

“Solomon, Paul, and the Pepper of Death”
By Jason Vanderlaan

Solomon was crazy. Just look at his books in the Bible: Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs. Now, you may think Proverbs isn't as odd as the others, but there's some pretty bizarre stuff in there too. Take Proverbs 26:6 for example, “Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.”

I don't know about you, but it seems to me like Solomon got it backwards. True friends don't wound us. And enemies certainly don't multiply kisses. If anything they multiply our wounds! At least, that's what I thought until I met the Pepper of Death.

I love Chinese food. And I love spicy food. This is a dangerous combination, especially when the dish I order comes with beautiful, enticing little red peppers that look oh-so-good. My mom always told me not to eat them, though. She said they were too hot and were not meant to be eaten. And I obeyed her... for a while.

When I came to Southern as a freshman I was “on my own” for the first time. I was free and bold and unstoppable and foolish. One day, while eating at a Chinese restaurant, I noticed one of those little red peppers. I smiled, realizing that my mom couldn't stop me now. With a quick dart of the hand, I snatched up the pepper and popped it into my mouth.

I began to chew. The flavor was bland and definitely not anything like I'd hoped. But then the heat kicked in. I don't know if all those little red peppers are that hot, but this was the Pepper of Death. The fire quickly spread across my tongue, through my mouth, and even onto the side of my face. Within seconds I discovered that I could no longer hear out of my left ear! My loss of hearing lasted a few hours before finally subsiding.

Needless to say, my encounter with the Pepper of Death taught me an important lesson: there are some things we want and think are okay for us, but in reality they will harm us. And the people who truly love us will warn us. At the time, it may seem as if they're “wounding” us by denying our desires. However, as with my mom and the pepper, it's usually best to listen to their advice.

On the other hand, there are people who let us do whatever we want. We may think they just want us to be happy, but really they don't care enough to help us live to the fullest. They are really enemies who “multiply kisses.” We like it at the time, but in the end we'll regret it.

It's not always easy to be honest about who our true friend are. We want the cheers of those encouraging us to eat the pepper, while we despise those who warn us and they are left feeling like Paul when he wrote “Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?” (Galatians 4:16). But would we think the same if we knew the consequences? In reality it's often much worse than just peppers; it's more like we're trying to swallow live cobras! Whose advice will we want then?

And what about God? Which kind of friend is He? Are His laws arbitrary or do they protect us from harm? I don't know about you, but I'd take a wound from God any day over a kiss from the devil.

