

“Love is not easily angered” 1 Corinthians chapter 13 verse 5

This is one of the very ways that God describes himself; “Slow to anger and abounding in love towards all he has made.” No one has more right to be angry than God. He continually bears with us, who consistently fall far short of his perfection. He knows our weakness and understands the individual perspectives of each one of us. Even Jesus prayed for the people who nailed him to the cross “Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing.”

Yet, flawed though we are, we are nevertheless more impatient with the failings of others than God is. When they do not live up to our standards, or behave the way we think they should, or disagree with us, or do not learn fast enough, or do not know what we know, or flout our plans, we are so quick to get irritated, touchy and angry. At this moment, anger is one of the greatest blights on our culture, with numerous factions vitriolically demanding their rights and their way and refusing to listen to any opinion other than theirs.

Human anger is one of the least gracious of human characteristics, because it is born in judgment and condemnation. James says in his letter that such anger cannot bring about the righteous life that God requires. But the bible encourages us to bear with one another's failings and forgive the wrong that people do to us. In this, we reflect God's gracious attitude towards us and counterbalance the atmosphere of hostility in the world, becoming peacemakers.

But the verse we are looking at today does not say, of course, that love is never angered at all. It just says that it is not easily angered. God's anger, says Paul, is being revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness. God is patient, even to the extent that people often ask why he does nothing about evil. Yet God withholds his anger against sin and wickedness as long as there is a small chance that people may turn to him from it. And Jesus's anger was clearly expressed against hypocrisy, oppression, corruption and exploitation.

So there are times when anger is appropriate. If we are to reflect the character of God, then we, too, may become angry when we see people hurt by evil. But we do need to be very sure that, when we express anger, it is Godly anger and does not have its source in our own human judgments, demands and prejudices.

Prayer.

Father, how easily irritated we are when people do not conform to our ways of thinking and behaving. Thank you for your long-suffering patience with our imperfections when all we deserve is your judgment. Thank you that, in love, instead of punishing us in your anger you make a way in Jesus for us to be reconciled to you. May we also be peacemakers, restraining our anger and relinquishing our demands. In Jesus' name, amen.

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