

Who You Are Determines Your Response When Wounded II: Be Forgiving

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[0:00] And for the rest of us, let's open up our Bibles to Ephesians chapter 4. I'm going to read two verses now. So Ephesians 4, verses 31 and 32.

This is the Word of God. 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 and Christ forgave you. Hear God's Word.

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 and Christ forgave you.

When someone sins against us, it hurts. We're wounded by it. We suffer when someone sins against us. It registers.

[1:13] And it's not just this outside wound. It's a wound internally. An inner man wound. And as a result, a wound like that can affect relationships.

It can affect the relationship with the one that's wounded me. And if unattended, it can actually affect relationships with other people as well. Because an untreated wound to the soul will become infected with bitterness.

Last week, we saw that God holds us each responsible for how we respond when someone sins against us. We're responsible for that.

We're responsible for our bitterness. God does not excuse our bitterness. Out of Ephesians 4, 31 and 32, it's clear that God's Word says we may not be bitter.

We may not be wrathful or sinfully angry or clamorous or slanderous or malicious towards those who sin against us. We're to put it away. Do you know why?

[2:27] That's not who we are anymore. That's the old self. That's the former manner of life in Ephesians 4, 22. That's old self living.

But now, if you're in Christ, God has made you new. You've been united to Christ in His death and resurrection.

You've been made alive. You've been forgiven, adopted, liberated, transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's beloved Son in whom we have forgiveness.

He has forgiven us all of our sins. Every one of them. Forgiven. It is an amazing thing to consider.

At your conversion, brother and sister in Christ, you underwent a spiritual heart transplant. God removed your unbelieving heart of stone and He replaced it with a heart of flesh.

[3:29] A soft heart. Tender to God. A believing heart. And if that's not enough, God Himself indwelt you the moment you believed by the Holy Spirit. He marked you as His own.

He sealed you. You belong to Him. And He lives inside of you now to empower you to live a life that's pleasing to God. All this to say, Christian, you have been radically changed.

Radically changed. You're not who you used to be. The old is gone. The new has come. You're a new creation in Christ Jesus. And this transformation that God has wrought in you by His grace, it's progressively working its way out in how we live our lives.

We are being changed from the inside out. God is at work in us.

Who you are determines how you live. Who you are determines how you live. If you're dead to God, if you're not a Christian and you get wounded, chances are you're going to get bitter. But if you're alive to God in Christ Jesus and you're wounded, someone sins against you, the call on your life is to forgive.

[4:41] To forgive the one who sinned against you. We are to put off the old selfish ways of bitterness. And we're to put on the new Christ-like ways of being kind and tenderhearted and forgiving those who sin against us.

It is a radical call. This morning, God is commanding you, brother, you sister in Christ, to be like Christ to those who sin against you.

You're to forgive. So three moves this morning. The first move is this. I just want to give a dose of reality and help you see that sin makes relationships messy.

Wounds complicate relationships. The second move is the call to Christ-likeness. That's where we'll spend most of our time in Ephesians 4.32.

To see what God is calling you to as a new creation in Christ Jesus. And the third move is they're the what-ifs. Because I know many of you have a lot of questions.

[5:53] What if? What if this doesn't happen? What if this doesn't happen? What if, what if, what if? What about this? Well, I'll try to tackle some. I have seven of them. I already know. I'm going to have to pare it down to like five.

Let's see how much time we have when we get there. So wounds complicate relationships. Move number one. Sin makes messes out of relationships.

I've experienced an interesting phenomenon over the years I've been a pastor. It goes something like this. I'm going to use an example of a marriage. But you can basically put in any kind of relationship. A married couple comes into my office looking for help.

And as they come in, there's obvious tension. You can see it in their body language. It's how they speak to each other or about each other. There's little warmth. There's little affection.

There's guardedness. Even suspicion. There's a lack of peace right here in front of me. Sitting in front of me are two people who profess Christ as their king, yet they're wounded and bitter.

[7:01] They're disunified. There's a lack of harmony. There's a lack of peace. Sin complicates relationships. Wounds suffered have an effect.

Sin can make a mess. And so as I'm sitting there across from this couple, I start scrolling through some questions. I'm wondering some things. And here's what I'm typically wondering.

Okay, this couple's hurt. They're wounded. What's the nature of their wounds? Are they real wounds? Are they perceived wounds?

Are they wounds that have been distorted? What's the extent of the wounds suffered? Are these pinpricks? Are they sword thrusts? What kind of damage are we talking about?

