

Put Off Bitterness, Put On Tenderness

by Tim Conway

This sermon delves into Ephesians 4:31 and Ephesians 5:1-2, emphasizing the need to put away bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice, and instead be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving towards one another as God forgave us in Christ. The pattern of putting off the old ways and putting on new virtues is highlighted, stressing the importance of actively cultivating kindness and forgiveness. The sermon underscores the power of faith in transforming our hearts and minds, leading us to reflect on the sacrificial love of Christ on the cross and how it should inspire us to forgive others.

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Scripture: Ephesians 4:31, Ephesians 5:1, James 2:17, Matthew 6:14, Colossians 3:13

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Description

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Transcript

Okay, once again, we are in Paul's epistle to the Ephesians 4. I want to read four verses. Chapter 4, v. 31, Ephesians 4.31, "...Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." Now let's jump to Ephesians 5, the first two verses there.

"...Therefore, be imitators of God as beloved children, and walk in love as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Now, you may have not been with us all the way through these verses. And even if you have been, you may have forgotten. What we don't want to lose track of is this.

Chapter 4, v. 22, 23, and 24 give us the broad teaching or the broad injunction, the broad admonition as to how sanctification works. In v. 25, Paul gets specific with us. He begins to apply v. 22, 23, and 24 to specifics.

Notice the pattern. I just want you to remember the pattern. V. 22, put off.

The old mannish ways. Put off. Belongs to your former manner of life.

Corrupt through deceitful desires. And then, we're to be renewed in the spirit of our minds. And then, we are to put on the new man created after the likeness of God.

True righteousness and holiness. That's the pattern. That's the formula.

The Christian ethic, the Christian moral principle is found in this. Listen, the Christian ethic says stop. There are things we need to stop.

There are ways we used to live that we need to quit. But it never stops there. It always says start.

It always says do. It always says that there is a way to imitate Christ, to imitate God, to be like Him. You have to do.

Listen, we are to be fruitful people. Not just stop the sin. We are to be people who do good.

This neutral morality doesn't exist in Christianity. We're not just telling people clean up their act. The idea here is well done good and faithful servant.

Remember what Revelation 14 says, their works follow them. Not their evil works. Their good works bearing fruit for God.

That's the picture. There's always a good to put on. But you know what? It never just stops at that.

The Christian ethic doesn't just say stop that, start that. It also brings in v. 23. And you never want to forget v. 23.

Because what that means is that there's always a reason. There's always an argument to be made. There's a motive.

In other words, Christianity thinks. Christianity isn't mindless. We don't do what we do just because we're told to do it.

There's a reason behind why we live the way we live. Christianity appeals to the mind. Christianity confronts us with certain truths.

Something to stop doing. Something to start doing. And there's a reason.

That's critical. Because people need to be thinking. That's where the Word of God comes in.

That's why we say it's so important. You want to grow. You want to mature.

You want to reach higher planes. You want to be more like Christ. You can't do that without being in this book all the time.

Why? Because this is what renews the mind. This is what makes you think right. This is what washes the mind.

You want to be renewed? You can't do that without truth. Listen, we need to be thinking people. Thinking people are people who are going to live most like Christ.

Thoughtless people don't end up living like Christ. It's thinking people. It's rational people.

It's reasoning people. That's it. And you know what? The same basic formula falls out through here.

You see it in v. 25. We looked at it. What do you put off? Falsehood.

What do you put on? You speak the truth. Why? We're members of one another. There's the reason.

I mean, as you move down through here, I recognize it doesn't work perfectly in every single verse, but you do see it over and over. I mean, you consider v. 28. There it is again.

What do you do? Thief. Stop. Don't steal.

What do you do? You work. Why? Why? There's a reason. So that you can give to people.

Same thing, we see it again. Look at v. 29. What do you put off? Corrupt talk.

What do you put on? You speak good for building up. Why? In order to be able to give grace to those who hear. And it's the same kind of thing that we have happening in v. 31, 32, 5.1, and 5.2. Same thing.

What do you see? V. 31, that's what you put off. V. 32, that's what you put on. End of v. 32, 5.1 and 5.2, there's the reason.

There's the argument behind why you should do this. Now, if you keep that correlation in mind, v. 22 and v. 31 have a correlation. They're the thing you put off.

In fact, you see it in both of them. In v. 22, what's the word? Put off. In v. 31, what's the word? Put away.

And what I want you to see is v. 22. That's the broad statement. And you know what it tells us? You put off the old man.

It's corrupt. Well, that's helpful. And it belongs to your former manner of life.

And it's got to do with deceitful desires. So guess what? Guess what you can say about v. 31? That's bad stuff. That's rotten stuff.

V. 31, bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, malice. That's corrupt. That belongs to the former manner of life.

You know what? Paul wants us to see our former manner of life for what it really is. Do you realize when you were lost, it was bad? It was raunchy. It was ugly.

