

In Ephesians 4:17-22, Paul reminds the church in Ephesus of their spiritual condition before they became followers of Jesus. He used words such as futile, darkened, alienated from God, callous, greedy, and impure. This is the condition of everyone before meeting Christ. But then in verses 23 and 24, he encourages the believers, “... *be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*”

A Peculiar Life

When we become followers of Jesus, we receive the Holy Spirit, who enables us to live a different life. It is a peculiar life, a life that makes little sense to a lost world. Paul begins listing instructions for how believers are to live their lives; put away falsehood, speaking the truth, do not sin when angry, work and don't look for dishonest gain, speak to build one another up, and in verse 31, he writes, “*Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.*”

There is tremendous power in the words we say. We have the Holy Spirit in us; we have the presence of God with us, and whatever we say is in the presence of God. Sadly, Christians have accepted gossip and slander, even vulgar joking, as acceptable. The fruit of such language leads to sickness in the Body of Christ (see Matthew 12:36). It is all about spirit-filled living. Putting on the cloak of Christ's righteousness.

The Power of Forgiveness

One of the most powerful ways a Christian demonstrates being filled with the Spirit is through forgiveness. Ephesians 4:32 states, “*Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*”

The Word of God instructs us to put off all negative ways of communicating and replace them with kindness and compassion. Compassion is one of our foundational values at Grace Point. Both kindness and compassion will cost us; it will not always be easy, but the rewards far outweigh any cost.

But then Paul writes this phrase under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, “*forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*”

Psychologists have studied the act of forgiveness for many years. Why do some people hold on to offence and refuse to forgive, while others are able to let go and forgive? They found that the people who forgave, even when it was completely undeserved, were those who experienced a deep sense of their own forgiveness.

We have been Forgiven much.

When we are reminded of what we have been forgiven, it changes how we respond. Forgiveness is not something that we should grit our teeth and do simply because the pastor tells us to; that doesn't really help. Forgiveness must flow from grace, supernatural spirit-filled grace, knowing how much we have been forgiven. That is unconditional Christlike love. It changes how we treat each other.

The greatest act of injustice ever committed was when Jesus was nailed to the cross. He did not deserve punishment, but he took on himself the punishment for our sins, and in that moment, he said, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do...*" Luke 23:34. We don't have to keep score, because the cross removes any excuse for us to hold a grudge.

When Jesus walked the earth, the rabbis were teaching that if someone offends you, you must forgive them three times, and then after that, you are entitled to hold a grudge or take retribution. When Peter came to Jesus in Matthew 18:21-22 and asked the question, "*...Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?*" Jesus said to him, "*I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.*"

Peter thought he was being exceedingly gracious, extending more than double the grace of the rabbi's teaching, but Jesus said, no, you must grant unlimited forgiveness. This does not mean that there should be no consequences for wrongdoing. We are not required to allow people to abuse or continually hurt us or those we love. That is not what is being taught here. This forgiveness is a matter of the heart.

Not taking revenge but allowing room for God to take vengeance. Do you know God feels your offence, and we can trust Him for justice?

In Romans 12, under the heading, "*Marks of a true Christian,*" we read in verse 19, "*Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'*"

The Freedom of Forgiveness

Unforgiveness comes at a cost, John Chrysostom wrote, "*We punish ourselves by hating others, even as on the other hand we benefit ourselves by loving them.*"

It has also been said many times, "*Unforgiveness is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.*"

There are real physical consequences of unforgiveness; the body is placed in a constant

“fight or flight state”. This leads to cardiovascular issues, high blood pressure, lower immunity, depression, anxiety, not to mention bitterness and a lack of joy. Unforgiveness comes at a high price.

I promise you, based on the promises of God’s word, you will never regret forgiving the person who has hurt you. It is a supernatural transaction that happens and sets you free.

Do you want to know that freedom today?