
So last week we talked about the fact that those who steal and take from others need to stop and how the words which come from our mouth should pour forth grace on others. In addition, we spent some significant time on the issue of grieving the Holy Spirit, which we will circle back to in the next couple of weeks. I hope you went and did your homework and studied both that passage in ***Isaiah 63*** and ***Psalms 78*** as they do lay a solid foundation for understanding how God goes to war against our *old self* when we grieve His Spirit. With that in mind the last thing we want to do is find ourselves living in darkness having presented ourselves to the dark lord of our flesh.

Ephesians 4:31

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

This is the companion verse to “Be angry and do not sin.” This speaks to us of what happens when we do not learn the healthy way to deal with our anger. Now, we all get angry as it is part of the bundle of emotions that God gave us; so being angry, in and of itself, is not by definition bad or sinful. It is what you do with your anger that determines whether or not you cross that line of sin (do you hold on to it or do you learn and practice the healthy way of dealing with it).

Remember, we are commanded to be angry because terrible things happen when we do not get angry at legitimate offenses and we hold the offenses inside of our soul. Over time, un-dealt with anger festers and mutates into wrath and

bitterness and results in all manner of evil pouring forth from our life. This verse captures the terrible effect of failing to be angry and not sinning.

The word we have translated “bitterness” is rooted in the idea of something being pungent and piercing—like the nasty smell of a strong cheese—or something that is harsh or corrosive. In relational terms, it is the quality of being sharply disagreeable and offensive in language or tone.

It is also interesting that the word used for “wrath” is a different Greek word than was used in **verse 26** (which was akin to rage); however the word for anger is the same. This word for “wrath” comes from a root that means to sacrifice with fire. This is the picture we get in the Old Testament sacrifices which represent the burning judgment of God against that which deserves to be destroyed. With that as our picture, this word captures the idea that anger which is not “put away” will mutate and turn into a burning passion of judgment and wrath. I am sure you have met people whose indignation is so intense that they literally burn with hatred toward others; I know I have. This is scary stuff and very, very destructive.

Now, the word clamor means just what you would think, a loud cry; but the word translated “slander” literally means blasphemies or evil speech. And finally, the word translated “malice” refers to the need to see others suffer.

So putting this together, we might say that we must let all pungent and piercing expressions of burning indignation or hate, all the anger that you have held within, all loud cries of evil speech which are intended to tear apart and blaspheme another, along with your need to see others suffer, be “put away” from you as it all belongs to the *old self* and has no part in the life of a son of God.

The good news is that this passage assures us that we can be free from our anger and all its horrific mutations. However, I want to make something very clear and you cannot miss this point. Since the verb “put away” is an imperative—a command—we read it as if we are to go and “do” something or stop “doing” something in an attempt to be obedient to this command. We read it as if the Spirit is telling us to turn right instead of left and that all we need to do is choose to obey it; but that is simply not the case—it’s not even close to what is being communicated here.

If you are bound by anger due to the wounds you have incurred in your life you cannot just wake up in the morning and decide that today, by the power of the Spirit, you are not going to have any angry expressions towards others. It simply will not work for the un-dealt with anger is still stuffed within the rooms of your soul and is still festering and mutating behind the locked doors.

So trying to be obedient to this command, as a good Christian, will always result in crushing failure. You may have temporary moments of victory but they will be short lived as the wrath inside your soul will not be ignored and will find its voice. Just wait for the next person to touch upon your wound in any significant way and your wrath (whether it is internally or externally expressed) will come pouring forth. You may even try extra, extra hard but you will fail and you will find that you will be more frustrated than you can imagine. Guilt and hopelessness will become your close friends and instead of living in freedom you will live in perpetual bondage.

