

*Women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate*

*It is better to marry than to be aflame with passion : he who refrains from marriage will do better.*

*Women should dress themselves modestly and decently in suitable clothing, not with their hair braided, or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes, but with good works*

*Whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task*

*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God*

*I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent.*

*Take a little wine for the sake of your stomach*

*Slaves, obey your earthly masters*

*Wives, be subject to your husbands*

The advice of St Paul- or as many of his letters are in fact Apostle karaoke, people *pretending* to be St Paul; this advice, I trust you will agree from the preceding is not always helpful, relevant or indeed, dare we say it, for a person living in the 21st century rather than the 1st, good.

Religious revolutionary without a doubt, Paul was also in many of his views an unremarkably standard product of diaspora Judaism and we cannot expect him to be otherwise. His letters were never intended- by him at least- to be Holy Scripture. Given the circumstances of their writing they are as you would expect, a mixture of the sublime, the everyday, and the ridiculous. When he is sublime, Paul is not to be bettered; when he is ridiculous, sometimes there is no disrespect if we respond by

laughing; and when he is everyday it is not our day but a day and a time that is impossibly remote. If the events and opinions of our Bible don't seem as immeasurably different from our own lives and experience as they actually are, that's only because we've been reading them out loud, every week for the past two thousand years. If the past is a foreign country, then the Bible breathes the air of another planet.

Anyway, as every Christian conservative knows, you can always find a Bible quote to back up whatever point you want to prove, and having kicked off today with some cherry picked choices to show how anachronistic Paul can be, I would like to draw your attention to the sublime hidden in some of the saint's everyday advice that far from rusted away is still solid gold in 2023:

*“Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger”*

First then, *Be angry*

Christians do not have to be Ned Flanders-style doormats: anger has a rôle in religion, though that rôle is tempered.

*Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger*

Be angry, but get over it quick. Good advice from Paul, if only so as you can get a good night's sleep. Needless to say, it's not the quality of your shut-eye that is exercising the apostle here. The implication is clear: keeping your anger on the simmer is a sin. So in the impeccable interest of helping us to sin less, I wish to consider tonight the various ways there are of ending that most frequent and vexing cause of anger- an argument- so that before the sun sinks over the horizon, we will have spent our steam. The anger of an argument is self sustaining: it keeps itself going and if, for whatever reason, you stop arguing, that anger will, deprived of fuel, soon enough putter out. Beneficial then to consider how to stop arguing.

Obviously the most satisfying way to end an argument is to win it and for your opponent to openly admit that they have lost it. You'll sleep like a baby after that. Alas, as experience may tell you, this is hens teeth rare, and after a couple of decades of progressive education, we're all winners now, so if you'll be waiting in vain to win it. You ain't going to: that argument is just going to go barrelling on until you can find another way of stopping it.

Undoubtedly the quickest non-winning way of ending an argument is simply to walk away. Go somewhere else. Shutting the door as you leave. Noisily for added impact. Dramatic, certainly, but not necessarily effective as you can always be followed and not always desirable or possible. As you slam dramatically out of the door you realise that you might have ended the argument but will now be spending all night in the garden; or perhaps the argument might be happening in a car which is doing 70 mph in the outside lane of the M25, in which case leaving the scene, though no doubt helping to put the argument into perspective, is being perhaps a trifle over-dramatic and not nice for other road users.

You could try intimidating your opponent into shutting up: this seems to be a popular one at the moment in public life, but although this may be effective at ending the argument, you won't feel very big or clever afterwards as you will know that you haven't actually won the argument, just bullied the other person into submission.

The same can be said of verbal equivalents of the violent option: neat phrases which just occasionally, depending on your opponent, might work: generally only if your opponent is aged 4 or less. So you could try:

'Because I say so.'

'That's just the way it is.'

'There's more of us than you.'

'I'm PM.'

And, coming full circle, you could also go for the church equivalent of the above, not 'I'm bishop' though some do try, but:

'The Bible says...'

'The Bible says.' QED is, of course, a rubbish way of ending an argument. For 'The Bible says' to even have a chance of working, it needs the person you are arguing with to be a Christian to start with and a biblicist extremist to boot.

And then... And then, the Bible is a book: it is the ultimate passive voice: take your Bible and wait for it to speak: it says nothing. And then if you read it and hear the voices speaking to you across the millennia, what you hear is not one monolithic voice 'The Bible': but a multitude of voices: sometimes they seem to be addressing you; sometimes somebody else; sometimes they are talking about each other; sometimes they're saying pretty much the same thing, sometimes they're arguing with each other; some things they seem to agree on, some times, such as when talking about Christmas or Creation, they are saying completely different things.

So if even the last refuge of the religious isn't going to cut the mustard, how do we end the argument and let the anger go? We return to where the question started, he started after all, what does that Paul bloke have to say. Here is St Paul's advice:

*"be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you"*

Being kind and tenderhearted, you're much less likely to be arguing in the first place. But if you do end up in a to-do, try hard to find a consensus; strive for common ground. If you can't find that, find a way of disagreeing without being at each others throats. Don't draw lines in the sand: walk over them. Search out what is loveable in the other and pass over what is not. The quid pro quo at the end is reason enough—

God has forgiven you: now do the same to others. But it's about a lot more than a theological tit for tat. Concentrate on God, on the things that really matter, concentrate on God, and whatever it is you're arguing about is very likely to suddenly seem a lot less important, and a lot easier to let go. Of course, it's easier said than done: forgiveness is one of the hardest things faith asks of Christians, but then nobody has ever said following Jesus is easy, usually they say quite the opposite.

Pick your Paul carefully. Remember that we are not called to be Holy Havershams, leaving everything unchanged one day to gather two millennia of dust. Some of what Paul wrote all those years ago will be offensive, some of it will be anachronistic; it can be understood for what it is, a product of a particular person and a particular time. But read some of it, and it's almost as if Paul's scribe has just put down his pen and the ink is still drying. Treasure those parts.

*Do not let the sun go down on your anger. "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you"*