

THE
DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERS
OF
TRUE BELIEVERS.

IV. IN RELATION TO THEIR MEEKNESS, AS AN EVIDENCE OF GREAT UNDERSTANDING, AND THE FOLLY OF PASSIONATENESS.*

PROVERBS xiv. 29.

He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit, exalteth folly.

THERE is a great affinity betwixt sinful anger, and cursing, swearing, profanation of the name of God. It is the mother, and they are the daughters ordinarily; though in all it does not bring them forth, yet they are hardly to be found with a meek and quiet spirit.

The scope of these words is to beat down sinful anger, a common evil, producing much mischief. And in them,

1. There is the excellency of meekness. Meekness is the bridle of anger or wrath; the meek man is *slow to* [Heb. of] *wrath*. He is one that does not soon take offence, and keeps such a command over his passion, that it does not unreasonably and violently break out, breaking up as it were the doors of his soul and flying forth and raging. The excellency of this is, that such a one is an understanding man, *of great understanding*. Worldly men, whose pride and passion is to them instead of law and reason, count such a one a poor mean-spirited, silly man, that does not understand himself; for that when he receives an injury, he does not presently take fire and resent it: but as the understanding, so the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God; and the world's fool is God's wise man.

2. The mischief of passionateness, and the evil thereof. The passionate man is *hasty of spirit*; his passion runs before his reason. The original calls him *short*, or *cutted of spirit*. He is so far from being slow to wrath, that his spirit finds a short way to it. His fiery spirit is as tinder to every spark of provocation, and at one

* This subject was handled at Ettrick in October, 1724.

step is forward in the midst of wrath or sinful anger. The ill of this is that he *exalts*, or *lifts up his own folly* like a standard, making it visible to all about him. He thinks by that means to proclaim his worth, and make others stand in awe of him : but in very deed he proclaims his folly, that is, his sinfulness, corruption, naughtiness, and wickedness.

So here anger is held forth as a passion dangerous and difficult to manage, which the wise will therefore be loath to venture into, and when they are in, will labour to keep a bridle upon ; but fools rashly venture on, and let loose the bridle to it, and in it.

The text gives a foundation for the following doctrines.

Doct. I. The man that is slow of wrath or anger, shews great wisdom and understanding in his meek and peaceable disposition and deportment.

Doct. II. The passionate man proclaims his folly and naughtiness in his unbridled passion and sinful anger.

I shall handle each doctrine in order.

Doct. I. The man that is slow of wrath or anger, shews great wisdom and understanding in his meek and peaceable disposition and deportment.

In discoursing from this doctrine, I shall,

I. Consider the nature of wrath or anger in general.

II. Shew what it is to be slow of wrath.

III. In what respects he that is slow of wrath is of great understanding.

IV. Make some improvement.

I. I am to consider the nature of wrath or anger in general. Anger or wrath is a passion which is not of itself sinful, but is either good or ill as it is regulated : and so it differs from fretting, murmuring, and envy, which can never be good or allowable in any case. This is evident from the scripture's attributing anger or wrath to God. We find it in Christ, Mark iii. 5. *He looked round about him with anger.* So that without question there is an allowable and holy anger. Such was that of Moses, of whom it is said, that, on his descent from the mountain, when he saw the calf and the dancing, *his anger waxed hot*, Exod. xxiii. 26. And this is our duty, Eph. iv. 26. *Be ye angry, and sin not.* But such is the corruption of man's nature, that when this passion riseth in his breast, it is exceedingly hard to keep it within bounds, and rarely is it that it overflows not the banks. Therefore the apostle exhorts, that *all wrath and anger be put away*, Eph. iv. 31.

Anger is like a fire, that is a good servant, but an ill master. It is a servant to the meek, but a master to the passionate. The passion of anger is like wind to the ship: so is it to the soul called to steer its course to Immanuel's land.

1. If there be a dead calm, and the winds blow not at all, or very weakly, the ship does not make way. And if men be so stupid, indolent, and unconcerned, that their spirits will not stir in them, whatever dishonour they see done to God, these are standing still in the way to heaven. And many such there be, who are all fire in their own matters, but in those of God, their hearts are dead like a stone. And if their hearts on such occasions stir in them, but very weakly, they are making but little progress. Such was the case of Eli: *His sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not*, 1 Sam. iii. 13. It was not so with Paul: for *his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city [Athens] wholly given to idolatry*, Acts xvii. 16.

2. If the wind is brisk enough but yet is contrary, the ship will at best have much ado with it, and may be driven into a shore which the crew desired not to see. So if men's anger be in itself sinful, if their anger burn against what is good and just, against their own mercy, their duty, such things or persons as are for their real good, as the Jews' wrath was against Christ, his apostles, and their doctrine; such anger cannot fail of an unhappy event, driving the soul into much sin, and driving at length into destruction, if that wind do not turn, and they change their course. This was the case of the Jews, of whom the apostle says, 1 Thess. ii. 15, 16, "Who hath killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles, that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway; for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost."

3. Though the wind be not contrary, yet if it be too impetuous and violent, it may dash the ship on rocks, and split it. So though men's anger may have a just ground, yet if it prove excessive and boisterous, it may run men headlong into great mischiefs, to the dishonour of God, and ruin of themselves and others. And therefore Jacob thus censures that of Simeon and Levi, Gen. xlix. 7. "Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel." Oft-times reason lets in anger into one's breast; but then anger turns out reason to the door, and carries on all precipitantly without reason or discretion: like one that brings in a coal to his hearth, because of the cold, but unwarily lets it fall on tow, which sets the house on fire.

