

Date : 30 March 2025

Topic : Dealing with offense

Key Passage: Ephesians 4:31-32

Key Verse : **Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.**

Over the past weeks, we have been addressing the struggles that strain our relationships—pain in families, difficult conversations (Dr. Tan MY), and conflict resolution (Ps. Philip). At the core of these challenges is a constant tug-of-war: Will we respond with self-rightness, holding onto our old ways? Or will we choose righteousness in Christ, allowing Him to transform our hearts?

Ephesians 4:31-32 presents a clear contrast between these two responses. Verse 31 describes the old nature—a cesspool of bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and malice. Like filthy, decayed grave clothes, these attitudes cling to us, poisoning our hearts and dividing our relationships. In contrast, verse 32 points us to a life-giving wellspring—one that flows with kindness, compassion, and forgiveness, modelled after how God forgave us.

Every day, we make choices in how we relate to those around us—whether at home, church, work, or school. If we refuse to put off the old, it will shape our attitudes and damage our relationships. That's why the Lord gives us a clear command:

1. Command to put off: Let go of the grave clothes

Offense is a deep-rooted issue that takes hold of our hearts, giving birth to negative emotions and destructive behaviours. It weighs us down and slowly destroys our lives. It is like wearing clothes that are too heavy, too tight, and make it impossible to move freely.

When we hold on to offense, it's as if we are trapped by these emotions. Just like a dead person wrapped in grave clothes, we attempt to walk in life while still wearing the shroud of bitterness, anger, and malice. It robs us of the freedom to truly live. Holding onto offense is like carrying a weight that keeps you spiritually dead, unable to experience the fullness of life, joy, and transformation that Christ offers.

Ephesians 4:31-32 calls us that we are to put off the grave clothes—the sinful emotions and behaviours that come from holding onto offense. When we allow them to linger, they trap us in spiritual death.

The 6 negative emotions:

Internal – Rooted emotions

- **Bitterness – Holding onto offense and grudges**

Unforgiveness, long-lived anger and resentment that linger in the heart. It is sharp and pointed, often lingering and festering, causing a corrosive effect on the person's spirit. It is acidic in nature, slowly consuming and eating them alive from the inside, preventing healing and peace.

- Eg A wife, bitter from unresolved grievances, repeatedly brings up her husband's past mistakes, preventing healing and progress in their relationship.

- **Wrath – Sudden outbursts of rage**

Outbreak of anger - Explosive, uncontrolled and sudden burst of intense anger that flares up quickly and burns out fast (*yelling, aggressive behaviour or violent actions*).

Eg: A father yells at his son in anger after he disobeys.

- Avoid letting anger control your reactions in heated moments.

- **Anger – Deep seated, internal smoldering of hostility and resentment.**
Intense agitation that simmers beneath the surface, bubbling just on the verge of eruption but suppressed.
 - Don't let anger fester; address it before it grows.

External – Outward manifestations

- **Clamor – A Loud and disruptive outcry**
Uncontrolled, persistent shouting, demanding and unrestrained scolding and scorn.
Eg An argument between family members that turns into shouting, pushing, or other forms of physical or verbal aggression.
 - Avoid shouting and fighting when offended, as it deepens division
- **Slander – False accusation and character assassination**
Hurt reputation of others, verbal abuse. Gossip is passive slander
 - Speak life and truth. Avoid gossip and undermining others out of hurt.
- **Every form of Malice – Bad-hearted with evil intent**
Intentional (*calculated, premeditated*) desire to hurt or harm someone. Desire to see others suffer, often stemming from revenge or a deep-seated grudge (*get even to see the other person hurt*).
Eg A colleague spreads false rumors about another, aiming to damage reputation out of jealousy or resentment.
 - Erase all thoughts of harm toward others. Strive to protect and uplift relationships instead.

Put off All – Every form, big or small

Ephesians 4:31 emphasizes that we are to rid ourselves of all these grave clothes—every form of bitterness, no matter how small, not just the big things, but even the small seeds of resentment.

- Bitterness is like **poison** in our hearts, slowly eating away at our joy.
- Anger leads us down a path where peace cannot exist. Wrath can explode in unbridled rage, leaving destruction in its wake. Clamor, slander, and malice—all are like chains that bind us and keep us from experiencing freedom in Christ. Any of these keep us trapped in spiritual death.