What's been the frequency of these wounds suffered? Is this a one-time event? Are these multiple wounds? What's the duration of the wounds suffered? Was this one wound ten years ago that has not been dealt with?

[8:04] Or is this twenty wounds over the last two years? Or is this one hundred wounds over the last year? What's the frequency? For how long the duration? And then of course, what's been the effect of these wounds suffered?

On a couple, are they now sleeping in different bedrooms? For these individuals, if there's bitterness in their hearts, how are they coping with it?

Where are they turning? Who are they looking to? Are they turning to pornography? Are they going shopping? Are they gossiping? How are they dealing with it? Are they turning to Jesus?

And of course, it raises the question, if this is a married couple, what about their kids? If they have kids, you've got to ask the question, what's been the effect of this on their kids? Because, as you can imagine, sin complicates relationships, doesn't it?

Or maybe you don't have to imagine that. Maybe you're experiencing that. How sin wounds complicate things. Well, the more complicated a relationship is, the longer it's going to take to clear things up.

[9:21] Right? Right? But there's grace for this. If relationships are strained and they're not being attended to biblically, they'll move from bad to worse.

That infection called bitterness eventually rots things out. But in order to put away bitterness from a relationship, no matter how entrenched, no matter how complicated, in order to move to forgiveness and to experience a fullness of peace, you've got to deal with it.

You've got to face the wounds you've suffered. You've got to face the wounds you've inflicted. You cannot ignore them. But you've actually got to deal with them.

Maybe you're here in this room right now. And you're saying, Pastor Salvati, my marriage is beyond repair. Too much damage done.

There's no going back. No hope for me. No hope for my marriage. Maybe it's not your marriage. Maybe it's your parenting. Maybe it's some kind of different relationship. But you're hopeless. You're discouraged.

[10:37] You're overwhelmed. You're even despairing. You want out of life. I want to help you this morning.

If you're there, I'm glad you're here. Because I want to move you or focus off the problem and onto the solution.

So despairing brother or sister, listen to this. Do you remember Mark 5?

Your Savior walks into Jairus' house and laying before him is a dead 12-year-old girl. Do you remember what he does?

He grabs her by the hand and says, Talithi kumi. Daughter, arise. Remember what happens? She arises.

[11:38] Luke chapter 7. Your Savior comes across a funeral procession in the town of Nain. A widow is burying her only son. It would have been heart-wrenching.

What does Jesus do? He walks up to the casket, touches it, and says to the dead young man, Young man, I say to you, arise.

And you know what happens? That young man sits up. And everybody marvels. John 11. Your Savior, Jesus, arrives in Bethany four days after the death of his friend Lazarus.

Lazarus. And what does he do? Well, after he does some triage with Lazarus' sisters, he asks them, Where have you laid him? He goes to the tomb.

And with a loud voice, Jesus cries out, Lazarus, come forth! You remember what happened? Lazarus came out of the tomb. Do you know what you would have done if you were there?

[12:45] You'd have been like, what? Lazarus has been dead four days. And then you would have made the connection. He did it with just words! Jesus himself, several times throughout the Gospel, says, Hey, I'm going to be killed, and on the third day, I'm going to be raised from the dead.

Jesus, God in the flesh, was faithful to that. He was crucified, buried, and on the third day, his disciples go to the tomb, and they find an empty tomb.

He's been raised from the dead. He stands victorious over the power of sin, over the power of death, and over the power of the devil.

He stands victorious. And it's just not history. He's alive now. If you're despairing, remember, your risen king is alive.

Is he overwhelmed by your wounds? Is he overwhelmed by your bitterness? By the strain in your relationship?

[14:02] He may be grieved by that, but he's not overwhelmed by that. He's conquered sin, death, and the devil. He is able to resurrect your marriage.

He has the power. He has the authority. And he has the grace to change hearts. Sin complicates relationships, but your risen king is not overwhelmed.

He is able to deal with the wounds, with the sin, and un-complicate that which is complicated. He is able to bring peace where there is hostility.

That's what he does. So what do you do? My heavy-hearted brother. My despairing sister.

You cry out to your risen king. And you cry to him, and you say, Oh Lord Jesus, transform me.

Transform this relationship.

[15:21] Revive it. Restore it. Rebuild it. Now, if you think that Jesus, the risen Christ, is going to fix your marriage or your strained relationship without first changing you, you don't really understand how Jesus works.

Jesus' MO, His modus operandi, is to deal with your heart first in order to fix your relationship. He wants your heart. He's going to change you in order to bring peace to your marriage or to whatever relationship it may be.