The ingredients of anger are these following.

1. A commotion or trouble of the spirit, which ariseth from an apprehension of an injury. The injury apprehended strikes on men's spirit, and disturbs its repose. And many times the sinfulness of it riseth here, that there is an injury apprehended where there is none, or it is apprehended to be greater than it really is. In both cases it is rash anger; hence our Lord says, Matth. v. 22. "Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." But however it is, as to the cause of it, it is according to its name an anger, vexation or trouble of spirit, in its nature, which a wise man will be loath to admit without a good cause, 2 Pet. ii. 7.

2. Hatred, which is bent against the injury apprehended, that they cannot think on it but with detestation. And in respect of this anger is called indignation. And if the injury be real, and consequently a sinful thing, and the hatred and indignation be confined to it, the anger in that case is laudable, so that it keep due proportion with the offence, 2 Cor. vi. 11. But here again the sinfulness of anger riseth, while like a flood-water it does not only fill the channel, but overflows the banks; the hatred being not only directed against our neighbour's sin and offence, but his person, whom we are obliged to love as ourselves, notwithstanding of his real or apprehended injuries to us, Matth. v. 44.

3. Grief, for whosoever is angry is grieved too, Mark iii. 5. And this ariseth from the conceived injury too which is hated. But the grief is on the account of the party, or parties injured; and in lawful anger it is impartial, and goes as broad as the injury goes: as in our Lord's anger, he was "grieved for the hardness of their hearts." He was grieved for it as an injury to his Father, to himself, and to their own souls. And here is another joint, at which our anger is often distorted, and becomes sinful. The grief the angry man has, often looks only to himself as slighted, despised, and wronged; upon that his anger feeds: but he has no regard to the dishonour of God, nor to the wrong done to the injurer's own soul, by the injury to us.

4. A desire of the vindication of the right and honour of the injured. And from this appetite or desire it hath one of its names in the New Testament, *οργη*. And this desire is allowable as far as it seeks what only in a way of justice and equity is necessary to vindicate the right and honour of the injured, and withal seeks it in an orderly and allowable way. The meek desire that in their anger; but they commit it to God to whom it belongs. But here again our

nger usually becomes sinful; partly, while that desire respects only their own right and honour, and we have no concern for the vindication of the honour of God and our neighbour; partly, while men are bent on revenge, which is measured not by the rule of moderation, justice, and equity, but by the satisfying of an exorbitant passion; and partly, while men are by it carried to avenge themselves, while yet they have no lawful power, Rom. xii. 19. whence come scoldings, quarrelings, beatings, and fightings.

Thus ye may see that anger is a passion uneasy to one's self, compounded of bitter ingredients and uneasy passions; in which one walks on slippery ground, where he is apt to fall headlong.

II. I come now to shew what it is to be slow of wrath. It imports these three things.

1. Being slow to take up anger in one's own cause. The wise man is not soon angry, Prov. xiv. 17. It is wisdom indeed to be very tender of God's honour, but to be more indifferent about our own personal interests, as Moses was. But the world's way is the reverse of this; they are lions in their own cause, but lambs in the matters of God. However, in all cases the wise are not rash with their anger; they consider matters duly, put a charitable construction on actions that will bear one, and put up many offences, covering them with a mantle of love.

2. Managing it warily when it is taken up, being guided by the light of reason, and not by the fire of passion. This is to possess themselves, and not to be turned out of the possession of themselves by their passion, Luke xxi. 19. They find themselves on slippery ground, and therefore are slow to their motions: they see their danger, and therefore do the rather watch, lest they be precipitated into what will afterward bring them nothing but remorse.

3. Being easy to lay it down, Eph. iv. 26, 27; easy to forgive and forget injuries, Matth. xviii. 22. The more slow that anger burns, it is the easier to quench, it doth the easier die out. Thus he who has the rule over his own spirit, as he manageth his anger regularly while there is need for it, he shuts it out when there is no more use for it.

III. I proceed to shew in what respects he that is slow of wrath is of great understanding. Such a one thereby shews, that he does well understand,

1. His duty to God his sovereign Lord, Eccl. v. 2. If men understood that, they would not be so ready to take fire on every temptation. If they considered that God is the Judge of all and their Judge, to whom belongs vengeance; that he has by his command enjoined them patience, long-suffering, and forbearance; and

that he is slow of wrath towards themselves, and that they are obliged to be followers of God ; they would see it their duty to be slow to anger.

2. Himself. The passionate man thinks he will shew those that offend him, that he understands himself very well. But our text shews, that he hangs out a sign at his own door to tell that a fool dwells within, one who does not understand himself. If you saw one girt about with bags of powder run in among sparks, you would say he did not understand himself. He that is truly wise understands himself to have a mass of corruption within him, to be of like passions with others, that it is very hard for him to be angry and not sin, to bridle his passion sufficiently if once it get place ; and therefore he is slow to wrath, as one handles glasses tenderly and warily, that knows the nature of them.

3. Satan's diligence and malice against him, who will not lose a fair opportunity for tripping up his heels. He knows full well, that that evil spirit will blow the coal that he has cast in, if so he may bring it to a flame, and then say, *Aha, I am warm*, Eph. iv. 26, 27. He understands that Satan seeks first to trouble the waters, and then to fish in the muddy flood. The passionate fool sees nothing of this, till once he finds himself carried headlong, and afterwards comes to himself.

