

The Remedy for an Angry Heart

By Don Green

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Ephesians 4:31-32
Preached on: Sunday, September 13, 2015

Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

It is good that we were able to sing songs that focused on the fullness of our salvation as we prepared for the hearing of God's word today. On those songs that remind us and let us enter into the joy of the full remission of our sin, that all of our guilt before God has been removed by the precious shed blood of Jesus Christ who interceded for sinners like us at the cross, that our guilt has been placed on him where it has been punished and the guilt of that has been settled and removed and his righteousness has been given to us. In the gift of salvation, we have been declared righteous in the presence of a holy God and that should have an impact on us that we're going to work out and work through here in our text here today. That should have such a profound impact on your heart, one of gratitude and humbling you under the grace of God that he has given you such a gracious salvation, free of cost to you and all at the expense of our Lord Jesus Christ. You have received eternal blessings at the hand of God that you did not deserve, in fact, you deserve the exact the opposite. You deserve his judgment. Well, the point of that here for today is that that has a profound impact on the way that you view your human relationships both inside and outside of the body of Christ.

Our text for this morning is found in Ephesians 4:31-32 and I would invite you to turn there with me. Ephesians 4:31-32, a very profound passage that shapes the way that we view everything in life. Ephesians 4:31-32 say this,

31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

There is an interesting aspect to this passage that I want to highlight at the start. Where you start your thinking in life begins at the end of this passage rather than at the beginning. The passage kind of drills down until it gets to the core of what it is to influence us and if you look there at the end, you see, "just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." When you are thinking about life, you should think from this fundamental perspective: though I was a guilty sinner, God has been gracious to me and has forgiven all of my sins in Christ. Whereas I was guilty before him and under his wrath and had nothing to offer to him in order to bribe him into forgiving me, there was nothing in me that would prompt God to be gracious to me, despite that, God has poured out grace upon

me. He has forgiven my sins in Christ and now I stand before God forgiven, accepted eternally secure.

That thought is designed to go deeply into your heart and to transform the entire way that you think about all of life. It's from that fundamental thought that the admonition that Paul gives us here in Ephesians 4 finds its root. Forgiveness, beloved, is at the heart of true Christianity. The forgiveness of sins is the core of what biblical theology is about. For you to be a Christian is not to say that you have somehow achieved a standard of righteousness on your own. You did not somehow live a good life up until now and God said, "I don't have any choice, I've got to bless her with salvation. Look at that life. I mean, she has earned it." It's not like that. It does not work that way at all. It is not, Christianity is not a statement that God rewards your good behavior with salvation because you deserve it. Quite to the contrary, God saves you from sin when you do not deserve it. None of us in this room deserve the forgiveness of God. None of us in this room have done anything to merit his kindness and goodness to us.

You and I both, you are under condemnation under the law of God. Scripture says that you did not seek God. You did not honor him. You had no desire for him whatsoever and that you were guilty and fell short of his glory. You were dead in your trespasses and sins. That's the statement of Scripture about us, about you, and yet, here you are. Here you are gathered together in a Christian church, gathered together with other believers and if your faith is in Christ for your salvation and not of yourself, your sins are washed away by God and he has graciously brought you into his family and forgiven your sins and wiped away all of your guilt.

Well, the whole point of this passage is that that shapes everything about your inner and outer man. It is a profound shaping of your character when you work through the implications of that. This is not something to be treated lightly. It's not a matter that, oh, you think about this for a little bit and then you move on with the rest of your life as if you could raise your hand at a meeting or come forward and pray a prayer and receive the great gift of eternal salvation and then walk away the same person that you always were before, the same bitter, hateful, resentful person that you were before. No, no, no, no, that's not biblical Christianity at all. That's some kind of pagan substitute with a thin Christian veneer on it that has no bearing to the biblical reality. No, what Paul says here is that what Christ has done for us shapes all of life.