Testimony of Louis Zamperini

Louis Zamperini, a former Olympic athlete and a World War II bombardier, endured unimaginable suffering after his plane was shot down over the Pacific Ocean. Surviving 47 days at sea, he was eventually captured by the Japanese. There, he was relentlessly tortured by his captors, especially by a sadistic guard known as "The Bird." The brutal beatings, starvation, psychological abuse, and various humiliations left deep scars on Louis. After his release, Louis struggled with intense anger, bitterness, and resentment, particularly towards "The Bird." His rage consumed him, driving him into alcoholism and self-destruction. The bitterness he carried put significant strain on his marriage to his wife. He became emotionally distant, often violent, and his marriage nearly fell apart as a result.

It wasn't until 1949, when Louis attended a Billy Graham crusade, that his life began to change. He found faith in Christ. For the first time, he made the life-altering choice to forgive those who had tortured him, including "The Bird." This act of forgiveness set him free from the chains of bitterness and rage that had bound him for so long.

2. Command to put on: Embrace the grace clothes

It is not enough to simply remove harmful emotions. We are not just called to take off the old. We're called to put on something better—the clothes of grace. Grace clothes represent kindness, tender-heartedness and forgiveness – the opposite of the sinful emotions.

- **Kind** - goodness in interactions, helpfulness in meeting the needs of others.
- **Tender-hearted** – compassionate, easily moved to love
- **Forgiveness** – extend grace, release a debt owed to me

Grace clothes are life-giving transformative qualities that reflect Christ.

- Choose to walk in grace every day by embracing kindness and tender-heartedness.
- Every act of kindness and compassion helps us to see others as Christ sees them. This perspective opens our hearts to forgive, even when it feels hard.
- Forgiveness isn't just about letting go of the hurt; it is about choosing to walk in kindness and compassion, which then leads to true freedom and peace.

Forgiveness is the true reflection of Christ's love

Ephesians 4:31-32 teaches us that we must move from one end of the spectrum—where all bitterness, anger, wrath, brawling, slander, and malice reside—towards the other end, which is **forgiveness**.

- **Forgiveness** is the ultimate path to life. It is through forgiveness that we experience true healing, deliverance and restoration in our relationships. It is the key to living fully in the freedom and peace that Christ offers.

Testimony of Corrie ten Boom

Corrie ten Boom, a Dutch Holocaust survivor, struggled deeply with forgiveness after the war. During World War II, for helping Jewish people escape the Nazis, she and her family were sent to a concentration camp. Her sister, Betsie, died there. Corrie faced unimaginable suffering and loss.

After the war, at a church service, she spoke about God's forgiveness. Present at the service was one of her former Nazi captors in 1947. This man had been responsible for the humiliation and cruelty she endured in the camp.

Read the story in Corrie's own words:

He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. "How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein." He said. "To think that, as you say, He has washed my sin away!" His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often to the people in Bloemendaal the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side.

Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him. I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I prayed. I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness.

As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me. And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself.

Through this act of obedience, Corrie experienced God's healing in her heart and learned that forgiveness isn't just a feeling, but a choice—a choice that freed her from the grip of bitterness and allowed her to live in the freedom of God's grace.

3. 3 Steps to forgiveness

i) Acknowledge the hurt

Recognize and admit the pain you have experienced, being honest with yourself about the offense and how it has affected you

ii) Choose to forgive – forgo the right to retaliate

Forgiveness is the Lord's command, not an option. Our forgiveness of others is rooted in God's forgiveness of us – a response to the forgiveness we have received.

The unforgiving servant refused to forgive a small debt, even after being forgiven a huge debt Matthew 18:21-35.

- Forgiveness is an intentional choice, not a feeling
- Forgiveness is surrendering your right to get back in one way or another.

iii) Release the pain

Letting go of the emotional weight of the offence.

- Forgiveness does not mean forgetting, nor does it erase the pain.
- Forgiveness is a process, not a point or one-time decision.
- Forgiveness brings emotional healing and freedom without being controlled by resentment and bitterness.

Applications:

1) Identify the six negative emotions above. What triggers them in your life?

How can you manage these triggers in a Christ-like way?

2) What steps can you take today to choose to forgive someone where offence has taken root?