4. His real interest ; that to give up himself to his passion is to bring damage to himself, to let in an enemy that makes havock of soul and body at once. To see inhabitants breaking down their city, and dismantling it of its walls, whereby they should be defended from their enemies, we would say, they understood not their own interest. As little does the man that is hasty to wrath hasty in it, and slow at laying it down. He has no rule over his own spirit, Prov. xxv. *ult.* His passion masters his reason, and his grace too, if he have any : and so the good that is in may go out, and ill may come in.

5. Human nature, and what metal fallen Adam's sons and daughters are of. He is not surprised to meet with offences among mankind, more than with midges flying about him in the summer, or frost and snow pinching him in the winter. For as that is the nature of the seasons, so the other is the nature of sinful mankind. He considers that there is not one among them all to cast a stone at another : that as some offend him, he offends others too ; and therefore since he needs forbearance and forgiveness, he will give it too.

I come now to improve this subject ; and that in a use of exhortation.

Be slow of wrath, slow to take up anger, wary in managing you

spirits when angry, and ready to lay it down. For motives, consider,

1. It is a heaven-like disposition, it is a God-like and Christ-like temper, Joel ii. 13, "God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger. Matt. xi. 29, I am meek and lowly in heart," says Christ. And should we follow the dictates and way of the wicked world, which puts darkness for light? If we bear the name of Christians, let us follow the example of Christ.

2. The comfort of society depends on it, Col. iii. 13. O! what disorder does the want of this breed among neighbours, and in families! One fires his train, another catches the fire as flax or tow would do, and then the flame goes up; and Satan finds his account in it.

3. It is necessary for a man's own comfort. The hasty man will never want wo, while he lives in a sinful world. And what a pity is it that our peace and quiet should lie at the mercy of every one who has the ill disposition to give us a provocation? The meek man will maintain his quiet over the belly of these, and will be happy in bearing calmly the provocation that others are so unhappy as to give.

4. It is necessary to keep both one's self and others from the snare of sin. We are to pray, *Lead us not into temptation.* This is a necessary mean thereto, Prov. xv. 18, "A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife." Compare Matth. v. 2, *Blessed are the peace-makers.* He that is slow to anger keeps the bridle over his own passion, he lays in no fuel to another's, and so appeaseth strife, as the coal goes out when left alone on the hearth.

5. Consider the authority of God binding it on us, Jam. i. 19, *Let every man be—slow to wrath.* This is backed by the authority and example of the Mediator, who cast us a copy for our imitation. Matth. xi. 29, *I am meek and lowly in heart.* Let this double tie serve to bind down our spirits when they begin to swell sinfully.

6. What need we have of the Lord's being slow to anger towards us, Lam. iii. 22, 23, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness." There is no body so frequent, so unreasonable in their provocations to us as we towards him. What should come of us, if Heaven should fire against us at every provocation? We should be made to cry as those unreasonably did, Numb. xvii. 12, 13, "Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish. Whosoever cometh any thing near unto the tabernacle of the Lord, shall die: Shall we be consumed with dying?" What we need for ourselves, let us use to others.

7. *Lastly*, The want of it will provoke the Lord to anger against us. Remember the servant in the parable, Matth. xviii. 33, 34, "Shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him." God is almighty, able to revenge every disobedience; yet is *slow to anger*, Nah. i. 3. We are weak, and often can do no more than show ill-will. How then can it miss to provoke the Lord against us?

But here it is necessary to caution against sinful slackness to anger, whereby the necessary duties of justice and charity come to be omitted. It has indeed a semblance to meekness and slowness to wrath: but it is really the rock on the right hand of them, as passion is the rock on the left; and upon the one as well as the other the ship of the soul may be damaged, if it is not dashed in pieces. The difference between this slowness and sinful slackness is, that the former proceeds from true wisdom, as in the text, *viz.* spiritual and heavenly wisdom, wrought in men by the Spirit, through the word, Jam. iii. 17, the latter from a mere natural softness of temper which we call good humour, or from carnal wisdom, in both which the principle, manner, and end of the action are all confined within the circle of self, and so cannot be acceptable to God, as they are not the product of his sanctifying Spirit. And hence it is that the effect of them is often, as in this case, quite contrary to the rule of the word; which the effect of grace and spiritual wisdom can never be, Gal. v. 22, 23.

Now, the evil of this slackness lies in its causing a criminal omission of that duty which we owe to God, and to our neighbour, either by the tie of justice or charity. Such was the sinful slackness of Gallio, Acts xviii. 17, of the church of Corinth in not casting out the incestuous person, 1 Cor. v. with 2 Cor. vii. 11, and of Eli in not restraining his sons.

We have need to take heed how we steer our course then, keeping off sinful passion on the one hand, and sinful slackness on the other, studying a Christian meekness, a gracious slowness of wrath, whereof the new nature is the principle, the word, the rule and reason, the glory of God the chief end, and faith the mean by which we come to exercise it. All other meekness and slowness of wrath, will be found but spurious meekness and slowness, or sinful slackness.

Therefore let us look to Christ for the sanctifying of our nature, the extinguishing of the hellish fire of them by his Spirit working like water; let us entertain habitual impressions of the majesty of God, the spirituality of the law, and our own danger, on our spirits;

and labour to exercise this slowness to wrath, depending on Jesus as the head of influences for strength.

Doct. II. The passionate man proclaims his folly and naughtiness in his unbridled passion and sinful anger.

