

On the Control of Temper.

by J.R. Miller

J.R. Miller's sermon emphasizes the importance of controlling one's temper through self-discipline and reliance on Christ's teachings and the Holy Spirit.

Scripture: Ephesians 4:31

Topics: "Self-Control", "Christlike Character"

Description

J.R. Miller addresses the pervasive issue of bad temper, revealing that a significant portion of people struggle with it, often dismissing it as a minor flaw rather than a serious sin. He emphasizes that bad temper is unchristlike and contrasts it with the gentle and loving nature of Jesus, who remained composed under pressure. Miller encourages individuals to recognize their responsibility in overcoming their temper, asserting that transformation is possible through Christ's strength and the cultivation of self-control. He advocates for a vision of sweet temper as a goal to strive for, highlighting the importance of intimacy with Christ and the influence of the Holy Spirit in achieving this change. Ultimately, he calls for continuous effort in learning the lesson of sweet temper, assuring that God will assist in this journey.

Transcript

A great many people seem to have trouble with their temper. Some years ago an English philosopher undertook an investigation. He arranged that about two thousand people should be put unconsciously under watchful eyes for a certain period, and that a study should be made of their temper. A tabulation of the reports showed that more than one-half of the two thousand were bad-tempered in various ways and degrees. Almost every adjective qualifying temper of an unlovely kind was used in defining the various shades and phases of unloveliness which were found to exist in the people under inspection.

It is not pleasant to believe that more than one-half of the people about us are so defective in the matter of temper. It is a comfort to know, however, that about forty-eight per cent are good-tempered in various degrees. Yet the fact that the preponderance is on the wrong side is humiliating.

Many Christian people are willing to confess to an ungentle temper. They seem to think it, too, a matter of not very grave importance. Perhaps the very commonness of the infirmity, blinds our eyes to its un beauty and its sinfulness. We are apt to regard the malady more as a weakness -- than as a sin which makes us guilty before God.

But there is no question that bad temper is unchristlike. We cannot think of Jesus as acrimonious, touchy, irritable, peevish, or vindictive. Love ruled all his dispositions, his words, his feelings. He was put to the sorest tests -- but never failed. He endured all manner of wrongs, insults, hurts; but, like those flowers which yield their sweetest perfume only when crushed -- his life gave out the more sweetness the more it was exposed to men's rudeness and unkindness. We are like Christ, only in the measure in which we have the patience, gentleness, and good-temper of Christ.

We all agree that bad temper is very unlovely in other people; it cannot be any more lovely in us as we appear to others' eyes. We know, too, what discomfort and pain a bad temper causes wherever the person goes.

One form of the malady is sulking. No doubt it is better to pout in silence -- than to go about spitting out angry words. It was arranged among the sisters of a certain family, that if one of them was in a bad humor, she would go to her room, and stay there until she had worked off the unhappy mood, and was fit to be in society again. It would be well if such an arrangement could be made in other homes.

A sulking temper, however, does not make such havoc of the happiness and comfort of others, as a spit-fire temper does. An unbridled tongue at the mercy of an ungoverned temper, scatters abroad coals of fire and sharp arrows which cause pain and anguish wherever they fly!

It is easy enough to portray the unloveliness of bad temper, and describe the hurt and mischief wrought by its manifestations; we would better address ourselves, however, to the question, How to get a sweet temper.

One who finds himself possessed by an unlovely spirit, should not be content to go a day longer without beginning the conquest and the culture which will transform the hateful disposition into something Christlike and beautiful.

The first thing to remember is that the change can be wrought. You may say that you were born with a hasty temper, that you inherited it from both your father and mother. That is very likely. Parents do not know what evil influence they are transmitting to their children when they fail to control their own feelings and tongues; nor what a training-school for strife and irritability they are conducting in their home, when they indulge in bickerings and contentions in the sacred place where only love and patience should have sway.

But suppose that you have received your unhappy temper as a heritage, or have been trained into the habit in your home? You are not to conclude that you have no responsibility in the matter, or that you must stay just as you are until the end of your days. Because one happens to be born with a faulty disposition, is not a reason why one must live and die with it! The essential teaching of Christianity, is that human nature can be changed. The worst temper can be schooled into the most divine sweetness of spirit. The tongue which no man can tame -- Christ can tame, so that, instead of bitterness, it shall give out only love.

It is a great step in the right direction to know that one can get such a victory. One who is aware of his infirmity of temper, and is ashamed and sick of it, should never say, "I cannot help it. It cannot be cured. I must go through life a slave to this miserable habit." A Christian may be more than conqueror over every weakness and everything sinful in himself. All of Christ's strength is upon his side to help him to be victorious. Indeed, if he is a true Christian, he will never cease in his efforts to grow like his Master, until at last he is presented faultless before the divine presence in exceeding joy!

The first thing, is to know clearly what is to be accomplished, and to determine that the beautiful ideal must certainly be reached. It is a great thing to have in one's soul a vision of perfection toward which one is to grow, and which is one day surely to be reached.

What God puts into our heart as a vision -- he will help us to realize if we do our part. However, the lesson is not to be learned in a day; it will probably take you years to master it. But a little part of it should be got each day, one line added to the picture. Paul was quite an old man when he said he had learned in whatever state he was therein to be content. His language implies also that it was not easy for him to learn this lesson, and that he had not attained full proficiency in it until he had reached old age.

The lesson of sweet temper is probably quite as hard as that of contentment. It has to be learned, too, for it does not come naturally to many of us. But it can be learned. We need only to put ourselves into the school of Christ and stay there, accepting his teaching and discipline, and advancing little by little, until at last we can say, "I have learned in whatever circumstances I am, under whatever provocation, irritation, or temptation to anger or impatience -- always to keep sweet-tempered."

Self-control is really the heart of the lesson. Temper is not a bad quality; temper is an element of strength. A person without temper is weak, soft, pliable, and lacks courage. The problem is not to crush or destroy temper -- but to get the mastery of it, so as to be able to endure annoyance, wrong, insult -- and not get angry, nor speak unadvisedly. Young people should school themselves continually in self-control. A really strong man is one with strong passions and affections, which are held in complete mastery. This is the secret of a good temper.

Then we can get help from Christ. Among his own disciple family, there was one who at the first was hasty, fiery, and vindictive -- but who at length grew into such sweet beauty of disposition and character that he was known as the beloved disciple, the disciple of love. John learned his lesson by lying on the bosom of Jesus. Intimacy with Christ, close, personal friendship with him, living near his heart of love, will transform the most unloving, selfish nature -- into sweetness of spirit.

But there is more than even friendship, with its holy influence; Christ lives in the heart of every disciple. Every true Christian is a temple of the Holy Spirit. If this holy guest dwells in you, he will transfigure you from within by the renewing of your mind. He will fill your heart with love: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs." Such love within the heart -- will soon get control of all the outer life -- the dispositions, the speech, the manners, and all the expression of the inner life. Thus bitterness, wrath, clamor, and all evil speaking -- will give place to gentleness, goodness, and grace.

Of course we have a part and a responsibility in all this. We must accept the divine teaching, and receive the divine help. We must let the word of Christ dwell in us, let the peace of God rule us, let Christ himself live in us.

Every one of us should now receive the lesson of sweet temper which the Master sets, and should never intermit his diligence until the lesson is perfectly learned. That is the way God works in us; he sets the task for us, and then as we try to learn it he helps us.

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