When you think about this, bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, malice, that's the stuff that makes the people in this world really ugly. It's corrupt. And by the way, it comes from deceitful desires.

People are deceived who do this. But it's bad. And you know what? Paul wants us to hate this.

He wants us to be disgusted with it. He wants us to cast it away from us. So, v. 31, let's just kind of focus here.

Bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, malice. And you know, we could go through and we could look at each one of these six items. There are six nouns here.

You all see them. They jump right out. But there's overlap.

In one sense, bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, malice, in one sense, it's just a six-legged beast. It's almost like you don't even need to dissect this thing and look at each of the components by themselves. It's more like a package deal.

I mean, do you ever find people where you can pinpoint one of these are true, but none of the rest are? Oh yeah, that guy there, he's got this one. But none of the others. It's not like that.

These all are plants that grow in the same sewer. There's not only overlap. They feed on each other.

You find one of these, you find all of these. This is a package deal. And you know what's so package? You know what's so descriptive and so true of all of these things? Every one of them.

Inconsistent with love. Inconsistent with kindness. That's the fact.

No one possesses just one of these. Each is just a nuanced perspective of the native hatred of man. Isn't that what Scripture says? At one time, we were what? We were hating and hated.

This is it. Like I say, this is what really makes people of the world ugly. Some people wear this more on their sleeve than others.

But this belongs to our former manner of life. And it's the kind of garbage that needs to be put off. So, I think that the first term is a good fitting lead.

Bitterness. You see it? Verse 31. Bitterness.

Just the perfect crowning ugliness to start all of this with. Bitter. Aristotle.

I came across this. And I only mention this because Aristotle was a Greek philosopher who lived about 350 years before Christ. He said specifically of this word, he defined it as one who spoke Greek.

He said that this is what this word means. It means hard to be reconciled. That's what bitterness is.

It's a person who doesn't forgive. It's a person who nurses grudges. Kenny's a nurse.

I'm going to go to Lebanon. He's going to try to make people better. You know what it means to nurse something? You want to make it healthy.

You keep it alive. Keep it as healthy as possible. You feed it.

You medicate it. This is this kind of person. They feed and they medicate their grievances.

They stay there. They allow these long-standing resentments to just stay, to simmer, to percolate there. And you can just stretch it along here.

You've got wrath. You've got anger. You know what? It's just the person who nurtures their wrath to keep it warm.

I've got some resentment towards you. I'm not going to let go of it. I'm going to keep that thing.

I'm going to just feed that. I'm going to help that thing to stay alive. Keep it warm.

Keep it living. It's the person who just... we talk about the word brooding. It's kind of a word that has to do with birds sitting on eggs.

You're keeping that egg warm and alive because you want it to come to fruition. You want it to hatch. This is the person who broods over the insults and injuries that they've received from others.

It's a kind of settled... settled... like I won't let it go. A settled hostility that just infects their whole person. It's really a cancer.

It'll rot a person. And it does far more damage. You ever notice this? Bitter people, they hurt themselves far more than they ever hurt anybody else.

It's a cancer that eats them. The people that they're aiming all this at, that they feel the resentment towards, that they're nurturing the wrath and the anger towards, the other people oftentimes are clueless. Oh, sometimes they're both nurturing it against each other.

That happens. And a lot of times, other people don't even hardly know. What's wrath and anger? I mean, that's the burning.

We talked about anger back further up. That's when your emotions come to a fever pitch. Oftentimes, you see that anger in Scripture or wrath in Scripture are likened to burning.

It's that idea. It's the infuriation, the rage that rises up out of these bitter feelings. What's clamor? Clamor's basically when you lose it with your mouth.

You just become loud. You use tones and expressions. You know the thing about bitterness? It breaks forth.

It breaks forth in anger. It breaks forth in wrath. It breaks forth in the way you speak.

You can't speak right. You can't talk right to that person. But then, you know, it doesn't only break out in the fact that you can't talk right to them.

You can't talk right about them. That's where slander comes in. Or evil speaking.

You have to say things that hurt the person. And that's what malice is. Malice is basically wanting to hurt somebody.

It's wanting to get back at them. You see, this whole thing, it's a snowball. It's all packed together.

It's a dirty snowball. It's ugliness. These all just feed off of each other.

All our sisters to malice. Just evil intent. Evil desires towards other people.

Bitterness is synonymous with sour. You know, we talk about a sour person. And you know the thing here? Look, it's so easy as you hear this to think, oh, I know a person like that.

But you know what the problem is? Paul's not saying that you need to consider yourself with the person back there in the back row or over here or over there. He's talking to you. We really have to personalize this because you know what? This belongs to your former manner of life.

And there's not a person in here that not only in their former manner of life, but in their present manner of life knows that this is something that can creep in, it can enter in, having bitter or sour feelings towards another person, somebody you imagine has wronged you. Sometimes it's only imaginary, but sometimes it's legitimate. Sometimes it's purposeful.