In discoursing from this doctrine, I shall,

I. Consider the nature of passion or sinful anger.

II. Shew how the passionate man proclaims his folly.

III. Make application.

I. I shall consider the nature of passion or sinful anger. And that we may understand it, let us view,

1. The causes of it.

2. The kinds of it.

3. The effects of it.

First, Let us view the causes constituting anger, sinful anger. Anger then is sinful anger and passion.

1. When it riseth without a just ground, having no cause for it assigned by grace or right reason as just. Hence our Lord speaks of one's being *angry without a cause*, Matth. v. 22. That is either, (1.) without any cause at all. The rush grows not without mire, nor the flag without water. But the heart of man can produce anger without any cause given him. There is a certain sourness of spirit that sometimes sits down on men, whereby they are angry while they know not wherefore. A humbling instance of the corruption of nature. (2.) Vainly, upon some light and trifling occasion, unworthy of such notice. There is no just cause for it; but the judgment is weak and yielding, and so gives way to passion.

But, O! how often do terrible flames arise from such trifling sparks, and the waters which at the beginning would hardly wet one's foot, or might easily be stepped over, come through this rash anger to overflow even to the neck? Prov. xvii. 14, "The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with."

2. When it keeps no due proportion with the offence, but in its degree quite exceeds the measure of the injury received, as in the case of Simeon and Levi respecting the Shechemites, Gen. xlix. 7. forecited, and that of David with regard to his design against Nabal, 1 Sam. xxv. 34. compare ver. 32, 33. It must needs be sinful anger, that turns men so far out of themselves, as to turn about their cart-wheel on the cumin, which might be beat out with a rod. Men need to take good heed lest they exceed; for when the smoke of passion rises, men see injuries as in a magnifying glass; and being once set on the passionate run, are apt to pursue beyond bounds.

3. When it is not directed to the honour of God, and the destruction of sin; but is confined within the cursed circle of self, Prov. xxi. 24, "Proud and haughty scorner is his name, who dealeth in proud wrath." God is dishonoured, as well as the man is wronged: but the passionate man has no concern for the former, but his concern is swallowed up in the latter. So it is a fire lighting on others, just to make them sacrifices to the pride and arrogance of a lofty heart, which thinks nothing too much for itself, Prov. xxviii. 25.

4. When it makes no due difference between the offender and the offence, but gives both one measure. It was the corrupt divinity of the Pharisees in Christ's time, Matth. v. 43. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy." But Christ, who never bade us love but hate offences, and acts of enmity, will have us nevertheless to love the persons even of offenders and our enemies, ver. 44. thereby showing that we in our anger make a great difference betwixt the offender and the offence. But alas! how little is this regarded, but the passion hand over head treats the offender and the offence alike, till they like the one no better than the other.

5. When the effects of it are sinful. If the fruits be sinful, the tree they grow on must be so, for the tree is known by its fruit. The effects of holy anger are just and good: but when anger puts a man so far out of himself, that it unfits him for his duty, or drives him on to revenge, or breaks out in clamour and evil speaking, and the like; it is easy to see that that fire is not from the altar, but, from another quarter. Moses himself had a fit of it, Psal. cvi. 33. "They provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips." But passion is never a whit the better of that, but the more to be feared, as a potent enemy which mastered so much meekness for a time as Moses was possessed of.

6. *Lastly*, When it is kept up and continued beyond due time, contrary to the apostle's counsel, Eph. iv. 26. *Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.* The keeping up of sinful anger is a double sin. It is sinful to admit it, it is more so to keep it up, and refuse to let it fall. It is not to be thought, that it is lawful to keep it up till the sun go down; for what is sinful in its rise, must be more so in its countenance. But the meaning is in these two things, (1.) As the sun with his scorching heat hastens to go down, like one running a race, Psal. xix. 5. so should we lay by our passion, which comes ordinarily far sooner to a height with us. (2.) As the setting sun bringing on the night, calls men to cast off their clothes, and so compose themselves to rest; so should we timely put off this part of the old man, and get our spirits composed. And particularly we ought not to lie down with it; for whereas the daylight affords a

variety of objects, that may serve to divert the force of passion, the darkness of the night hides all these, and leaves the fiery spirit to feed on that allenary, which raised it. So it gets leave to range through the several methods of revenge, Psal. xxxiv. 4.

Secondly, Let us view the kinds of sinful anger. In general, anger is twofold.

1. There is an anger essentially sinful, sinful in itself. And that is where there is no just ground of anger. Such was Jonah's anger at the withering of the gourd, and Saul's anger against the priests whom he murdered. The worst anger of this kind is, where that inflames anger that should be entertained with love and esteem. Such was Saul's anger against David: he was angry with him, just because he behaved himself well, and God prospered him. See Psal. cix. 3—5. Men may sin, in their anger at others for their sin: but to be angry at one for their duty, there can be no good in that. This kind of anger is like a water that has quite left its channel, or like fire in the thatch of a house, where it should never be.