Here at the end of Ephesians 4, he's concluding his statements about basic Christian ethics. As we've seen over the past several weeks, we realize that in salvation we made a fundamental turning away from sin toward Christ. We broke bonds with the old life and came to Christ under the influence of his Holy Spirit and in principle it was settled for us forever that we would live under the Lordship of Christ, we would live under his grace and not follow after the lusts of the world from which we repented. Now, what Paul has done in chapter 4, verses 25 through the end of this chapter, is he has helped us work through the implications of what that means in our lives and here in verses 31 and 32, he is bringing a concluding matter to our thinking to show us how to work out that principle in life and I know for a fact that many of you need to hear this today.

How is it, then, that you go from having an angry spirit to a gracious one? In the most fundamental way, how is it that we move from being bitter and resentful over the things that have troubled us in the past or what people have done to us in the past, how is it that we move away from that and into the gracious spirit that is a reflection of true Christianity? You know, one of the things that I hope is true of me when I enter into old age if God gives me old age, I really want to be a gracious man in my old age and not someone who is bitter and cynical and all of that. And it has occurred to me many, many times over the years that if you want to end life like that, if you want to be someone who is a gracious, godly influence in your 70s and 80s and 90s, well, understand that that doesn't just happen. The kind of person that you become at the end of life is a reflection of the kind of person that you have been now in life here today.

So this just has long lasting implications for us and here in these verses Paul lays out three principles to conform you to the image of Christ in his grace and this is what we're going to look at. How is it, you know, this passage kind of meets some of us where we live and meets us in our irritable spirit and says, "How is it that I move from that to the kind of gracious spirit that Christ would have us to manifest?" Paul gives us three ways to move forward in that and the first one is this, the first principle that you need to see, you contemplate with your mind, you are moved by the grace of Christ to the point where you make a decisive commitment of your will to separate yourself from something and we see that in our first point here this morning: that you turn away from your anger. You turn away from your anger. Rather than justifying it, rather than rehearsing in your mind all of the things that have gone wrong in your life or the way that people have mistreated you or they did this or that and it hurt me really badly, rather than rehearsing that, you come to a point in your mind where you reject that and say, "That is no longer relevant to who I am. This has nothing to do with the way that I view life."

Paul, in verse 31, gives us a list of six ungodly attitudes that you are to put off. He writes in the imperative. This is a command. This is not optional for the Christian. Look at verse 31, there. He says, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice." Six attitudes that he lists out there: bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice. It would be tedious and also unnecessary in our context to do exhaustive studies of each word that is listed here. I suppose that you could make a sermon out of each word but that's not Paul's point. He's kind of touching on these things, bouncing along the waves to illustrate what it is that he's calling you to turn away from. It is enough to see that these attitudes share something in common and what they share in common is hostility toward others. They start with inner attitudes and progress toward verbal expression and we'll just kind of explain them very briefly individually and see the collective impact that they are supposed to have on our hearts, but do understand, beloved, that we should receive this instruction from God's word, these verses from the hand of the Apostle Paul, we should receive these with teachable, compliant spirits as Christians. We should not resent the fact that Scripture puts its finger on the pulse of our life and says, "This is not right and you need to change in this way." We should view this from the perspective of what we've sung about today, the glory of redemption in Christ. What a Savior. Full atonement. Can it be? Hallelujah what a Savior.

That the Son of God has given himself for us and despite all of our rebellion against God, God has wiped it off of the map. He does not take it into account when he deals with you any longer. He deals with you according to the righteousness and the pleasing nature of his own Son and secures your future and is gracious in constantly blessing you. That's the spirit from which you should view this passage. When you view it from that perspective, when you view things in that way, you can see instantly how inconsistent, how unthinkable these six attitudes in Ephesians 4:31 are with the Christian life.

Let's look at them together. Look at verse 31 with me. Paul says, "Let all bitterness and wrath be put away from you." This word "bitterness" is a word that refers to a sour spirit, sour speech, a complaining attitude toward life. It is the mark of someone with a negative, resentful, cynical outlook on life and you know who they are. Maybe you've looked in a mirror and you've seen a person like that. I don't know, but someone who always finds the dark cloud in the silver lining. That always finds the reason that things can't go well. That is quick to rehearse what someone has done to them in the past and why it makes it so that they can't be happy in the present. The bitterness of the past defining who they are today. This is a word that speaks to someone, perhaps some of you, someone who refuses to be reconciled or who is settled in anger at his or her life's circumstances. Is that any of you? I hope not.