Sometimes it's not purposeful on the part of the other person. Sour. It's the opposite of sweetness.

Obvious. Bitterness. Sweetness.

You see, he moves forward into the kindness. This is the stuff that's opposite to it. Tenderheartedness.

It's opposite of all that. It's the spite that harbors that resentment. It keeps a score of wrongs.

You know, I was listening one day, we were driving somewhere, and I was listening to this testimony about Corrie Ten Boom. And you all know how she forgave like the guards at Ravensbrück, the concentration camp where her sister died. And she had forgiven.

But you know there was a day when her pastor was talking to her and she got talking to her about some incident and Corrie brought up about Christians. She had their letters. And they had wronged her and she had the proof because she kept these letters and the pastor just said, Corrie, Corrie, you're able to forgive these guards in the concentration camp, but you're keeping score over here against these Christians? And she went and she took those letters and she threw them in the fire and she was released.

But you know, we think about Corrie Ten Boom. The reality is there's a tendency you see, to keep score. Well, they did this.

They did that. They did the other thing. It's this brooding grudge.

Something we hold on to. And what comes with it? These harsh, these uncharitable opinions about that person. They fill our thoughts.

It makes the person crabby and sour and repulsive. And you know, the thing is, you see it on their demeanor. Sour people, you can see by the way they look.

It shows up on their face. It's a condition of heart that brings a scowl to their face, unkind words to the mouth. It's a condition that makes it impossible to see good in others.

You know the problem is when you're bitter, it doesn't just affect oftentimes the way you think about the person that you have this grudge against or that you feel has wronged you. I mean, it makes it just impossible to see any good in that person, but often, it just makes you a sour person overall. You become the kind of person that you can't see the glory in anything.

You can't see the beauty in anything. It infects you. People pretend they're not bitter, but behind the mirage, you find the brooding over wrongs.

Someone has said, I don't know who it is, but they said bitterness is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die. That's a good picture of it. And you know the thing is, by nature, we're all bitter.

God inspired Paul to come along to us Christians and say stop this. Put this away. Stop.

And you know what? The grievance may be genuine. It may be. People may have really wronged you.

But that alone doesn't make someone bitter. It's when we stay there. It's when we ponder it.

It's when we meditate upon the wrongs. We nurse them. We rehearse them.

We play them over and over. We dwell on them. And it's the kind of thing that if we do happen to forget, when we see them or we hear their name again, there it is all over, we deliberately sour ourselves again.

Ah, I had forgotten about that. Yeah, they wronged me. And you know the thing about this, the more bitter a person is, the more imaginary a lot of the offenses become.

They begin to read things in. This is sister also to people that are super sensitive, hypersensitive, don't have thick skins. We call them thin-skinned.

They're always ready to be insulted. They're always ready to be wronged. But just people that walk around and you feel like you've got to walk on pins and needles with them because they're so fragile.

And the fragility here has to do with them just keeping score, them being sour. Of course, many offenses are purely imaginary. There's no substance to them.

But a lot of them, there is substance. And the thing about bitterness is it tends to just feed itself into more bitterness. It's not like it's very hard to just leave it at a certain level.

It tends to compound. And the thing is, more and more of the supposed insults and wrongs are indeed imaginary, but they're not deemed that way because the problem is bitterness corrupts even the imagination. You start imagining all these different things and we're just poisoned, assuming the worst.

Seize the wrongs where there are none. It nurses the fiction. Bitterness.

It's never ready to believe good about those that we are grieved with. And you know what happens? They're miserable people. They make other people miserable.

Bitterness, it distorts reality. It keeps us chained to the past because we're always remembering. That's the thing.

We're not remembering the good things. We remember and we hold on to the bad things. Paul says that belongs to your former manner of life.

You know what he said back in the beginning of this section? He said you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do. This is pagan. This is Gentilian.

This is old man. This is your former manner of life. And this is corrupt and he says put it off.

This is the way the unregenerate world lives. It should never appear in the Christian. Listen to how he says it.

Let all, all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander be put away from you along with all malice. And I'm going to say this again. I've said this in the past on some of these.

This needs to be said. When he says put away, it's an imperative. And he's telling you you need to do it.

There's nothing here about you sitting down and waiting for God to come along and do something. He tells you do this. It's like what? I mean, it's like this.

I'm holding on. This is like bitterness. You know what he's assuming? You can do this.

That's what he's assuming. You can let go of it. There's no place for the Christian to say I lack the ability, I lack the power, I lack what it takes to be able to let go of it.

He's coming in here and he's saying let go. And if you just face that reality, have you ever had that kind of I guess that thought, that revelation come to you? Like, oh yeah, I can let go of this. In the theology class, we've been moving through Romans 8. And it says concerning the flesh, you're no debtor to the flesh.