2. There is an anger accidentally sinful: and that is, where there is indeed just ground for it, but it is ill managed, either by not keeping proportion with the offence, or not directing it to the honour of God, &c. Such was Moses' anger against the Israelites, and David's against Nabal: and the more of this is in it, and the more violent, the worse is the anger, and the more hellish; as Simeon and Levi's anger against the Shechemites. This is like a water which is indeed in its channel, but withal it is without it too; or like a fire which is indeed on the hearth, but withal coals of it scattered up and down the house. More particularly, there is,

1. A close sullen anger, called, Eph. iv. 31. *bitterness*, which is a fire that burns within the breast, with little noise. It is kept within, and makes one go with a bitter heart, and full of gall, a burden to himself and others till it be digested. It has more of discontent than revenge; and often carries not to actual revenge, either because they cannot, or for certain reasons will not. So it is very lingering, like a fire that has little vent. There is much of this in the world, which eats out the comfort of society, and men's own comfort. This is it that makes many go champing their own bridle, and gnawing on their own liver, and tinctures all their words and looks, as in the jaundice the overflowing gall colours the skin. And the nearer the relation is, it is the more dangerous; hence is that exhortation, Col. iii. 19. "Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them."

2. An open and impetuous anger, called their *wrath*, which is too violent to hold long. The hot spirit keeps it not in, as in the for-

mer case ; but it breaks forth like a thunder-shower, overflowing. It is a most dangerous thing, apt to precipitate men into such indecencies and wickednesses, that if they were themselves, they would be ready to say, *Am I a dog that I should do these things?* But the smoke of the passion strikes them blind while it lasts; for it is in effect a short madness. Men are apt to think little of this, unreasonably taking it for bravery of spirit. Prov. xxv. ult. and because it is soon over, and they rue it: but it leavens the whole man, it is fire set to the devil's train; and oft-times that is done in it, which it is too late to rue.

3. There is a pursuing implacable wrath, called there, *anger*; which is set upon revenge so, that they will never lay down their anger till they be revenged to their own satisfaction. This is not kept so close as the first kind, nor is it carried so precipitantly as the second; but is more open than the first, more deliberate than the second, and so is the more devilish. This is to be mad with reason, and may well be called malicious anger, and is at the utmost remove from the spirit of Christianity. The apostle calls it a *giving place to the devil*, Eph. iv. 27. In other kinds of anger the devil takes place; in this they give him place.

Again, more particularly, there may be observed a fourfold anger.

1. Anger that is long a-taking up, and is soon laid down. This is the best sort of that ill thing; it speaks either a good natural temper, or great grace. It is like fire in wet wood, which is ill to kindle, and soon dies out. However, it is matter of humiliation, being sinful anger; and needs sprinkling of the blood of Christ, as well as the worst.

2. Anger soon taken up, and soon laid down. This is like fire in flint, flying out with a touch, but quickly vanish away. It is good it is soon laid down; as when one falls into a mire, the sooner out the better. But it is a great evil to be soon angry, Tit. i. 7. to sting like a wasp at a touch. It is very contrary to the nature of God, who is slow to anger; and makes people an easy prey to temptation, like a bunch of dry straw to a spark of fire, soon kindled and soon burned out.

3. Anger long a-taking up, and long a-laying down. This is like fire in iron, which is long a-heating, and long a-cooling too. It is good it is long a taking up, but very sinful that it is long a-laying down. Many value themselves, and are valued by others, upon their good temper, that are so long a-taking up anger, and can overlook so many offences; who are yet of such a disposition, that if once they be heartily angered, there is no gaining of them again. They are like fire in a moss, that is very ill to take fire, but when

once fired there is almost no quenching of it. And they, when once raised in anger, are implacable. This is most sinful and dangerous. Their name is in the black roll, Rom. i. 31. Satan has eminent place with such, Eph. iv. 26, 27. and they cannot walk in a course of communion with God, Matth. xviii. *ult.*

4. Anger soon taken up, and long a-laying down. This is like fire in oil or spirituous liquor, kindled with a touch, and burning vehemently, and continually while there is any thing to burn. This is the worst of all; it has all the mischief of the third kind, and that ill in it over and above, that it is soon taken up. It speaks a fearful height and power of sin, a person to be a perfect slave to his passion, who is guided neither by grace nor reason: and it is of all the most opposite to the spirit of Christianity.

Thirdly, Let us view the effects of sinful anger. I will hint at the general heads of them, as the particulars are too many.

1. It is mischievous to the body, a killing instrument to it, Job v. 2, *Wrath killeth the foolish man.* Therefore the scripture represents it as a sin against the sixth command, Matth. v. 21, 22. The transport of passion makes a man a tormentor to himself, inflame the heart, fire the eyes, render the visage fierce and pale, and loose as it were the very joints; and history affords several instances of persons who have been thrown into fevers, and died, by their passion. And it readily makes a sensible alteration on the body.

2. It fires the tongue in a particular manner, Jam. iii. 6, and that brings along with it a train of evils, Eph. iv. 31, quarreling, bitter words, railing and scolding, reviling and reproaching, swearing, cursing, fearful imprecations, blaspheming, &c. And all these, being traced to their original, are landed at the door of passion, which opening, sends out these as the smoke of the pit.

3. It disturbs society, and is destructive of it, Prov. xv. 18, "A wrathful man stirreth up strife. And where strife is, there is confusion, and every evil work," James iii. 16. It is the coal that fires families and neighbourhoods, and sets every one against another. Yea, hence proceed people's devouring one another, striking, fighting, wounding, and murdering: so that this passion has been the death of many, and brought many to an evil end.

4. It overclouds reason, as in the text. It carries a man out of himself, that he cannot judge of matters clearly, nor act deliberately; but it makes him rash and precipitate in his managements, so that when the fit is over, nothing remains to him by it but remorse.

