

A SOFT ANSWER

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We know that the devil is strong and that he is determined to destroy our souls. The scriptures tell us that the devil is our adversary and that he is like a roaring lion, walking about, seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet 5:8). We are also commanded to resist him steadfast in the faith (1 Pet 5:9). Indeed, our God is faithful not to allow Satan to tempt us beyond what we are able to bear, and always provides a way for us to escape the temptation (1 Cor 10:13). He has also given us an armor that is able to quench all of the fiery darts of the wicked one, and will enable us to stand against the wiles of the devil (Eph 6:10-18). But it is important for us not to be ignorant of Satan's devices to prevent him from gaining an advantage over us (2 Cor 2:11). We need to especially understand the ways in which he tempts us to misuse our tongues.

Bridling the tongue

Of all the battles in our spiritual war, that of bridling our tongues is the most difficult. James 3:6-8 says that "the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: but the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." James 1:26 gives us a stern warning: "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain." Our goal is not merely to *seem* religious, while in fact possessing a vain religion. Therefore, we must bridle our tongues. When we grow to the point that we are able to do that, we will then be spiritually perfect (complete), "*and able also to bridle the whole body*" (Jas 3:2). Thus, the word of God clearly teaches us that bridling our tongues is a very difficult job, but is also necessary and *possible*.

How to answer

Colossians 4:6 says, "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, *that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.*" From our own personal experience, we should all be able to relate with the difficulty in knowing how to always give a proper answer, and to be able to put that wisdom and knowledge into practice and actually speak those right words in every situation. One particular case in which this is especially challenging is when the other party is angry or upset. When someone speaks to us roughly, the natural reaction is for us to speak

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roughly in return. This is one reason why we have been commanded to be slow to anger and not give the devil an opportunity (Eph 4:26-27; Jas 1:19-20). When the Israelites demanded that Solomon's son Rehoboam treat them gently as the price for their loyalty, he sought counsel on how to answer the people. The elder men advised the young king to "speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever" (2 Kgs 12:7), while the young men gave him opposite advice. Rehoboam "answered the people roughly, and forsook the old men's counsel that they gave him; and spake to them after the counsel of the young men" (2 Kgs 12:13-14). The people then rejected Rehoboam, resulting in a permanent split in the kingdom of Israel. Proverbs 15:1 says, "*A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.*" Whereas Rehoboam stirred up the anger of the people, Gideon responded to some angry Israelites in a very wise manner. The tribe of Ephraim was jealous over Gideon's victory against the Midianites and "did chide with him sharply" (Judg 8:1). "And he said unto them, What have I done now in comparison of you? Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than the vintage of Abiezer? God hath delivered into your hands the princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb: and what was I able to do in comparison of you? *Then their anger was abated toward him, when he had said that*" (Judg 8:2-3). Gideon's soft answer turned away their anger. We need to speak wisely like Gideon, and not like Rehoboam when dealing with people who have their emotions stirred up. Those situations present us with an excellent opportunity to demonstrate that we are followers of Christ. "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, *when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not*; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Pet 2:21-23). James 3:13 says, "Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom." We need to show meekness of wisdom with our words. Our goal is expressed in Ephesians 4:29: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."