Our obedience to this command is entirely contingent upon the removal of this hideous stuff from our souls, which is something only Jesus can do. Only Jesus can

bring true healing. We know this to be true because the verb “put away” is in the *passive* tense which means that this is not even a command you can obey. You have no power to “put away” the anger and wrathful expressions as you cannot heal the wound—the source of the problem. You can do a lot of self analysis and even psycho-therapy or meditation to understand what happened to you in order to work through all the damage, but you have no power to heal yourself. And no matter how hard you try and not react from your wounds, when push comes to shove you will resort to self protection and survival as is the nature of the *old self*. The point is that you are in no position to obey this command—you are powerless to obey this command.

I know that there are those who disagree with this in principle; but the data is not on your side. You can look at any moment of time throughout human history and (with the exception of those true believers who have learned how to live from their *new self*, like the many martyrs written about in the New Testament) it is riddled with behavior that is rooted in self protection and survival; even by those who consider themselves to be Christians, to be on a path of enlightenment, or to be seekers of the truth.

The *old self* is simply bound by its nature; and without a new nature, there is simply no escape from its self serving grip on your life. This is why the only one who is truly able to heal is the one whose name is “*Jehovah Rapha*”—the God who heals (*Exodus 15:26; Psalm 103:3*). And the only ones who can truly be free from the death grip of the *old self* is those who have received the *new nature* that only God can give and which like God is righteous, holy and true (*Ephesians 4:29*).

Again, because the verb is in the *passive* tense, God is the one who is going to

have to “put away” all of this stuff from your soul. As far as your part, open the doors when He knocks, invite Him in, and let Him do His work. Ask Him to heal you and to purge out the dark waters of bitterness and to teach you 1) why you can trust yourself to Him (even if you have experienced deep and terrible wounds that few of us could imagine), and 2) ask Him to show you how you are to trust yourself to Him.

I want you to understand that everything about our Christian experience is to be understood in the context of relationship. Every command, every exhortation, and every example given for us to follow is intended to drive us deeper and deeper into a dependent relationship with Jesus or to illustrate how a life dependent upon Jesus is to be lived. It is all intended to make us realize that without Him we can do nothing; but with Jesus living in the rooms that were previously closed off to Him, we can do all things.

Oh and by the way, just so you don't get too discouraged, all good and enduring relationships take time to build. Good relationships do not happen overnight; people have to get to know each other. Now God knows you completely, but you have to get to know Him as a person, which is why He comes knocking on the doors of your heart so you will have the opportunity to get to know Him in the deepest parts of your soul.

In fact, Jesus comes knocking because He wants to have a conversation with you about the true “cause” of your pain and the true “cause” of your wounds (which are the source of your anger, bitterness, slander, malice and wrath). He wants you to stop having conversation with your *old self* and take the time to listen to Him.

He will first probably talk to you about those who caused the wounds and why what they did was not ok. He will explain that you are not at fault, you don't deserve how they treated you, and you are not the one who should still be suffering for what they did. He will definitely help you see the truth and explain to you why you need to stop internalizing their brokenness and stop thinking that they hurt you because of something you must have done wrong. After all, let's be realistic; most of us incurred our significant life shaping wounds when we were just kids (and some of us when we were just babies). Therefore what could we have really done to deserve any of it?

The truth is that those who wounded us should have known better; they were the ones who had the power and control whereas we were small and weak and had no ability to do anything on our own. They should have protected us, cared for us, loved us, been involved with us, provided for us and so on; and they simply did not. Sure they had their reasons and they had their own brokenness to deal with, but the fact of the matter is that as little kids (little babies even) we were absolutely undeserving of such treatment; and it was not right and no matter of excuse can make it right.

But ultimately God is going to want to push the conversation even farther. He will want to help you gain an understanding that goes beyond the people who did the horrible things to you, beyond their sin and abject failure, and even beyond the devil and his evil minions that were the source and inspiration behind those people's actions, and get you to focus on Him. Yes, He will want you to look at Him, so to speak, in the face, stare into His eyes, and listen to the reasons why He allowed it. The reasons why as your loving Father He believed it was necessary. He

will also explain to you why it was love for Him to have permitted all those things in your life. He will want you to understand His purposes.