5. *Lastly,* It unfits a man for his duty.—For the duty of his station; for often the passion makes him, that when he is doing, he knows not what he is doing.—For his duty to God, and mars any

thing of that kind in his hand, Jam. i. 29, "For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." To conclude in a word, the effects of sinful anger are in a lively manner, represented by Moses in his holy anger breaking the tables of the law, Exod. xxxii. 19. When sinful passion is up, what will it not do? it will precipitate men into all mischief.

II. The next head is to shew how the passionate man proclaims his folly. He plainly discovers that he does not truly understand his duty to God, himself, Satan's malice, his own interest, or human nature; of which I have spoke before. Further, he proclaims himself,

1. A proud man, Prov. xxi. 24. The passionate man is always a proud man, and the proud man is a fool in God's account, and in the account of all who understand themselves. Were there less pride, there would be less passion: but he who is conceited of his own excellency, cannot miss to fall into the snare, while he receives not from others what he thinks is due to his merit.

2. A weak man, one incapable to rule himself, Prov. xxv. *ult.* Is he not a weak man, who rules not himself by grace or reason, but is a slave to his passion, and must roll or flee away before it, as chaff before the wind. You know, that children, by reason of their weakness of spirit, are easily fretted and angered: and of the same make are the passionate, who on every trifling occasion lose the mastery of themselves.

3. An unmortified man, whose desires of the world's smiles are too vigorous, his uneasiness at its frowns too great, his expectations from the world by far too big. For these are the sources of unruly passion, always arising from one's being disappointed in some one thing or other, Col. iii. 3, 8. And an unmortified spirit is a foolish spirit, James iii. 17, 18.

4. A rash and precipitant man, dangerous to society, apt to run himself and others into snares, Prov. xxii. 24, 25. And this must oblige both himself and others to call him a foolish man. It is the character of a prudent man to be deliberate in his motions, and foreseeing: but the passionate man is the very reverse of this, Prov. xxii. 3, "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished."

5. *Lastly*, An unwatchful man, who has his enemies within him, without him, round about him, and yet cannot be brought to stand on his guard, and repress their motions, Prov. iv. 23, 24. This his practice is folly with a witness.

I shall now make some practical improvement of this subject.

USE I. Of humiliation and conviction.

1. It must be a dangerous and sinful thing designedly to provoke and stir up others to passion. Yet how many are there who make no bones of it, but will divert themselves with it? Thus the young and foolish especially, will please themselves in angering the aged and hasty. But let such know, that "fools make a mock at sin," Prov. xiv. 9. It is dangerous to please one's self with what is displeasing to God, and ensnaring to the soul of our neighbour.

2. What shame and confusion of face may cover every one of us, when we examine ourselves in this point? The picture of passion is drawn, and is it not an ugly one? But where is the man or woman that has not entertained this monster, and in whose breast it has not been bred many a time? O how unlike God and Christ has it made us, how unlike Christians, yea how-unlike rational men and women? Think not light of it, Eph. v. 6. compared with chap. iv. 31. We must be washed from the guilt of it by Christ's blood, and the fire of it must be quenched by his Spirit, else we will be undone for ever.

USE II. Of exhortation; which I offer in these two particulars.

First, Beware of provoking and stirring up others to passion. Lay in no fuel to that fire in the breasts of others, neither designedly nor any other manner of way, without exception of any thing but necessary duty. If that will provoke people's passion, there is no help for it. Better men be provoked than God, Acts iv. 19. But otherwise beware of it, as ye will answer it to the God that made you. To press this, consider,

1. The law of love binds it on you, *Love thy neighbour as thyself*. If you do so, you will be loath to provoke him; for you would not choose to be provoked yourself. If you love his soul as you are obliged to do, you will be as loath to stir up his passion, as to fire his house. If you love his peace and welfare, you will be loath to rob him of it.

2. That is to be a snare to him, to lead him into sin. God charged his people, Lev. xix. 14. "Thou shalt not put a stumbling-block before the blind;" and the apostle will have all to take heed, "that no man put a stumbling-block, or an occasion to fall in his brother's way," Rom. xiv. 13. To lead your neighbour into a mire, over a precipice where he might fall, and break a leg or an arm, you will own would be akin to murder. This is worse, as being of the nature of soul-murder.

3. You are partaker of the guilt which is brought on another by your means: and it will justly be charged on you, as instrumental in it, laying the snare for them, 1 Kings xxi. 25. As he who lays the stumbling-block before a blind man, over which he breaks his

neck, is guilty of his blood; so are those that provoke others to passion, guilty of their sin.

4. *Lastly*, It is doing Satan's work, and that is a sorry office. When Peter advised our Saviour to beware of exposing himself to suffering, he says, *Get thee behind me, Satan*, Matth. xvi. 23. for he saw that Peter was serving him in that. Satan spared Job's wife, because he had use for her to provoke him to blaspheme. And that is the way they are employed who provoke others.

Therefore I beseech you, beware of this practice.

1. For God's sake, who is thereby dishonoured. The coal you cast into your neighbour's breast, kindles a flame there: but the smoke mounts upward, and darkens the heavens. And therefore, as ye have any love to God, or regard to his honour, treat your neighbour tenderly in that point.

2. For your neighbour's soul's sake, which is thereby endangered and involved in guilt, Rom. xiv. 15. Say not, *Am I my brother's keeper?* You certainly are so far: but certainly you can never think you are at liberty to be your brother's destroyer.