Paul says if it is, you need to put that away. You need to turn away from that because it's inconsistent. As one who has received abundant grace from the hand of our Lord, who is under the favor of God, who has been granted heaven instead of hell as an eternal destiny and now God is dealing with you in grace rather than wrath, what you deserved? For you to be bitter in life and to go through life with that sour spirit is completely inconsistent with what you say to be true about your spiritual condition. Paul says because it's inconsistent, because it negatively reflects on the grace of God, put it away. Stop it, in other words.

Look at verse 31 again and notice how comprehensive it is. That little three letter word "all" would be one that would be quick to look past and maybe if you didn't see the word "all" you'd reserve a little corner in your life for that darkness of spirit. But Paul says, "Put it all away." Without qualification. Without condition. He says, "All of this needs to be done away with. You need to put it away. To silence it. To put it out of your mind and to do something different instead. Let it all be gone."

Then he goes on and says, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger," those are two related terms dealing with the human temper. Wrath being a word that refers to an explosive outburst in rage and blasting out your anger in violent words or violent behavior. Anger is a word that is used more for settled hostility. There is that seething, burning resentment inside that says, "I am never going to let this go. I am not going to forgive that person. Don't you know what they did to me?" Maybe you're thinking that with a smile on your face rather than letting pulsating rage come out, but Paul says that has to go. That has to go.

And here's why being mindful of the context of what Paul is talking about from the first three chapters of Ephesians and also what follows in the immediate verse, why would you do that? I mean, I realize that some of you have been seriously wronged by those who had authority over you or by those that you trusted. I realize that. Scripture does not diminish that when it says these things but rather, what Scripture says is that you should look at the greater thing about your life and about your spiritual condition and the greater thing is that God, the eternal holy God, has forgiven you of eternal sins against him and has waived eternal punishment against you out of a gracious decision on his part to include you in salvation and Christ graciously spilling his blood at Calvary in order for that to take place.

If God, here's the point, beloved, if God was willing to set aside his righteous wrath against you based on the mediation and intercession of Christ on your behalf, by what right, on what grounds do you keep holding onto human resentment about what someone has done to you? God has done the greater thing in forgiving your eternal guilt therefore it follows as night follows day that you should let go of the human resentment that tends to dominate your life. If you want to see wrath and anger illustrated, just turn on a cable news interview with a panel of people with conflicting opinions and you'll see it all right there.

But, beloved, it's striking, isn't it, the way that Scripture goes right to the very core of who we are? It's striking, isn't it? The unparalleled authority of our Lord Jesus Christ. I mean, Paul is writing as a representative of Christ, as an apostle of Christ. He's speaking on behalf of Christ when he writes these things. This is Christ's word to his people, not simply the words of a man who lived 2,000 years ago and here's what I want you to see, here's what I want you to think on: how great is Christ? How magnificent is his Lordship over us? It's this great: Christ's authority is so great that he commands you how to think and feel in your inner man. Who you are inside is under the authority of Christ and he goes right to the inner sanctum of your heart and says, "I will assert my authority over who you are here inside." So we glory. We thank Christ for his work on our behalf and at the same time, we tremble at the one who asserts authority over who we are in our thinking, in our feeling and in our emotions. This is Christ saying, "This is how my people must be."

Well, we're gathered together as the people of Christ here today, aren't we? We're gathered together around the name of Christ and around the word of God and we join together to lift high the cross and to magnify his name because we belong to him and he's brought us into his family. Well, praise God for that. Just realize the implication of that is that Christ asserts himself over your inner man as he does. Christianity is not primarily about your external conduct, it's about Christ changing who you are inside and your external conduct flows from that and we see here in Ephesians 4:31 Christ asserting his authority over his church and saying, "This is how I want my people to be." Christ saying, "I will not have angry, bitter people being the mark of my people." And we say, "Wow Lord, yes, of course. That's the way I would want it to be. You who exercise grace and kindness toward me then, yes, it is fitting that I would mold my interactions with men

to reflect something of the character with which you have dealt with me." It is inescapable that that's the way that it should be.