It's like that can be a revelation to people. Like, I don't owe the flesh anything. I don't owe you anything.

Yeah, I can let go. I mean, just do it. Really, I can just let go? Yep, you can put that away.

You can say no, I'm not holding on to that. Now, like I've been saying, the Christian ethic doesn't stop just at that, but clearly that's where it starts. Let it go.

Are you keeping inventory of offenses? Then I would say this, behold this text and see plainly what you are told to do. It's an imperative. Is there any ugliness within you? What this says, grab hold of it, cast it away, stomp on it, slam the door against it.

Paul doesn't concede to the Christian. He doesn't say, oh, well, old wretched man that you are. You know, this is the way you're going to live.

This is the way you are. This is the way we all are. We're helpless.

We're sinful. We're defeated. He doesn't teach we should just sit down in our sourness and wait for God to come along and perform a miracle on us and zap us somehow and that's what it's going to take.

Read it for yourself. I would say this, behold the inspired words of v. 31 and do what it says. Christian, you have no excuse.

Why? Because remember the verse before this? You've been sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. There's a power of God at work in you. You can do this.

Do it. You say, that's it? You just say do it? Like you're imagining we have power in ourselves? No, I'm not! Since when did I say that? I'm not imagining you have the power innately in your own natural fallen self. But that's not what a Christian is.

They've been sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. The power of God is resident there. And so stop with your silly complaints and excuses of weakness.

Of course you're weak in yourself. But you're not weak in the power of Christ. You're not.

No Christian should talk that way. Read it for yourself. Let it sink in.

Put all. That's His word. All.

I can't even coddle a little bit of this? I can't just coddle a little resentment? All. Think with me. I mean, think with me about this.

Paul is assuming genuine Christians need to be told v. 31. Now that ought to suggest a couple things to you. It's necessary to be told as a Christian to put off bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, malice.

Why? I mean, it suggests two things. First, it suggests this to me. Paul assumes that Christians will be exposed to a situation in their lives now.

I mean, here's the thing. He recognizes this. You as Christians, you are going to be exposed to the same kinds of situations now in your Christian life that in your former life when you lived according to your former manner, you were exposed to and it did provoke bitterness and wrath and anger, clamor, slander, malice.

You are going to be put in those same situations now. And you as a Christian have no right to entertain those things. You put them away.

Paul sees us getting faced with these situations where loving others is not going to come naturally. And in fact, I would even say this, God is going to see to it that you are put in situations where you are going to have to put this off. Guaranteed.

And you know what? I don't have to convince you of that. Because since the day you became a Christian, life hasn't been perfect. You've been exposed by things.

You've been exposed by these temptations to bitterness. God is going to bring situations that will require us to have to consciously put off what is ugly and unchristian. We're going to have to put it off.

Does it occur to anyone that you would never have to put away bitterness if everyone treated you exactly like you want to be treated? Look, the reality is this, if you had not been ill-treated, there would be no reason for the bitterness in the first place unless you're the kind of person that just imagines everything. But none of us imagine everything. I mean, we have some people with far too overactive imaginations when it comes to bitterness.

But the reality is, you don't have to wait too long. Somebody's going to wrong you. Somebody's going to speak to you with a tone that is not nice.

Somebody's going to do something. Somebody's going to slight you. Somebody's going to be unloving in some way.

Somebody's going to sin against you. Something is going to happen. Like I say, the Lord's going to design it.

Why? To test what we're made of. Look, this is the test. The test is if you're genuine, you know what's going to happen? You're going to be able to put this off.

You know, there is a test in Scripture. If you don't forgive, that's very telling about what you are. And God's going to test us.

God's always going to test us. Job is a good example of that. Why do you think Job is there? Job is a good picture.

Because you know, there is a devil and there is God who is often wanting to prove to the devil probably far more than we know, Behold My servant. And you say, well, I'm not Job. No, neither am I. But the reality is the devil's still there.

We're God's people. God is there. And God wants to test His people in the face of the devil.

Bring your temptations. You know, He put His very only begotten Son in that same situation. Did He not? The Spirit drove Him out into the wilderness to be tempted.

And you can guarantee that if Christ who broke ground for us and who we are to follow, the temptations are coming. The temptations are going to be there. We're all going to be put in places where this has to be worked out.

We have to put away. That's what this verse suggests to us. Look, your day is coming if it's not here right now.

And you've already experienced them in the past. This is something every one of us is going to get to glory. We're going to endure in this race and we're going to get to the end.

How do we endure? Well, one of the chief ways that we're going to endure is we're going to be striving to love people even when we receive conduct that isn't always loving. Put it away. The second thing that it suggests is this.

Such an injunction from the Apostle means the Apostle doesn't assume that when a person becomes a Christian, they automatically put all of this away. You know what he's assuming? He's assuming that some of the Ephesians that were sitting out there, he's saying this needed this word right when he was saying it. And others were going to need it in the future.