You see, if you never understand these truths and never come to terms with 1) His sovereignty over your life (which began from before the creation of the world), and 2) the love He has had for you from before you were even born, then it will be very difficult for you to trust Jesus in any room in your soul where you have incurred significant wounds. You will think that if He did not protect you in the past how can you be assured He will protect you in the future.

You may invite Him in for a visit, but if you are not grounded and rooted in His love then it is more than likely that when others wound you in the same way you were wounded in the past, you will once again give Jesus His eviction notice and you will re-take control of that space in a vain attempt to protect yourself. After all, it is all you have ever known. It does not even matter that you are wholly incapable of truly protecting yourself; you have found great comfort in your room. You know it so well and you know how to survive in that place.

However, when you are willing to listen to what Jesus has to say and believe what Jesus has to say, the truth of His love will renew your mind and you will be transformed. Jesus desires you to become thoroughly convinced that you are loved beyond your wildest imagination (hence, all those marvelous truths that the Spirit spoke over our lives in Chapters 1-3).

You see, if you know you are loved—truly loved by God—and know that you have always been loved by God—then you will feel safe to relinquish control and let Jesus into every, and I mean every, room in the corridors of your soul. If you come to understand how God has used the brokenness of others to stir up in our

dark and evil hearts an understanding of our need for God, then we will start to understand how everything He permitted was with the intention of driving us to Him so He can give us His life and door by door heal the wounds He caused (*Jeremiah 30:14, 17; Isaiah 30:26; 42:24; Deuteronomy 32:39; Job 5:18; Psalm 147:3*). Remember, if God did not do this on your behalf, this would have been your epithet:

Romans 3:11, 12

No one is good—not even one. No one has real understanding; no one is seeking God. All have turned away from God; all have gone wrong. No one does good, not even one.”

So I want to give you a word of encouragement. Remember I said that good relationships take time to build. Thus, even though at the start of the process where God works to “put away” your bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander and malice it may seem like it takes forever as you learn why you can trust Jesus and how to trust Jesus, it will become a much shorter process with each and every door that you open.

In fact, after a while, all Jesus will have to do is knock on a door and show you what is going on and why and you will want nothing other than for Him to come in and clean it all out and establish His rule in that place. As He transforms you mind, your desire to know Him and be filled with Him will grow and grow and grow. As the woman in the “Song of Songs” spoke to her friends: “Make this promise to

me, O women of Jerusalem! If you find my beloved one, tell him that I am sick with love” (*Song of Songs 5:8*), you will also be sick with love. Jesus will consume you and you will want Him and only Him. Your thoughts for Him will be obsessive. Your yearning to know and experience the peace and joy of His presence in your soul will be so intense you will give yourself no other option but to let Him in to every room where He comes knocking. You will totally embrace the freedom that He wants to bring into your life and you will daily live to know and experience that freedom.

Yes, there will be a day where letting Jesus into the place of your wounds will no longer be a scary process; but it will be something that you actually desire as you know the end will be more of Jesus in your life. And at that point, some of this “putting away” can actually be an overnight experience. I think I have shared with some of you the way I recently saw Lesley open a door to a deep dark room and just embrace Jesus; and the transformation that He worked in that area of her life was so fast it was mind boggling. You see she is sick in love with Jesus and is willing to let Him in and do what He needs to do in order that she might know Him deeper. Literally within a day or two of opening this door she was already experiencing His freedom and His joy and it was already overflowing into her other relationships. So take hope; things do get better and the process does get faster. And remember everything God does is all about relationship—you getting to know Him as intensely as He knows you. It is all about more of Jesus in your life.

For those of you who may not be tracking with me in all of this, I encourage you to go back and listen from the beginning to all the teachings in our study in Ephesians. Those teachings lay the foundation for understanding all that I have

been talking about. Besides, it is critical that you become filled with Jesus in all of those rooms within your soul or else you will not be able to obey the next command.