Paul goes on. Look at verse 31 again. It's good for you to keep your eyes on the text and to see the text in front of you. That's why I have you turn and have you look at the text again and again, that you see that this comes from the authority of God's word and not from the mind of a clever speaker. Paul says, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor be put away from you." Clamor being a word for people who get roused up, worked up emotionally. Who raise their voices in an argument and start shouting at one another. Paul says that's not fitting. Put it away.

He goes on and says, "Put away all the slander." Slander describing insulting speech that speaks badly about others sometimes to their face, more often when they're not present in the discussion. Paul says, "The Scripture says Christ calls us to examine ourselves. How is it that you are speaking about other people?" And realize that the slander that is coming out of your mouth is showing an anger in your heart that must be put away, that must be extinguished, that must be silenced. How many different word pictures can we use to say. Slander destroys reputations with evil and defaming words. Paul says, "Not from the mouth of a Christian. Not from your mouth as one who belongs to Christ. You can't go there." Paul says, "Stop."

The command is in a tense that expresses an urgency to it and there is an urgency to the command, "Put this away!" And beloved, here's the thing about it, especially for those of you maybe that are a little bit older and you've gotten settled into these kinds of patterns of life that are reflective of what Paul is describing here. Understand that Scripture here is not saying, "You know, deal with this when you have time. When you get around to it. You know, if you could just deal with this maybe sometime over the next 2-3 years, couple of months. You know, if you could get to it, that would be great." That is not how Scripture is commanding us here today. Scripture is saying, "Put this off now! This is urgent! This is a matter of highest priority in your Christian life that you deal with this today!" The fact that you and I have been happy to accommodate the sin and to make room for it or perhaps in the past have been in places where the word of God wasn't taught in a way that confronted you in your sinfulness and you've gotten used to that comfortable realm of mush, that is not an excuse or a reason to continue that way any longer. Scripture says, "No, do this and do it now! Deal with it before you leave the room today!" Scripture calls you to exercise a verdict on your heart in how you deal with these inner sins.

Look at verse 31, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice." Kind of a comprehensive summary statement there at the end. Malice describing an attitude of ill will against someone. It's wishing that something bad would happen to them or having the sense that it would be great if they got hurt. Or, "I hope they get paid back for what they've done to me." That kind of retaliatory spirit that would inflict harm on them mentally even if you wouldn't do it with your hands.

What are we to think, beloved, about all of those character impulses that are in our hearts? Whether it's matters of settled character qualities or just momentary impulses that flash up in various situations? Paul says, "Let them all be put away from you. Every one of them. The things that happened years ago with your parents, put it away. The issues, the chronic issues with your spouse that make you bitter and unhappy, put it away. The disappointment that your children didn't turn out the way that you raised them to be, put that away. Put all of that stuff away. The boss that cheated you. The neighbor that was unkind to you. The people who sued you perhaps and you have that pocket of resentment in your heart." Paul says, "Fling open the windows, shake out the rugs. Let all of that be cleansed out and let the fresh air of grace now permeate your life."

Listen, here's one of the things that will help you do that: if you remember that God has always been sovereign over all of your circumstances. God has been sovereign even over those who have done wrong to you and inflicted harm to you. All of that and, by the way, we're not even talking about, we're not even raising the issue of the harm that you've done to others, are we? I haven't even mentioned that, which that alone would be enough to change the way we think about these things. I'm just being sympathetic as we say these things and being mindful of the fact that we live in a world where you've been wronged. Okay. Understand that that wrong occurred to you under the greater sovereign plan of God in your life to accomplish good in you and for you and to work through those things in order to accomplish his will in your life. You know, God worked through the hands of lawless, godless men to crucify Christ in order to accomplish your redemption. Christ himself suffered under the hands of godless men who wronged him and Scripture says in Acts 2 that that was according to the foreknowledge and predetermined plan of God to bring about a good result.

Well, view what's happened in your life from that same perspective and if you've been hurt and wronged, then do us all a favor, show us what a Christian does who has been wronged like that and how a Christian manifests a gracious, godly, humble spirit despite what has happened in your past. Show us what that's like. Live this passage out and rather than magnifying the wrongs that have been done to you, magnify the grace of the one of our Lord Jesus who was gracious to you in your sins and say, "I'm not going to be marked by that bitterness anymore. I'm going to put it away in light of what Christ has done for me."