And some of it may have already needed it in the past, but they're just getting it now. And that's going to be true of us too. See, God knows that just because you're a Christian, you're regenerate, you're truly born again, you truly know Christ, you truly are on this road, that doesn't mean you don't need this.

But you know what? There's power in the Word of God. We have the Spirit. We hear the Spirit-inspired Word.

It's powerful. It does things. God's people respond.

And that's the expectation here. The reality is this, Paul knows better. He knows bitterness, resentment, unforgiveness is something we have to consciously lay hold of, put away.

And here's the thing, because if you don't put it away, where is it? Tell me. If you don't put it away. You have to put this away.

If you don't put it away, where is it? Well, it's not put away. It's still where it was. You don't want it there.

Christian, you need this admonition just as I do. Now, I would just say this before I jump on to the next thing. If you have eyes to see, if you've noticed, you'll notice that anger shows up.

Wait a second, didn't he deal with anger back up like in v. 26? And here's anger again. Or you think about corrupt communication. Wait, didn't he deal with corrupt communication? The word that we're given for slander is evil speaking.

Didn't he already deal with that? Yes. Is he rehashing some of this? I would just say this, this is not merely needless repetition. You know there's one massive difference when you deal with these things in v. 31 than when they were dealt with before? You know what the massive difference is? You just heard v. 30.

The great difference is introduced by that verse. The Holy Spirit. Do you know what strikes me about this line of six nouns? It's almost... no, I don't want to say almost.

It is diametrically opposed to the fruit of the Spirit that you find in Galatians 5. Just listen to this. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. The thing you're supposed to put away is bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice.

You know what the difference is now? Now when we hear about anger and we hear about corrupt communication, you know what's in our minds or ought to be in our minds that maybe wasn't before v. 30? Because now we have a sensitivity to the fact that that Spirit whose fruit is all of these things, He's very grieved when we don't let go of bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, malice. Now, as always, Paul doesn't leave it at the negative. It's not just you take this off.

It's not like putting off that old garment and now you just stand there with nothing. That's never adequate. That's never taking this thing far enough.

We're never to leave it simply at the negatives. The way to best deal with the negative is not merely stop it, it's replace it. That's always the truth.

Would you kill sin? Replace it with a positive virtue. I have a tree in my yard that perfectly fits this illustration. I have these deciduous trees.

Who knows what deciduous means? What is it? The leaves fall down. The leaves fall down even on non-deciduous trees. But yes, it's the fact that the leaves go through a very noticeable cycle.

You know, we have evergreens. We have the live oak family that tend to stay green even though they do cycle through leaves. They do tend to stay green all year.

A deciduous tree, the leaves very decidedly take a turn in color and they die and they're replaced. But I have a tree in my yard. It's a red oak.

And I know Pete has one in his... I think it's his neighbor's house behind. But you know what's interesting about red oaks? Is this time of year, the leaves begin to die. They don't fall off.

If you come by my house, you will find my maple trees, they lose their leaves and now they're naked. My sycamore trees, they lose their leaves and there they are. They look dead.

But if you look at that red oak, you know what you'll find? All the leaves stay on. I mean, it gets a really high wind. It may take some of them off.

But for the most part, all those dead leaves stay on until the buds begin to break out in the spring with new growth. And then the old gives way to the new. And you know, that is a perfect example of the Christian.

God doesn't want us to be like the sycamore tree and like the maple tree. He doesn't want you to put off and then you stand there naked and put nothing on. That is not the neutral morality that Christianity... it's immediately as the old falls away, the new should bud forth and replace it.

It's the perfect picture. Brethren, Paul calls us to this. The best way to get rid of the defects is by cultivating the new virtue.

That's always it. You don't just want to look at a person and say, oh, I need to stop resenting them. You know the best way to go about this is to start loving them.

That is by far the replacement mindset that we're obviously being taught here. God doesn't want us to shed the old, bad, ugly leaves only to stand there with nothing. That's not it.

We're to put off in order to put on. The surest way to handle bitterness and all its ugly sisters here immediately cultivate kindness, tenderheartedness, and a forgiving spirit. That's v. 32.

A vacuum is never good. I mean, look, brethren, didn't our Lord say this? You can tidy up the house. You can sweep it and make it right.

You can send that unclean spirit out. But if that's all the further you go, what happens? He's coming back. You see, you don't want to leave the vacuum.

So put it off. Put off. Don't stop there.

Put on immediately. Don't even let there be a gap. Kind to one another.

Tenderhearted, forgiving one another. There was an old divine by the name of Thomas Chalmers. Maybe some of you.

He spoke this way. He spoke about the expulsive power of a new affection. Don't you like that? The new affection, tenderheartedness, forgiving, kindness.