3. For your own sake, whose accounts are thereby increased with the addition of your neighbour's guilt. "Therefore be not ye partakers with them; and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them," Eph. v. 7, 11. Each of us will have enough ado with our burden; why should we adopt the sins of others, and stir them up to what will be laid to our charge?

4. *Lastly*, As ye would not do Satan a service and a pleasure. Dust is the serpent's meat; even the sin and ruin of mankind, with the dishonour of God, afford him all the satisfaction he has. It pleases him to see them snares to one another, and to cleave them with a wedge of their own timber,

I shall give you a few directions.

1. Be habitually concerned that ye stand not in the way of, but to advance the spiritual good of others, Gal. vi. 10. He who is concerned for one's recovery, will be careful not to do any thing that may occasion a relapse to him. It is Cain's humour, unconcernedness for the good, especially for the spiritual good of others, that makes men so easy on this point. But take that advice, Rom. xiv. 19, 20, "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence."

2. Be conscientious in giving every one their due, Rom. xiii. 7, 8, "Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour.

Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another, hath fulfilled the law." There is an honour due to men as men, which makes them to be no objects of contempt, 1 Pet. ii. 17. Be always ready to give every one what is due to them, whether in the way of justice or charity. For wrong done, and contempt shown, are the great upstirrers of this passion, and kindlers of this coal, in the breasts of others.

3. Particularly make conscience of your relative duties. The nearer the relation is, the provocation pierces the more deep, the peace is the more precious, and the offence in many cases the harder to be removed, Prov. xviii. 19. Let husbands and wives be tender of one another in that case, and beware of provoking one another's passion, as they would not be snares to one another, Eph. v. *ult.* Let children honour and reverence their parents, as their natural lord; and parents treat their children as parts of themselves, Eph. vi. 1, 2, 4. Let servants be precisely just, faithful, and respectful to their masters, and masters just and equitable to their servants, verse 5, 9. It is the neglect of these things that provokes the passion of relatives.

4. Be not negligent and careless of your carriage and behaviour towards any body: for whatever difference there may be betwixt them and you, you owe them an honour, 1 Pet. ii. 17; you are capable of offending them, Matth. xviii. 7; and it is dangerous to be a snare to their souls, and all souls are alike precious. There was no more paid by Christ for the king's soul, than the beggar's, Rom. xiv. 15.

5. If one's passion be up or like to rise, silence is oft times necessary, *not answering again*, Tit. iii. 9. The reason is, *Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out*, Prov. xxvi. 20. Wrath is a fire, answering often is like coals or fuel laid to it. Therefore learn to *give place to wrath*, Rom. xii. 19.

6. But sometimes there is a necessity of answering, as when one is directly questioned, and an answer is looked for, and passion may be irritated by silence. The angry person judging himself despised by silence, John xix. 10. in that case a soft answer is a sovereign remedy, Prov. xv. 1. as yielding wool will be a better fence against a cannon-ball than a stone wall. A soft tongue breaks the bone, and yet wounds no body, Prov. xxv. 15. So did Abigail pacify David.

7. *Lastly*, Be still ready to do them all good offices, Rom. xii. 19, 20, 21. And look to the Lord for the blessing on these things, practising them out of respect to his command: and great will be your peace and satisfaction therein.

Let no body say, Such a way of carrying is mean and sneaking.

It is prescribed by God in his word, and it is recommended to us by the example of Christ, 1 Pet. ii. 23, "Who when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not:" and it is true greatness of spirit, Prov. xxvi. 32, "He that is slow to anger, is better than the mighty: and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city."

Secondly, Beware of sinful anger in yourselves; bridle your own passion, and subdue it. Be not hasty in spirit; take not that fire into your bosom, nor cherish it, but extinguish it. To press this, I offer the following motives,

1. Consider it is a work of the flesh as really as adultery and idolatry, Gal. v. 19, 20. It is a notable piece of the corruption of our nature, not to be tolerated, far less cherished, but mortified. So the sowing to it will bring a reaping of corruption. It is far from bravery of spirit, but is a piece of man's corrupt spirit, the spirit of the world.

2. It is not only a sin, but it is a mother-sin, Prov. xxix. 22, "An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression." It is seldom it comes alone, but has a hellish train along with it, as clamour, evil-speaking, &c. And as one fire serves to kindle another, so seldom anger rises in one's breast, but the sparks fly into another's, and so another flame is kindled there.

3. It is a murdering sin, as we may learn from our Saviour's teaching it to be forbidden in the words, "Thou shalt not kill, Matth. v. 21, 22. Ye have heard, that it was said by them of old time, thou shalt not kill: and whosoever shall kill, shall be in danger of the judgment. But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment," &c. It is of a murdering nature to the man himself, Job v. 2. and to the man the sinful anger is conceived against. It is in its own nature heart-murder, Matth. v. 22. As he who lusteth after a woman is guilty of heart-adultery, so a sinfully-angry man is guilty of heart-murder. It is ordinarily attended with eye-murder, venting itself in a wrathful countenance. A proud look and bloody hands are joined, Prov. vi. 17. The Spirit of God takes notice of Cain's countenance, Gen. iv. 5. See Obad. 12. And it is attended with tongue-murder. Solomon observes that *death and life are in the power of the tongue*, Prov. xviii. 21. If passion have the management of it, no wonder that it be found guilty of murder. In its shapes it resembles both fire and sword, and with the mouth bow and arrow, all of them instruments of death: and in the angry man it is so, James iii. 6. Psal. lvii. 4. and lxiv. 3. And it has a native tendency to hand-murder, as in the case of Cain, Gen. iv. 5, 8.

