

One Another

Lesson 8: Be Kind and Forgive One Another -- Ephesians 4:29-32

Think of a word that someone once said to you that still lives in your memory years later. Maybe it was a careless cruelty from a parent or a teacher, a sentence flung in anger that lodged itself in your chest and never quite came out. Or maybe it was the opposite: a kind word spoken at exactly the right moment, a few syllables that lifted you when you were sinking. Words are not air. They land in people and stay. Paul knew this, and so before he ever tells us to be kind, he stops and points to our mouths. "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up."

Here is a striking thought tucked into the middle of this passage. Paul says that our speech and our temper are not private matters between us and the people we wound. "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God," he writes, "by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." The bitter word, the simmering grudge, the sharp reply we let fly in the car on the way home from worship, all of it touches God himself. The Spirit who marked us as his own and lives in us is grieved when his people tear each other down. Our words reach further than we think. They reach all the way to the heart of God.

So Paul calls us to clean house. "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice." That is a list to sit with. Bitterness that has soured into a settled resentment. Anger that boils over into shouting. Slander that quietly assassinates a reputation. Malice that simply wishes another person ill. These things have no place in people who have been forgiven everything. They are the old clothes Paul tells us to take off, the rags of a self that died with Christ in the waters of baptism.

And then comes the great alternative, the positive command that holds this whole lesson together. "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." There is the measure again, just as there was in the upper room. We are not told to forgive as much as the offense seems to deserve, or only when the other person grovels enough. We are told to forgive one another as God in Christ forgave us, fully, freely, at the cost of his Son's blood. This lesson is about the kind of people that kind of forgiveness creates. People with gentle words and soft hearts and open hands, because they have been forgiven a debt they could never repay.

Group Discussion: Why do you think Paul moves so directly from our speech (verse 29) to grieving the Holy Spirit (verse 30) to forgiving one another (verse 32)? What does the order itself teach us about how seriously God takes the way Christians treat each other with our words and our grudges?

Personal Reflection: Is there a person you have not truly forgiven, someone whose name still stirs up bitterness in you? As you begin this lesson, what would it mean to hold that grudge up honestly before the God who forgave you in Christ?

Read Ephesians 4:29–32

Study Questions

1. Paul says, “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear” (Ephesians 4:29). What does it tell us about God’s purpose for human speech that the standard is not merely “avoid the bad” but “build up and give grace”?
2. Replay your conversations from the past week, including the ones in private and online. Where did your words tear down rather than build up? Name one specific moment you wish you could take back.
3. Verse 30 warns, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” What does it mean that the Holy Spirit can be grieved, and what does that teach us about how God regards the way we treat one another?
4. When you let bitterness or a sharp tongue have its way, do you think of it as something that grieves God himself, or only as a small personal failing? How would taking verse 30 seriously change the way you guard your heart and mouth?
5. Paul commands us to “put away” bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice (verse 31). Why do you think he lists so many forms, and how are these vices connected to one another in the human heart?

6. Which item on Paul's list in verse 31 has the strongest grip on you right now, bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, or malice? What feeds it, and what would it look like to genuinely put it away?

7. Paul roots our forgiving in God's forgiving: "forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (verse 32). How does the way God forgave us in Christ become both the pattern and the power for the way we are to forgive each other?

8. Think of someone who has wronged you. How does remembering the size of the debt God forgave you change the way you feel about the debt you are being asked to release?

9. Paul says to forgive "as God in Christ forgave you." God's forgiveness is real and free, yet it is extended to those who hear the gospel, believe, repent, confess Christ, and are baptized into him, and it calls us to ongoing repentance and reconciliation. How do we forgive one another freely and from the heart without pretending that sin does not matter, that repentance is unnecessary, or that broken relationships need no healing?

10. Look back across Ephesians 4:29–32 as a whole: wholesome speech, a grieved or honored Spirit, the old vices put away, and Christlike kindness and forgiveness put on. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through this passage, and what you will do about it this week.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Matthew 18:21–35, where the parable of the unforgiving servant ties our forgiving of others to the immense debt God has forgiven us; Colossians 3:8–13, a close parallel where we put off the old vices and put on kindness and forgiveness in Christ; Matthew 6:14–15, where Jesus links our being forgiven to our forgiving of others; Luke 17:3–4, where rebuke, repentance, and forgiveness are held together; Acts 2:38, where forgiveness of sins is received in repentance and baptism into Christ.