There's an expulsive power. It's like you put on kindness and it expels. It's like turning the magnet backwards with the filings and it shoots them away.

It doesn't give place for those things to root and grow. And look, there's power in that. This is the priest taking the step into the Jordan River at fledge stage.

The person you feel resentment towards, ask the Lord, show you something kind that you can do and go do that. If there's anything that will melt your heart, it'll be that. Or maybe it'll be something else too.

There's obviously a truth that we have to apply to the mind and we're going to get to that in a second. Christian, this is a choice. I mean, when you have the Apostle come along and say put this off, put this on, those are imperatives.

That means your will is involved. That means there is a choice that you have to make. You cultivate this.

You choose this. You must become kind. Young's literal translation actually translates v. 32 this way.

Become one to another kind. Don't you love that? Martin Lloyd-Jones says he really emphasizes this. Because the King James is like the ESV.

It says be kind. Lloyd-Jones really brings this out. This is becoming.

And he says this suggests here a process of cultivation. You know how you nurse grievances? We also need to put that off and nurture kindness. Listen, if all of this is just about well, you know, we've got to get to church and hear the sermon.

Brethren, kindness, tenderheartedness, love, you doing things for others, you figuring out how to help others, you being kind to others, actually strategizing, actually cultivating, actually nurturing such a thing. This is what we have on the table here. The first one is kindness.

Now listen, we think of kind. Do you know the original word actually means this? It pertains to being superior for a particular purpose or superior in usefulness. You know this verse.

No one after drinking old wine desires new, for he says the old is good or the old is better. That's our word. It's literally the term better.

It's like better. I remember that one of the current days, oh, it was D.A. Carson. Carson said that when he was in college, he belonged to a fraternity.

And he said there was another fraternity off the way. And he said at the beginning of the year, the fraternity's really trying to attract the new students in. And he said that they put a big banner above the front of their frat house that said, Better.

And Carson said that the one across the street put up a banner and said Best. But he said you never really trump better. Better is always better.

Even if somebody puts Best, we're better. That was his point. They thought they were winning the battle, but they really didn't.

But think about that. What's better? And remember, one another shows up twice in this verse. When we're talking better, we're talking about for the other person.

What's better? Oh, there's a much better way than harboring resentment against them. What's best? There's always something better. The better way is making myself most useful to them.

That's what it has to do with. The better usefulness or the superior usefulness. You remember how the Lord said My yoke is easy? There's our word right there.

He's saying My yoke is kind. My yoke is better. My yoke is superior.

That's the idea. The whole idea of the word is a goodness which is superior. It's kind.

It's useful. Helpful to others. The sour, bitter person doesn't even think that way.

Sour, bitter people are just constantly thinking about themselves. Oh, I've been wronged. They're not even capable.

Sour people. All they can think about is how somebody's hurt them. How dare them! Don't they know who I am? It's so selfish! They can't even think about other people.

You have to put that away. Life is all about you. You have to put that away.

Remember the one another. Remember the one another. Because who is this one another? The one another that you're called to be kind to is also the one another that you're called to forgive.

You know, a lot of times, the person that you're called to show this kindness to in this superior way, this better way, is a very person who has wronged you. And it's not just imaginary. Somehow they did slight you.

And then you have this. Tenderhearted. You remember the pagan? The Gentile from back up in v. 17? You know one of the things that it says about the Gentile? Well, how are they? Hardness of heart? You remember that? Hardhearted.

That's the Gentile. They become callous. Some translations say unfeeling.

That's what callous is. You feel what callous is on your hand? You can't feel. They're unfeeling people.

That's the opposite of tenderhearted. And you know what it says? They've given themselves up to sensuality and they're greedy to practice every kind of impurity. The pagan wants to feel certain things, but it's not to feel good thoughts.

They want to feel pleasure. They want to satisfy bodily desires. They're greedy for that.

That's what they want to feel. But they don't want to feel kindness towards other people. Unfeeling.

You know what it means? They look at other people. Other people are just objects to serve them. Objects to gratify them.

Objects to appease these greedy things they go after. They're unmoved when they look at other people, whether the people are hurting or sorrowful. Whatever.

It doesn't matter. They're just oblivious to other people. Every man for himself.

That's the ugly stock. Just selfish. Selfish.

Nothing that happens to others makes the slightest difference. Put it off. Be done with that.

You have to really think about that. You know, the thing is you look at human history. You start looking at documentaries.

I mean, you can find all sorts of documentaries about wars or pirates. I mean, just look at the history of mankind. What do you find? It's ugly.

It's marked by wars, by cruelty, barbarism, inhumanity, atrocity. Think about this word, tender-hearted. Can you imagine a world of people where everyone is tender-hearted? I hope you can, because that's what Paul wants the church to be.

I mean, can you imagine a whole church full of people that are truly tender-hearted? Look, I think in many ways, this church reflects that and resembles that. But all the more, we need to press on all the more. Then forgiving.