The question comes to, how? How is He going to do that? We've looked at point one.

Sin complicates relationships. But Jesus is bigger than that. Let's move to point number two. God is calling you to Christ-likeness.

[16:30] How is God going to change your relationship? He's going to conform you to the image of Jesus. He's going to change you in order to change the relationship. He calls you to be like Him.

He's calling you, we see this in verse 24 of chapter 4, to put on the new self created after the likeness of God and true righteousness and holiness. Who's the likeness of God?

Jesus. He's going to make you like Jesus. Jesus. If you want to see a strained relationship changed, seek to be like Christ.

Don't wait for the other person to change. God is holding you responsible.

God wants to do a work in you. Now this kind of change is going to involve three shifts. Three shifts in how we respond to someone who wounds us.

[17:33] We're going to move from being malicious to being kind. We're going to move from being hard-hearted to being tender-hearted. And we're going to move from being bitter to being forgiving. Instead of being malicious, we need to be kind.

To be malicious is to want to do harm to someone. It even shows up in gloating. I gloat and rejoice in someone else's harm. It's usually someone you're bitter towards.

A malicious heart says, hey, I'm going to make you suffer for the pain you've inflicted on me. And you know what? You're going to pay with pain. That's malice. And so bitterness has a malicious edge on it.

So we're to put it away. Maybe you're sitting in your pew right now saying, Pastor Salvani, I'm not a malicious person. I don't want to beat anybody up. I don't want to do anybody harm.

How about your imaginations? Do you have malicious imaginations? Three years ago, I was in a really hard spot.

[18:40] Someone I dearly, dearly loved was getting deeply hurt by someone else. And I couldn't do anything about it. I felt so helpless. I wanted to beat this person up.

And I knew I couldn't because I'd lose my pastor job. And so you know what I did? I started daydreaming about beating this person up.

I did. I was being malicious. I was grieving God. Instead of being malicious to the one who's wounded us, we are commanded to be kind.

It's the opposite of wanting to do someone harm. It's wanting to do someone good. Where malice is overcoming evil with evil, kindness is overcoming evil with good.

Malice is a retaliation with the intent to harm, to curse. Kindness is a gracious response with the intent to bless.

[20:03] Even those who wound us. In God's loving kindness, He sought us even when we were rebelling against Him.

He sought to do us good even when we were opposed to Him. He sought to reconcile us.

Our God is incredibly kind. Now you may be wondering, how do I make this shift from being malicious to being kind? How does that happen?

It's not rocket science. You look to Jesus. The personification of kindness. Remember that you were united to Christ in His death and resurrection.

You've got to remember that. And don't be surprised when you see in you malice. Don't be surprised by that. Don't be surprised when someone wounds you and you want to retaliate with harm.

[21:07] Don't be surprised by that. Though we have been forgiven of our sin, sin's penalty, right? Sin's presence remains. When Jesus comes back, that'll be gone too.

So we live in a time where we're going to be tempted. So what do you do when you see it? You call it what God calls it. You call malice sin.

This is wrong. This is not loving. This is not pleasing to you, God. And then you nail it to the cross. It goes something like this.

God, you have united me with Christ in His death and resurrection. And so this malice in me has been united with Christ in His death. Done!

This is not who I am anymore. It's been forgiven in full. Done! Done! But I don't stop there and neither should you. Because not only are you united with Christ in His death, but also in His resurrection.

[22:07] And so in the same breath, you say, Oh God, put this malice away from me and in its place, would you make me kind to this person? Would you help me to do this person good?

Oh God, how can I do good to this person? And then when you see it, you do it by faith. You do good. Is this kind of radical?

Yeah. This has everything to do with Jesus. Following Him. Instead of being malicious to those who wound us, we must be Christ-like in our kindness to them.

But you may be saying, What about? We'll get to that in a little bit. So we move from being malice to being kind. The second thing I want you to see in verse 40 and 32 is, we are to be tender-hearted. We're to move from being hard-hearted to being tender-hearted. Again, what we're talking about is your posture of heart to the one who's wounded you.

[23:11] A hardened heart is a calloused heart. What happens over time when you are repeatedly sinned against is this. You kind of grin and bear it. You know what I mean? It's like...

And over time, you become hardened to that person who's been sinning against you. Anybody relate with that? Yeah.

Amen. Over time, you see it showing up like this. You're unresponsive to that person. You're uncaring of that person. Unavailable to that person. Untrusting of that person.