Beloved, on all of us, the Bible is conducting exploratory surgery on your heart. It has just opened up your heart with this verse and said, "What's in here? Let's take a look around." And you are meant to get specific in dealing with yourself in response to these things. Where is it, what area of your life is it where these things manifest themselves? What relationships provoke anger and deadly words out of your heart and mouth and life? That is where this Scripture is putting light on and saying, "Deal with this today." What is there in your past that causes continual bitter feelings and resentment? You see, the whole point here is for you not to start rehearsing the human wrongs again but rather to turn it to a meditation on the grace that God has shown to you despite your sins and when you start thinking rightly vertically, the horizontal aspects of it will work themselves out. So Scripture is bringing this to mind, not to whip you, but to graciously bring you to a point of spiritual growth.

Wouldn't it be great to be a person and you're going through life and you're not weighed down by all of the bitterness that has marked you up until this point? Wouldn't it be great to put that aside? Well, do you know what? You're commanded to do that. "Let it all be put away," Paul says, "because it is inconsistent with the new life you have in Christ."

Now, at the same time, this is one of the many reasons that I love God's word: this isn't Scripture coming to you and without sympathy saying, "Get over it." That's not the spirit of what God's word is saying to us here at all. It's not like that at all. It's saying, "Remember Christ. Remember how God has dealt with you," and as you remember the objective way in which God has measured out grace to you, free and abounding and clear, then as you understand that, then it moves your heart so that these human bitteresses are not so important to you anymore. It changes your whole perspective on them. It gives you a perspective to truly change.

So while Scripture does tell you, "Turn away from your anger," it gives you more to feed your heart and to respond with as we move into verse 32 and our second point this morning. It says, "Turn toward God's kindness. Turn toward God's kindness." So you turn away from your anger and say, "Okay, that's not it." But if you only did that, it would just leave a vacuum in your heart that was waiting to be filled with something else and unless you replace your bitterness with a conscious meditation on the goodness and kindness of God, the other stuff will seep back in.

Point 2: turn toward God's kindness. You see, spiritual growth. Looking out and I think I know the names of almost everybody that's in here. I know that collectively you are a group who desires spiritual growth. I believe that about you. I believe that you want to grow in Christ and you want to honor him with your life. Well, here's the thing that I want you to see: spiritual growth, if that's your goal and desire in life, spiritual growth is far more than avoiding bad conduct and keeping up good appearances before the good people at church, not that there are any good people, but you know what I'm saying. It's about more than avoiding bad conduct and keeping up appearances. Spiritual growth is going to the reality of who you are inside and spiritual growth gives you the avenue to develop heart virtues to replace your prior hostilities.

Look at verse 32 with me. Paul says, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." And understand as you look at this, understand that we're talking, we're seeing a contrast that's built up here that is completely separate from, distinct from what the world honors, what the world gives credence and likes to see a man in vengeance and rage and all of that and what Scripture says is that that's completely different than what it's like inside the church.

This word for "kindness, be kind to one another," and to one another especially emphasizing relationships inside the body of Christ. Paul here is writing to Christians and saying, "You be kind to one another." Now, that kindness should spill out into our relationships with the lost as well but there is a particular emphasis on the way that we relate to one another in the church and kindness is a quality that God demonstrates

toward all people. He has a gracious and forbearing attitude towards sinners. Mark this: he does good even to those who reject him.

Look over at Matthew 5:45. I want you to see this. We'll look at verses 43-45 just to set a context because remember that it's saying just as God in Christ has forgiven you. Well, if God's kindness is the pattern that we are to follow after, then it helps us to know something about what his pattern of kindness is. Verse 44 of Matthew 5, Jesus says, "I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Are there people that you're bitter, that you've been bitter against who have wronged you? Okay, love them. Pray for them. You can do that, right? You can get down on your knees and intercede for God to be kind to them and to show favor to them just like he did to you. You can do that. That is within your capability. This is not something that's impossible for you to do. You can get down on your knees and pray for those who have hurt you. You can do that and you must because Jesus says that's what you're to do.