I mean, Paul's putting his finger right there on the basic cause of the bitter spirit. We don't forgive. Somebody hurts us deliberately, unintentionally, imaginarily.

We don't let go. That's where the root of bitterness takes hold. Learning to forgive and forget is that which truly lifts Christianity so high.

This is the secret to living Christian joy, Christian peace, Christian love. If you are walking around with resentment in your heart, you know, you can't pray. There's no joy.

You're sour. You're bitter. You're feeling this.

Some kind of envy or jealousy's grabbed hold of you and all you can do is think about that person. It's not good thoughts. And there's malice in there.

I mean, you're grieving the spirit. It's bad. But here's a question.

See, we talked about what you put off. We talked about what you put on. But there's always the renewal of the mind.

And you say, how do I do this? I mean, yeah, that's nice. You're up there holding the bottle and you just let go of it. Like it's that easy.

But you don't know what that person did to me. Yeah, you stood up there and you've got your little graphic going on, but that doesn't help me a whole lot. Paul says, no, I know you need to be renewed in mind.

I know that this comes with thinking right. And this is essential. This is what's crucial.

Indispensable to this. And this is where v. 23 comes in. Be renewed in the spirit of your minds.

Christianity is not mindless morality. There are reasons behind the washing and the renewal of the spirit of our minds. Do we just forgive? Is that all there is? No, we have to think.

So what do we think? Well, be kind. Be tenderhearted. Be forgiving.

As God in Christ forgave you. Now, chapters 5.1 and 5.2 I think also take us down this same vein of thought. We just simply don't have time to get to all of them.

We don't really need to. We can stop right here and fix ourselves on this. Do you recognize that this comes down to a matter of faith? You know, James says, faith without works is dead.

You show me a faith that doesn't have works, then I'm going to show you a faith that can't save. Faith is me believing who God is as He declares Himself here. You have to believe that God is.

He's a rewarder of them that seek Him diligently. We believe His promises. You see, the thing is when I hear words like this, just simple words, God in Christ forgave you.

Okay, you're bitter with somebody, and you speak those words to the person. You see, if there's genuine faith, there's a dynamic that happens that comes in the ear and processes in the brain. What happens? I mean, the true Christian, their faith latches onto a statement like that and they feel something.

Something moves them. It makes them think, as God in Christ forgave you, what do we need to be forgiven of? And you see, you start thinking about the things you did. Not just when you were lost, but maybe even more so the things you've done since you've been a Christian and you've had all this light.

And you know, instead of keeping track, keeping a record, tallying the accounts of the wrongs that other people have done to you, you actually start thinking, wow, I remember when I did this and that and that and that and that and that and that and that. And you start thinking about the debt that you owe. You imagine Christian in Pilgrim's Progress with that load on his back.

And you begin to think about how big yours was. And you begin to think about how you'd spit in the face of God over and over and over. And you start to think about that.

You start to think of what has God released me from so that I'm able to walk out of death row scot-free. I'm a free man. After all the things I've done, I can walk away free.

Are you going to hold another person by the neck in your thoughts? Are you justified to do that when you remember the Lord whispering in your ears, your sins, which are many, are forgiven? No, but you don't know what they did to me! And God is saying, but do you remember what you did to Me? Do you remember what you've done to others? Do you remember what you've done to your parents? Do you remember what you've done to your friends? Do you remember what you've done to family members? Do you remember what you've done to people No, you didn't know. Do you remember the things you've done? And see, there's something about faith that latches hold on that truth. I would just ask you this, does that reality soften your heart towards other people? Does it melt the frozen heart? Those simple words, as God in Christ forgave you.

If you can just respond, but you don't know what that person did to me, what can I say to you? I can say to you what Peter said to Simon Magus. You're in the gall of bitterness. I mean, you're not giving any evidence that you know the Lord.

Because what you're doing is you're not giving any evidence that you have faith that that is true of you. Listen to these words again. Forgiving one another even as God in Christ forgave you.

I mean, think, what did God owe you after the life you lived? God owed us nothing. We just didn't hate one another. Being hated and hating, we hated Him.

And how does He respond? You tell me, how does He respond? He takes His eyes off of us and He turns them on His beloved Son. And He strikes Him with such a blow as to drain the dregs of hell for every one of His people. That's what happens.

He doesn't hold back His only Son. He sent Him all the way to that shame and all the way to that agony of the cross so that every one of my miserable sins could be put away. See, this is what has to happen.

This is what faith does. You've got any resentment at all towards an individual, towards a brother or sister especially. And what are you going to do? Here's what you need to do.

You look at them. You know what? The grief, the wrong, it may be legit. In fact, it may be bad.

But what you want to do is you want to look then at the cross. You want to see Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. He's like, Father, I don't want to go to this.

I don't want to do this. This is too terrible. Please take this away.