You're unfeeling to them. You're guarded. You're closed. You're suspicious. And you're distant. Those are symptoms of a calloused heart. But you know what your Bible has to say about calloused hearts?

Your Bible doesn't talk about calloused heart as a good thing. Jesus isn't seeking to produce in you a hard heart. He's not. In fact, in Ephesians 4.18, a hard heart is what characterizes a non-Christian.

[24:13] We're not to have hard hearts. We're not to have calloused hearts. And so if you detect in you a calloused heart towards someone else, you've got to put it away. You've got to confess it.

You've got to put it away. And in its place, be tender-hearted. A tender heart is an open heart to someone. A tender heart is available. A tender heart is vulnerable.

Trusting. Willing to trust. Welcoming of the person. A tender heart is responsive. A tender heart is feeling. Where a hard heart is callous, a tender heart is compassionate.

That's actually the word underneath. Tender hearted. We're not to be hard hearted to one another. But we're to be tender hearted.

Now when meeting with people in strained relationships, I have found this tender hearted category extremely helpful as a diagnostic.

[25:16] You're like, what's a diagnostic? A diagnostic is basically a tool to measure something. A tool to assess something. So let's just say I'm sitting down with some common grounds.

We're having coffee. I'm talking to this person. This person, it becomes obvious that they've got something towards someone else. I'll ask a question like, brother, is your heart tender towards this person?

Do you have a soft heart towards them? There's the diagnostic. And they say, no. And then I say, well what must change in you so that you can be tender hearted towards that person?

And you know, what usually I get back is this. Well, they've got to ask me for forgiveness. They've got to pony up. And then I say, well if they don't, what happens?

What happens to you? You see, what's needed there is a change of perspective. We need to pull up to a higher altitude.

[26:22] And what this person needs is this. They need to see this person who's wounded them as God sees that person. And as they see this person through God's lens, it's going to soften their heart.

I've experienced it. Is this person who's sinned against you a non-Christian? Yes. Are they under God's wrath?

Yes, and I'm glad. Really? Seriously? Seriously? You want them under God's wrath for eternity?

It tenderizes your heart towards somebody. We don't want that for anybody. We want them to hear about Jesus so they don't have to face the wrath to come.

Is this person a Christian? Yes, they're a Christian. How about this perspective? This person who's wounded you, they've been bought by the blood of Jesus.

[27:36] They belong to Christ. They're your brother and sister in Christ. Let that soften your heart towards them. When you see a person more and more as God sees them, it's going to change your perspective which is going to soften your heart.

God's word having an effect on you. Another way to approach this is to call on Jesus to soften your heart. Ask Jesus to give you his heart for this person.

Remember Matthew 9? Shows up again in Mark 5. Jesus sees crowds of people that are harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd and he has compassion on them.

He's moved. When we move from being hard-hearted to being Christ-hearted towards someone, there's going to be a shift in our hearts from hardness to tenderness.

You see it? Do you see it? Do you have a hard heart towards somebody? Ask God to do a work in you to see them as God sees them.

[28:55] Last shift. Instead of being bitter, we must be forgiving. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you.

Brother and sister in Christ, God is commanding you this morning to be like Christ and forgive the one who sinned against you. Again, this is a posture of our hearts towards the person who sinned against us.

Bitterness is resentment for being wounded and hurt. It's an infection of a wounded soul. And so essentially, bitterness is holding a debt over someone else's head.

It's a grudge. And 1 Corinthians 13 says, we're not to do that. It's not loving. But bitterness says this, you are in debt to me for the pain you caused me and I'm not letting it go until someone pays. You. You. Have you noticed that bitter people either pack or whack? If you're bitter, you'll probably either pack it and eventually blow up or you don't wait to pack it down.

[30:15] You just whack. You just whack somebody. You're bitter and you react to people. I've been around people like that. You either stuff it or you rebuff it.

There's another option. It's the way of Jesus. He's calling us not to be bitter, not to pack, not to whack, to forgive.

Notice that the Apostle Paul grounds this command to be forgiving of one another in God's forgiveness of us. You see it? Forgive one another as God in Christ forgave you.

We must forgive because God has forgiven us. It's a command. It's not an option. God's forgiving us in Christ is the basis by which we forgive other people.

Another way to say it is this. This is where we forgive from. This is the well which we draw from to forgive others.

[31:31] It's never ending. Never ending. This reason that Paul gives as God in Christ forgave you, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you, this is a major shift in perspective.