"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." Why? "So that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." So that you would reflect the character of God who has been gracious to you. And what does he do? Verse 45, Matthew 5, what does he do? "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good. He sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." He is indiscriminate in his common grace. Just like you and I enjoy a sunny day and cool breezes and we say, "Ah, this is great weather here today," and it's good to be a Christian in weather like this, God doesn't withhold that from those who reject him. He gives the same blessings in that external common grace sense to them that he does to us and says, "You be like that."

Verse 46, "if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?" Jesus says unsaved people can be good to those who are good to them. Unsaved people can congratulate and praise and be loving toward those who do everything that they want them to do. He says there is nothing special about that. What will distinguish you as a Christian is when you manifest that kind of kind attitude toward those who have wronged you.

God shows grace even to those who despise him and will never turn to him. That's exceedingly kind. That's really, really good. That's commendable. That's something to be lauded. That's something that's just so good because you can see that it comes from inside the nature of God rather than being prompted by the person who is on the receiving end of the goodness. Scripture says you be kind like that. Beloved, there should be room in your heart to show undeserved kindness to others even to those who have offended you. This is the nature of God. This is what Christ calls us to. This is the nature of being a Christian.

Go back to Ephesians 4:32, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted." It's a term that the New Testament uses to refer to God's mercy to sinners and here it's calling us to be sympathetically oriented. To be graciously minded toward the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ so we would be oriented toward caring and toward helping them in their need.

Finally, there is this climactic command, verse 32, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." You see, beloved, I'll say it one more time: this all flows from what God has done for us in Christ. Your fundamental thinking about life should be governed by the fact that you have been on the receiving end of undeserved mercy from God in Christ. That shapes everything else. If you think that somehow you deserve that, you can't possibly respond rightly to this passage. Can't possibly respond rightly because if you think you deserve it, then you're going to think you deserve things from other people as well. That's not what it's saying at all.

When you have it settled in your mind, "I have been on the receiving end of undeserved grace. God has been kind to me. God was compassionate to me in my sin and rebellion against him, in my deceitful character, in my lustful ways, in my anger and my pride and my boastfulness. God showed mercy to me and forgave me and didn't take that into account when he dealt with me." Then your whole perspective on life is redefined for you and that's what Christianity should do. That's what being born again should do. It should redefine the entire way that you think about life. It reshapes everything.

Look over at Colossians 3, if you would, just to the right in your Bible. Jump over Philippians to Colossians 3, a parallel passage to what we're looking at here today. You let go of the wrongs and say, "That's not going to define my disposition toward life is what's happened to me in the past. That's not going to define my disposition on life anymore. What will define my disposition on life is the way that God has dealt with me. The way that Christ has had mercy on me and sacrificed for me. That will define who I am going forward." Colossians 3:12 says, "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you."

You know, there is another passage that we should look at, Matthew 18, to just kind of seal this and help us to see how important and critical this was to the Lord in his ministry. Matthew 18, the Lord gave an extended parable on this point that kind of drives the point home. Matthew 18:21, this is an extended passage so bear with me as I read it. "Peter came and said to Him, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.'" Exponentially more, Peter. Your forgiving attitude should not be measured in counting arithmetically, it should be exponential. The grace of God has been exponentially, geometrically poured out on you that goes far beyond what you deserve. It's in the total opposite direction of what you deserve, Peter. That geometric grace, Peter, is the grace that you should show to those who have wronged you.

Verse 23, "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him." An inexhaustible debt. "But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will

repay you everything.' And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt." A debt that that slave never could have paid on his own. Walks away and the debt is forgiven.

"But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii," maybe a couple, three months wages, "and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed." It's entirely inappropriate, isn't it? That's obvious that that's wrong.

Verse 31, "So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?'" Free and abounding? Yes, they can never make it right. This can never be restored to what it should have been originally. But didn't I forgive you freely, abundantly when you could not pay me back? Then you should have acted in the same way against someone who had done a lesser wrong to you that what you had done to me, seeing sin as a debt that needed to be paid.

Verse 34, "And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him." The idea being that there is severe discipline waiting for the professing Christian who does not forgive.