Ephesians 4:32

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

So in the context of people who have hurt us, wounded us, and caused us great horrific pain; how can we be kind to them, tenderhearted and forgiving? I believe the answer is rooted in a few truths which we will have to choose to walk in (and in which we will be able to walk in when Jesus cleans out all our gunk).

First, we have to understand that everything that we are “to do” is a result of our relationship with Jesus and His living His life in and through our lives (***Galatians 2:20; 5:5, 16, 25; Ephesians 5:9***). Therefore, our ability to obey will be directly correlated to the number of rooms in our soul in which He dwells as our obedience is really His obedience to the Father, which is why we are told that if we ask anything of the Father in His name that He will do it for us—He will be our provision and our provider (***John 14:12-14; 15:7, 16; 16:23-24; 1 John 3:21-22***). He is the only one who gives us the power to do what please Him (***2 Corinthians 3:5-6; Philippians 1:11; 2:13, James 4:6; Hebrews 13:20-21; 2 Chronicles 30:12; Isaiah 26:12; Jeremiah 32:40; Ezra 1:5***). By the way, I quote so many scriptures so you can understand the authoritative nature of this truth!

Second, as God works to “put away” all the anger, wrath, bitterness and malice from our hearts we will come to understand that those who hurt us were also unfortunate products of great damage and destruction which occurred in their souls by those who should have loved, cared for, and protected them. And although that does not make what they did to you ok, it does allow you to have a platform for compassion or to have a tender-heart towards them and their brokenness.

Now, don't mistake what I am saying. Too often we feel guilty about being angry at those who hurt us and since we have been told for so long that we are not to be angry (or that it is bad to be angry) we tend to make excuses for others as a way to avoid dealing with the truth. But there is no excuse for what happened (or what they did to you) and choosing that path of excuse will still result in the unresolved pain distorting your life, as we discussed before.

But here is the reality. When God heals your wounds you will no longer have a reason to be angry at those who hurt you (at least for the past), for the cause of your anger and dysfunction will no longer be there. This is what it means when Peter said that God has redeemed us from futile way of life that we inherited from our forefathers (**1 Peter 1:18**). He has redeemed us from the pain they caused, He has redeemed us from the rejection and abandonment, He has redeemed us from our need to take on and subsequently pass on the brokenness of our forefathers, and He has redeemed us from all those dysfunctional coping mechanisms we learned from them. He has made all things new (**2 Corinthians 5:17**); therefore, when we “put on” the **new self** we can actually live free from the past because we no longer have a reason to be wrathful.

In addition, since He just does not clean out our rooms, but He fills them with His agape love (**3:17** says that He roots us and grounds us in His love), it is actually possible and even natural to be kind and tenderhearted—even to those that hurt you.

Third, when you realize that the life that God has brought to you has nothing to do with your deserving it any more than the next person, but everything to do with His desire for you and His love for you, in gratitude you will want others to experience the very same outpouring of grace, mercy and forgiveness.

Now there is a question that is begging to be asked. Why did He choose to let you experience the fullness of His redemption and give you, out of all the people who belong to Him, an understanding of how to live a redeemed life? The answer is simple. It is because He is obsessed with you and passionately desires to be in relationship with you. So He literally plucked you from the crowd and said, “here I am; come and experience a transformed and redeemed life.”

But then we have to ask, what about all the others? Why, for the most part, has generation after generation gone by without truly knowing why they can trust themselves to God and how to trust themselves to God in the rooms of their soul? Honestly, I cannot answer that question; but I can be thankful that He chose me and worship Him for the outpouring of His love and mercy over my life. In addition, I can desire to be a living miracle and show those who hurt me that it is possible to live a redeemed life and live from the **new self** who is kind and tenderhearted and is willing and able to forgive.

