

Devotion: September 2, 2020

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

²⁵ Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁶ "In your anger do not sin"^[a]: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷ and do not give the devil a foothold. ²⁸ Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

²⁹ Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. **5** ¹ Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

"Be angry but do not sin," says Ephesians 4:26. Now, wait just a minute. This is *the Bible* speaking?

Yes, it is -- strange as it sounds.

The reason that statement sounds so strange is that most of us have been taught, from a very early age, that anger is always un-Christian. Most of us have been taught that the defining characteristic of a Christian is to be *nice*. Don't make waves, smile a lot, be soft-spoken. Some take it to the furthest possible extreme: Be a doormat.

Eugene Peterson writes: *Anger is a useful diagnostic tool. When anger erupts in us, it is a signal that something is wrong. Something isn't working right. There is evil or incompetence or stupidity lurking about. Anger is our sixth sense for sniffing out wrong in the neighborhood.*

What anger fails to do, though, is tell us whether the wrong is outside us or inside us. We usually begin by assuming that the wrong is outside us -- our spouse or our child or our God has done something wrong, and we are angry. That is what Jonah did, and he quarreled with God. But when we track the anger carefully, we often find it leads to a wrong within us -- wrong information, inadequate understanding, underdeveloped heart.

Many of the great reforms in human history would never have happened, were it not for righteous anger. Think of where the descendants of African slaves might be, were it not for the righteous anger of William Wilberforce, who labored tirelessly for much of his life until the English Parliament finally abolished slavery. Think of the crusaders against human trafficking today, who keep publicizing inconvenient truths -- like the fact that nearly 70 percent of male tourists visiting Thailand are coming to partake of the sex trade.

It's a lot easier to put your hands over your ears and hum -- pretending that this sort of thing doesn't go on in this world. At least you wouldn't get angry.

We come before you, Lord, with repentant hearts. We confess to indulging in moments of worldly mindedness. The cracks in our souls' skin need closing if evil is not to penetrate. The wages of sin is death. Reprogram our hearts and minds, Lord, that we might be continually challenged to put on the mind of Christ and be imitators of you. Amen.