

WEEKLY SERMON

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Be angry!

When did you last read a sermon on St Paul's command to 'Be angry!' (Ephesians 4.26, part of today's Epistle)?

I thought not. There are so many commands in the New Testament to love one another and to forgive one another that we perhaps assume that it is never the right thing to be angry as a Christian. However St Paul clearly commands believers in Ephesus to 'Be angry, but do not sin.' In other words, sometimes it is right and proper to be angry. For example when we see innocent people being injured, exploited or abused, it is our Christian duty to stand up for those who are ill-treated, defend them and work for justice.

Interestingly, in the same passage Paul writes that we are to 'be imitators of God ... and live in love.' Anger can be a sign of love, as any parent knows when a child gets into a real scrape or danger because they have disobeyed rules made for their safety. God is angry with human sin precisely because, as a Father, he loves us and does not want to see us get hurt.

The prophets in the Old Testament were often angry, when they saw the poor exploited or people worshipping idols instead of God. Jesus was angry in the Temple, when he saw moneychangers noisily fleecing poor pilgrims, and doing it in the only part of the Temple where Gentiles were allowed to pray.

However anger is dangerous. Paul realises that when our passions are aroused it is very easy to sin, to do something we regret in the cold light of day, and so he instructs us to be ever so careful: 'Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil.'

Another danger of anger is that we allow ourselves to stay angry, and begin to fill our minds with bitter and resentful thoughts, which eat away at and quickly destroy relationships. That is why if we have had a row with someone, we need to try to sort it out there and then, and not let the sun go down while we are still angry. And if someone we love hurts us, we need to sort it out privately and quickly. One of the bits of counsel I offer in marriage preparation is never to go to bed angry, because if you do, you certainly won't go to sleep!

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