Verse 35, "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart." Jesus says the kingdom of heaven is reflective of the principle of mercy and when you have received that mercy, it is incumbent upon you to show that mercy. Don't receive forgiveness from God and then withhold it from men. That's not right. That's wrong. That's sinful. That has to change. That has to be put away. And the motivation for it comes from remembering the way that God has dealt with you in Christ.

So going back to Ephesians 4 now, we see the motivation. We've been talking about this motivation all along and this brings us to our final point this morning. We said that you need to turn away from your anger, turn toward the kindness of God which leads us more specifically, point 3, to turn toward the cross of Christ. To turn toward the cross of Christ. Look at it there at the end of verse 32, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." Notice the parallel that he draws, "just as." Here is the pattern by which you forgive others. You look at the way that God has dealt with you in Christ, a full and complete pardon of all of your sins and you say, "Oh, that's my pattern for dealing with men around me. I wronged God and he was gracious and forgave me the debt of my sin. Well then, I need to look at the men who have wronged me and graciously forgive them as well."

And beloved, I beg you, I beg you at this point not to say, "But you don't know what that person did." That's not the point. That has nothing to do with this discussion because what that person did to you on a human level is not the same eternal violation that you

have made of God's character with your sins throughout your life. It's not the same. Your sins against God are greater than what someone has done to you and as a result of that, because you have received a greater mercy at which God could have exacted eternal punishment in hell from your soul, when you remember that you say, "Ah, of course I'll be forgiving. How could I do anything else when God has been so generously gracious to me? How could I be selfish and shriveled in my forgiveness toward others?" It's pretty challenging. Why do you do this? You pursue it because that's the way that God has forgiven you.

Ask yourself, beloved, ask yourself those of you who know you're Christians: how exactly has God forgiven you? Answer the question in your own mind. Answer it. He has forgiven all of my sins. The blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. The sweeping, massive, complete, comprehensive, eternal forgiveness that God has given you should shape the way and your perspective and your willingness to forgive whatever has been done to you. You just can't keep hanging onto it. You've got to put it away because that is the only proper response of gratitude to the grace that has been shown to you.

What can we say about the way that God has forgiven you? He doesn't hold your sins against you any longer. Your past sins, they don't restrain his love toward you. He cares for you. He's kind to you. He has only begun to display to you the outworking of his eternal, gracious purpose to you in Christ. You've only tasted a little bit and yet that taste has been more wonderful than anything you could have imagined or ever deserved. And if you've been on the receiving end of that, how can you be anything other than gracious and forgiving to the ones around you? If God has had that kind of compassion on you, is it not incumbent upon you to adopt the same kind of heart attitude toward the people who have wronged you? Yes or no? Would that be right for you to be like that? Yes or no? That's the question.

God's disposition toward you sets the way that you interact toward others. God's dealings with you determine the outcome of the way that you deal with those who have wronged you. Put away the bitterness, put on a heart of compassion and remember Christ as you do. Beloved, it's time to put away your angry heart. Deal with others like God has dealt with you in Christ. Stop being bitter and start forgiving from your heart. Only one question matters in light of this passage: will you do that?

Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, our hearts are warmed by remembering your grace toward us. Our hearts are challenged by the call that this passage makes to change our disposition on some of the most difficult things that have ever happened to us in life. I pray for us, Father. I pray for these brothers and sisters in Christ gathered together, knowing some of the ways that some of them have been very, very hurt and wronged by what's happened in the past. Father, may the transforming power of the Gospel be evident in their hearts, that as they remember your grace toward them in Christ, that it would just come upon them like a wave of mercy to share that with others as well, that as you showed mercy to us, Father,

we would be willing to show mercy to those about us. Help us, Father, to be kind to one another, to be tender-hearted, to be forgiving and as we act in that way and as we cultivate that spirit within our hearts, Lord, may we ever be mindful that you were that way toward us first, that all of our blasphemies and all of our lusts and our sins and our anger, Father, you washed all of that away before you ever called us to be like this. We thank you for your mercy toward us. We ask for further mercy still that would help us be merciful in the way that you would call us to be as we move about in the church and the world with those about us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.