I want you to consider the following truth which when you stop and really think about it is quite unfathomable. Jesus forgave us for everything—every thought

and every deed (past, present, and future) that violated His standard of holiness. There is not a single offense against His perfection that remains (**Romans 5:1; Colossians 2:14**). What a gift we have been given. What a mercy He has bestowed. And as we are filled with Him we will be merciful as He is merciful, we will forgive as He has forgiven, and we will love because we have first been loved (**1 John 4:19**). Consider the following story which illustrates this truth:

Luke 7:36-48

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to have dinner with him, so Jesus went to his home and sat down to eat. When a certain immoral woman from that city heard he was eating there, she brought a beautiful alabaster jar filled with expensive perfume. Then she knelt behind him at his feet, weeping. Her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them off with her hair. Then she kept kissing his feet and putting perfume on them.

When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She's a sinner!" Then Jesus answered his thoughts. "Simon," he said to the Pharisee, "I have something to say to you." Go ahead, Teacher," Simon replied.

Then Jesus told him this story: "A man loaned money to two people—500 pieces of silver to one and 50 pieces to the other. But neither of them could repay him, so he kindly forgave them both, canceling their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?"

Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the larger debt."

"That's right," Jesus said. Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Look at this woman kneeling here. When I entered your home, you didn't offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You didn't greet me with a kiss, but from the time I first came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet. You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume. "I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love."

Consider the dark wickedness of anger, wrath, bitterness, clamor and malice from which you have been forgiven. Consider every self seeking thought you have entertained and realize that He forgave you for all of it. Consider the generational sin in which you have participated and have even passed on to others in the way you have treated them. All of it is gone; all of it has been erased from your record. In its place have been written some of the most beautiful words ever spoken: *"Tetelestai"* – "Paid in Full."

I love it, God never asks anything of us that He has not already done for us or lavished upon us. So the end of the process, the result of God knocking on your doors and you letting Him in to clean everything out and transform your mind is that you will be able to love greatly as you have been loved. As such, you will be kind, tenderhearted, and you will forgive one another just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. You have been forgiven of much and you will forgive much.

This is good news and provides us a lot of hope and purpose as to why we can

let Jesus in and work through this process no matter how painful it might be. Sure for now you feel the bitter anger towards others—and that's ok. Remember, you are just feeling the things you were supposed to have felt way back when but could not or were not afforded the opportunity to feel. So all that is happening to you is good and part of a necessary process that will result in your ability to be in relationship with those who have hurt you because of all that God will have accomplished within you.

Now you will still have to be in relationship in truth and love, which means that the fundamental nature or pattern of the relationship with those who hurt you will likely be permanently changed as you go through this process unless they are also seeking to be in a deep submitted relationship with Jesus. But if they are not, then you will most likely have to establish boundaries of protection which limit how you can be treated (which, unbeknownst to most of us, is actually an act of great love and compassion). You will have to practice how to be angry in these relationships and yet not sin so that any fresh wounds you incur will not result in bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander along with all malice.

In addition, you will have to practice honest and timely communication in order to deal with the offenses, in truth, so that you can live in continual and ongoing healing. This is very critical to learn not just with those whom you have to protect yourself from but especially with the relationships you share in this family and with those who are also seeking to be filled by Jesus. Unfortunately, open and honest communication is very difficult for most of us since we were never taught or saw any good examples healthy communication, especially during any sort of conflict.

Therefore, if someone has hurt your feelings it's ok to go and communicate but don't just stop and run away if you did not get the connection that is needed to grow the relationship. Stop, back up and try again and keep trying until you and the other person feels not just heard but understood and you both agree on how you can move forward in the relationship. Again, this only really works in relationships where there is a mutual desire to grow in friendship and love and does not really apply as much to those people against whom you have had to raise boundaries of protection.

Nevertheless, over time, you will learn to take each and every offense to Jesus and ask Him to heal it before it has a chance to fester and create problems within your soul. And as for His part, you can count on the fact that He not only will do it but has done it. He has already given you everything you need for life and godliness. How perfect is that!

Let's Pray