But He surrenders. I came to do Thy will. Okay, look back at this.

They wronged Me. Go back and look there. Watch Him being scourged.

Watch them hoist Him. The sun forbears to shine. What is going on in that three hours of darkness? He is silent.

But they wronged Me. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. But that's speaking about the Roman soldiers.

No, but what happens? Because the Spirit gives you ears to hear. Forgive you because you didn't know what you were doing. You nailed Him to the cross.

Your sins. My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me? Now that's a good question to try to answer. Lord, they wronged Me.

Behold the man. They brought Him out with a crown of thorns pressed. They shamed Him.

This is the Son of God. He endured the shame of the cross. Psalm 22 says that His soul was poured out like water.

And you know Isaiah 53. God crushed Him. He sweat, as it were, great drops of blood because He was under such duress.

He said at one point there leading up to the cross that He was so under the duress of the coming cross, He was ready to die even before He got there. The idea of what He had to be confronted with. Now you look back at these individuals and what they've done to you, and you recognize why the Son of God, God Himself, why one so mighty, why one of such character and pure, pristine character must come from the very halls of heaven and come down here and humble Himself.

How it is that God even became man. Who can tell that God would become man? It's a miracle that God would become man to die for us. Okay, you look back at what they've done to you.

And you look at this. And if that doesn't move you, I can tell you this, you have not faith and you are in the gall of bitterness, and if you will not forgive another, Scripture says the Father will not forgive you. Because that truth right there will melt the heart of anybody that believes it.

And you look at those people. How can I hold on to that? When after everything I owed, I came and I fell before Him and I pleaded that He would have mercy with me and He let me free. Am I going to grab them by the throat and say, pay me in full? That's what you can do after looking at the cross.

And listen, this is real life. And there are some people in here that have bitterness. And you can see it on their face.

You can see it in the way they react to others. You can hear it in the way they talk about others. They slander others.

There's a bitterness. Look, this is real life. If you have bitterness and you can't speak well of certain people, you can't think well and you can't think kindness and you can't devise kind ways of treating them, what Scripture says, if you're harboring this, you know what Scripture says? Right there.

Right there in that chapter where we were at today, it says that there's a warning. Warning you about failing to reach or obtain the grace of God because of what? A root of bitterness. And we as elders, we encounter this.

And there are some folks that attend this church regularly that are bitter. And the hope is that a truth like this, this is where Paul takes us. Oh, it's so short.

But you don't want to make it short that as you're considering Jesus, you're thinking on Him, you just think on this. You think about what He endured. An eternal hell.

You don't just get a free pass for nothing. That hell had to be paid. An eternity of suffering had to be paid.

You don't owe \$100 and Christ comes along and pays a penny. Christ paid it all. And He set you free.

In our freedom, we ought to be able to look at the person that sinned against us and have pity. Especially if they're lost. They don't know what they do.

They know not what they do. They're doing what you did when you walked in the former manner of your life. And if they're Christians, you just remember this, you haven't had a perfect day yet.

And the reality is, if Paul's assuming that in the church we need this exhortation, he's assuming that each one of us are going to be ill-treated to where we need to put off bitterness and put on forgiveness. But have you ever recognized that for this equation to work, there's going to be other people in the church that are actually the people that we have to forgive. And you are going to be in that part of the equation as well as the other part.

You are often the person that has to be forgiven. I mean, what are you? Are you the perfect person that walks around in the midst of the church and all you do is get offended? Well, there are people that think that way. And of course, they always think that the reason that they're offended is valid.

I mean, there are people like that. They think they're the only perfect person in the church and everybody else is... that's not it. Well, none of us are perfect yet.

And none of us treat one another exactly the way that we should. Brethren, if you forgive others their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

We look at the cross. We look at our fellow man. We look at the cross.

We look at our fellow man. We look at the cross. Paul knows if you're genuine, that's going to melt your heart towards this guy over here.

And you're going to be able to look at him and smile. Well, brother, we're forgiven. We can forgive each other.

Because look, I mean, I can't even keep this small debt in my mind. Brethren, do you realize who you are? Do you realize where you're going? Do you realize what God has done for us? Do you want to hold on to some little debt that your brother or sister owes to you? Are you going to grab them by the neck and choke them? Like in that Matthew 18 parable? Are you rather going to rejoice? You see, this little truth, as God in Christ forgave you. See, if it doesn't melt your heart, it's because you don't believe it.

If you don't believe it, you're not a believer. If you're not a believer, you won't forgive. If you don't forgive, you won't be forgiven.

That's the way Scripture works. Put it off. Put it on.

And renew your mind. Renew your mind. Dwell on this reality.

Think about what you were. Think about what God has saved you from. Think about what God owed you.

What He owed you and what He actually gave you. Father, I pray that You would melt our hearts with this reality. Make it so real, so powerful.

I pray in Christ's name, Amen.

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