**Brought to Life; Brought Together**

**Walking Worthy: Don’t Be Bitter, Be Forgiving**

**Ephesians 4:31-32**

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We are continuing our series in Ephesians, Brought to Life; Brought Together. As I have said, Ephesians has two sections, chapters one through three describe what *God has done in us* through Christ while chapters four through six call us to *live out what God has done in us*, what Paul calls walking worthy. The command to walk worthy is rooted in what God has already done in us. So, let’s look at our final verses of chapter four, 4:31-32.

4:25-32 describes the normal christian life of putting off the old self and putting on the new self. For all Christians, Christ followers, there is a lifelong battle raging within us between hostile enemies, the old self and the new self, the flesh and the Spirit, each waging war against the other in our fight to walk in faith and obedience rather than unbelief and sin. Today Paul describes the battle with anger and bitterness. Our big idea today is don’t be a bitter person, be a forgiving person.

**Stop Being Bitter**

Paul tells us to put off all bitterness and anger and the aggressiveness that goes along with it. Bitterness is a callous heart that nurses past hurts and resentments, justifying your right to be angry and resentful.[[1]](#footnote-1) Psychologists tell us that bitterness is destructive to us emotionally, physically, and relationally, but the greatest is spiritually. Hebrews warns us that bitterness will keep us from God’s grace and defiles those around us (Heb 12:14-15). Paul says to put away all forms of bitterness, any way your bitterness expresses itself. Then Paul mentions two words that are bedfellows with bitterness, wrath and anger. Wrath was used to describe boiling water. It is rage that tends toward both verbal or physical attacks. Anger describes a person who is always angry, like an undercurrent in their life. Bitterness and anger leads clamor and slander. Clamor is being verbally and even physically aggressive and violent. Slander is profane and abusive speech. Then he adds this summary phrase, along with all malice to describe putting off every evil intention. So, in summary then, we are to put away all forms of bitterness and every evil intent to hurt others. Don’t be a bitter person; be a forgiving person. When those feelings and desires come up, don’t feed them but put them away and instead be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

**Be Forgiving**

Paul does not just tell us to stop being bitter but to replace bitterness with being forgiving because God has forgiven us in Christ. He does not just tell us to stop feeling and acting sinful apart from the gospel (Col 3:7-10; 12-14). Kindness is just being pleasant, like a well aged wine; a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). He refines kindness as being tenderhearted or compassionate (Lk 1:78; Phil 1:8; 1 P 3:8). Compassion is sympathy and concern for the sufferings of others and a desire to alleviate the suffering. So instead of being bitter and malicious, we are to be sympathetic, concerned for others. The fruit of kindness and compassion is forgiving one another. Don’t be a bitter person, be a forgiving person. Forgiving someone is letting go of the offense or hurt against you instead of holding onto it. Forgive others because God in Christ has forgiven you. Forgiving others is the only means of overcoming your anger and bitterness.

What about when sinned against grievously by a parent or a sibling, or a spouse or maybe by an employer or your employee or even a stranger? When we are told ‘just forgive them’ something inside of us cries out that it is too deep and painful to just let it go. I have been wronged and my anger is rightly over the injustice of it all. That is what makes forgiveness so hard sometimes. There is a verse that has helped me battle against this anger that leads to bitterness. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” (Rom 12:19). Here is where our sense of justice meets forgiveness. What frees you from anger and bitterness and frees you to forgive is the promise that God will avenge all sin. Faith empowers us to forgive others because we trust that God will intervene with his wrath against all sin, including the sin against me. Faith is resting in the promise that vengeance belongs to God so I do not need to be judge, jury, and executioner.

What about when someone has sinned against us and that sin deserves to be punished, and yet it does not appear that they are being punished for it at all? Fath empowers us to rest assured that God’s justice will be executed, whether in this life or in eternity. Faith is trusting that in the new creation we will rule with Christ who will execute his justice perfectly and eternally. Listen to how Jesus dealt with injustice, He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but instead continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly (1 Pet 2:21-23). Jesus trusted the promise that his Father’s righteous judgment would come so he did not need to avenge himself but left that to his Father. Christ is our example. This is the only way I know how to forgive horrendous sins against us. God’s wrath will execute perfect justice against every sin, either on the cross or in hell for eternity. God’s justice will be executed for all sin either on the cross for those who believe or in hell for those who reject Christ. Don’t be a bitter person, be a forgiving person.

**Life Group Questions:**

1. Describe the old self and the new self and how one puts on the new self when it is created by God?
2. Why is the old self so hard to put off sometimes?
3. Described a time you were bitter over something? How did you get past it?
4. Why do we get angry?
5. What is the difference between righteous and unrighteous anger?
6. How is our mouth connected to our hearts?
7. How is putting off the old self and putting on the new self root in the gospel?
8. How is God speaking to you in this message?
9. How does this passage relate to you own discipleship?
10. How does this message help you in making disciples?

1. [Stephen Diamond, Ph.D.,](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/evil-deeds/200906/anger-disorder-part-two-can-bitterness-become-mental-disorder) regards bitterns as “one of the most destructive and toxic of human emotions.” If we repeatedly ruminate over how we’ve been victimized, “nursing” wrongs may eventually come to define some essential part of *who we are, taking* hold of our very [personality](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/personality). https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/evolution-the-self/201501/don-t-let-your-anger-mature-bitterness. Accessed May 30, 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)