4. It divests a man of his ornament as a man, whereby he differs from beasts, that is, his reason, Prov. xvii. 12. *Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly.* While passion rules, reason is banished: that is he acts the beast, and lays aside the man so long. The beasts have their passion, anger, and wrath, as well as men: but they have no reason to guide it with, and therefore in them it is not sinful. But for men to indulge in their passion, and be ruled by it, is to degrade themselves into the order of beasts.

5. It divests a man of his ornament as a Christian, i. e. *a meek and quiet spirit*, 1 Pet. iii. 4. They who put on the new man, are supposed to lay aside and put off all these, *anger, wrath, malice, &c.* Col. iii. 8. Where the gospel comes in power, and casts the soul into the mould of it, it meekens the rugged spirit, Isa. xi. 6. conforms the soul to Jesus the pattern of meekness and lowliness. So that professors would know, that victory over their passion is necessary to evidence their interest in Christ.

6. It is a downright opposite to communion with God, in any of the duties of religion. What duty is the man fit for when he is in a fit of passion? If God be speaking to him by his word, he does not hear, his heart is taken up with the object of his anger; and therefore the apostle saith, 1 Pet. ii. 1, 2, "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as new born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." If he is to speak to God in prayer in that case, what comes of it? his praying is a burden to himself, and it is a burden to the Spirit of God too. "Therefore, (says Christ,) if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way, first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift," Matth. v. 23, 24. And says the apostle, "I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting," 1 Tim. ii. 8. For as troubled water is not fit to receive the image of the sun, so the soul in passion is not meet for divine communions. Ah! how many secret prayers and family prayers have been lost this way? Mal. ii. 13.

7. *Lastly*, It excludes men out of the kingdom of heaven, Gal. v. 19, 20, 21. And no wonder, for it is *a work of the flesh*, a mother sin, a murdering sin: and *no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him*: When men are brought into the kingdom of grace, their spirits are meekened: and there are none taken into the kingdom of glory above, but who are taken into the kingdom of grace here.

I shall conclude with giving a few directions.

1. Carry your sinful nature to Christ by faith to be healed, that ye may partake of the virtue of his blood and Spirit for your renovation, Gal. v. 24. Without this all other remedies will be but scurfing over the sore.

2. When ye are in hazard of the temptation, catch hold of the promise of protection and preservation by faith, and use the means of resisting, Eph. vi. 16, "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." Hence one bears sometimes greater affronts and injuries better than lesser ones; because in the former case they betake themselves to the shields of gold made by the true Solomon, faith and dependence on the Lord; in the latter, like fools they venture with the brazen ones of their resolutions, &c.

3. Consider the sufferings of Christ, when any thing thou sufferest is like to raise thy passion, Heb. xii. 3. Those stung by the serpents in the wilderness, were to look to the brazen serpent and be healed. The injuries thou receivest are stings in this wilderness; therefore look to Christ who is exalted on the pole of the gospel, and thou shalt be healed by him.

4. Study humility, and remember well what ill-deserving creatures ye have been; how sinful ye are, and whatever is done or said to you, you deserve it, and much more at his hand. This would make us lay our hand on our mouth, under the provocations we meet with, Tit. iii. 3. And whoever be the instruments of our uneasiness, we know it is in God's hand to make use of whom he will for our trial, 2 Sam. xvi. 11. It is pride that is at the bottom of all our passion, Prov. xxviii. 25.

5. Consider the injury done you, as a sin and as a trial.—As a sin of the party who does it; and this will turn your eye on the dishonour done to God thereby, and so make the injury to yourself light; it will also turn your anger into pity upon the party who is so unhappy as to provoke God against himself, by wronging you. Thus Christ said on the cross, Luke xxiii. 34. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." And consider the injury as a trial to you, a trial of your patience: God is looking on, observing how you will bear it; and God chuses the instrument of the trial.

6. Bear down your passion with silence, if you find it beginning to rise. I do not bid you harbour it in your heart, but refuse to give it vent. Some will think, that perhaps it is better to give it a vent presently, and that it will be the sooner over. But what is that but to satisfy it with clamour, and then it will end? That is not the scripture-method, as you may see, Prov. xii. 16. "A fool's

wrath is presently known: but a prudent man covereth shame. Eph. iv. 31. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking be put away from you, with all malice." Give fire a vent, and it will burn while it has matter; but if it have no vent at all, it will die out. So it will be in this case.

7. Study a charitable disposition, and beware of a suspicious, curious, and credulous temper. This would be an excellent antidote against the attempts of passion, 1 Cor. xiii. 7. Charity will put the best construction on the actions of others that rationally they can bear, and so eases men of many supposed injuries, and many real ones too. Suspicion serves to gather in fuel from all quarters to the fire of passion, and would find it in plenty there, where charity would see none at all. Curiosity and credulity are passion's handmaids. He that is curious to know what others think and say of him, and credulous to believe every report, will not want enough to make him uneasy.

8. Remove the occasions of your passion, as people use to keep lint far from the fire, because the fire easily seizes on it. It is said of Augustus, that he did for this reason break some curious glasses of purpose. And it is said of turpentine, that it will draw fire to it. No fire is so easily drawn as that of passion. And therefore it is good to remove those things that draw it to them.

9. *Lastly, Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation; and if at any time ye are caught, haste out of the snare. Dallying with temptation is the fair way to entangle you further: therefore fly from it as from a serpent, lest ye be stung to death thereby.*