prayer or praise, or our work or suffering – the genuine salt of humility cannot be used in excess!

*Lord, we confess that we are, by nature, far from humble. We pray for grace to cast ourselves simply upon the full resources of the Gospel, and to follow the Great Example of humility that has been set for us by our Meek and Lowly Savior! Amen.*