This is apostolic genius at its best. It's particularly effective for those who are bitter and unforgiving right now. What Paul is saying is this.

Changing a perspective. He says, forgive one another as God in Christ forgave you. Don't forget, you were in dire need of forgiveness yourself.

You had sinned greatly against God and God by His grace forgave you all of your sin. He's actually kind of making a comparison.

Your sin against God is far greater than any sin against you. He's reminding us of the scale of our debt. He's putting things in perspective.

[32:38] Our sin against God is greater than those who sin against us. And God in His grace forgave it all. Forgave it all. You know what this means? We have no grounds, no grounds to hold back forgiveness from someone else.

We have no grounds for that. Not in light of what God has done for us. Quite the contrary. We are to forgive. We owed a huge debt and Jesus paid it all.

This is the point of the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18. Jesus is teaching of forgiveness. And He says, there's this king who wants to settle accounts with his servants.

And there's one servant who couldn't pay. He owed 10,000 talents. I did the math this week. It's like \$9 billion. Seriously.

\$9 billion. That's what he owed and he couldn't pay. Jesus is making a point. The servant can't pay. The king is about to exact justice and throw this guy into jail.

[33:55] The servant pleads for mercy. Amazingly, the king says, hey, I'll forgive you. I have pity on you. I'll forgive you. All of it. All \$9 billion. Done. I'll bear it. Done. And then you know what the servant does?

He walks out of the king's presence. He's like, where is that guy? He owes me money. He grabs another servant by the neck and says, you pay me what you owe me.

You know how much he owed? 17 grand. That's how much he owed. We would say, 17 grand? I could do a lot with 17 grand. Compared to \$9 billion, though? It's nothing.

It's nothing. Seems as though our servant forgot about what he was just forgiven of. The fellow servant pleads for mercy.

And this servant who was just forgiven \$9 billion has no mercy. Throws him in prison until the debt is paid.

[34:59] Well, word gets back to the king. The servant is summoned. The king says, you wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you.

He gets thrown in jail. Jesus wraps up by saying this, so my heavenly father will do also to you if you don't forgive from the heart.

What's the point? What's the point that Jesus is making and why are we talking about this regarding Ephesians 4.32? We forgive out of God's forgiving of us.

We forgive out of God's great forgiveness of us. We forgive little sins, people sin against us because God has forgiven us the great sins with which we've sinned against Him.

When you remember the astronomical debt God forgave you of, you will gladly forgive the comparatively small debts other people owe you. When you remember that all that God in Christ Jesus has forgiven you of, it moves you from being bitter to being forgiving even wanting to forgive.

[36:22] My God did this for me? It's easy to do to you. I am rarely sinned against to be honest with you. I do more sinning against people than people sin against me so I'm usually the one asking for forgiveness but on occasion people will sin against me and they'll ask me to forgive them and I have this opportunity to say this, it is my joy to forgive you because God in Christ has forgiven me so much more.

It's my joy. Yes, I forgive you. When you remember all that God in Christ has forgiven you of, it moves you from being bitter to being forgiven.

Are you bitter? Are you saying He's got to pay? Remember what Jesus did for you. He paid the price for all your sins so that you could be forgiven before God.

He paid it with His life. Bitterness is saying, hey, you caused me pain, I'm going to pay you back and I'm not letting it go until someone pays and you're going to pay.

Forgiveness says this, you've caused me pain, it was very hurtful and someone's got to pay and I'm going to pay it. I'm going to bear it.

[37:41] Just as God in Christ bore my sin. It gets to a point that we can say things like this, that wound that caused me pain, I'm not going to hold that over you anymore because God in Christ no longer holds my sin over me.

so in light of God's great forgiveness of us, when we're sinned against, we gladly bear the cost of the debt of the wound.

This is how God moves us from bitterness to forgiveness. This is how God moves us from hard-heartedness to soft, tender hearts. It's how God moves us from being malicious to being kind. Just notice that all pivots on Jesus. It all pivots on what He's done for us in Christ. I'm out of time. If you want to talk about some of the what-ifs, I'll be sticking around here afterwards, love to talk to you about it.

Let me pray for us. We call them Lord. God in heaven, thank you so much for your word and I pray that Father that you would do a work in us that you would remind us of the extent to which you've forgiven us and out of that fullness of forgiveness we would glad-heartedly forgive those who've sinned against us.

[39:17] God, there's much wisdom that needs to be exercised here but God, we trust that this is your word and that this is what you're calling us to. We commit it to you in the name of Jesus.

Amen. And amen.