

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON SEVENTY-FIVE)

“THE MANIFESTATION OF BIBLICAL CHRISTIANITY”

EPHESIANS 4:25-32

25 Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

26 Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath:

27 Neither give place to the devil.

28 Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

29 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

30 And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

31 Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

In **Ephesians 4:31**, Paul writes: *“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.”*

Dr. **David Martyn Lloyd-Jones** made the following remarks concerning this verse:

“I must remind you that the Apostle is exhorting the Ephesians to put away all this evil. **He does not say, that because they have become Christians, it has automatically dropped off. So any kind of evangelistic preaching that gives the impression that the moment you become a Christian all your problems are left behind, is just not true,** and the Apostle realised that the Ephesians were still subject to this kind of thing. And again we notice that he does not merely tell them to pray that these sins may be taken out of their lives. Pray by all means, but do not forget that Paul tells the Ephesians to put them off, to put them far from them, and we must do the same.

It is not pleasant. It is not at all pleasant even to preach on these things; it is very unpleasant for us to face them, and to see if there is within our hearts any bitterness of spirit, or any malice or hatred or wrath or anger; but, says the Apostle, we must do it, and if we find any vestige or trace of these things within us, we must take hold of it and hurl it away from us, trample upon it, and bolt the door upon it, and never allow it to come back. We must do just that! Let it, he says, be put away from you! Put it away once and for ever, and realise that it is a denial, a complete denial of everything that you claim to be and to have as newborn people in the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom the Holy Spirit of God has come to take up His blessed residence.

If these things are in us the Holy Spirit is grieved, for the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. All that is contrary to this fruit must be put away, says Paul. **But, thank God, he does not leave it at that! He**

goes on to his positive injunction. Be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another. Thank God, I say, that the Apostle does not stop at the negative (put of's) but brings us on to the positive (put on). **Indeed...you cannot truly deal with the negative unless you are at the same time doing the positive."**

Brothers and sisters, the changed life not only requires us to *"put off...the old man,"* it also requires us to *"put on the new man."* The **"new man"** is the essence of what believers are in the new covenant with Christ. The term describes our new **position** in Christ, which gives us the potential to practice daily the putting off of the filthy rags which characterized the **"old man,"** and the putting on of the righteous garments which characterize the **"new man."** The source of the potential to "put off" and "put on" is the indwelling Holy Spirit. The **"new man"** is not our work-he is God's creation. We do not **create** the **"new man,"** but we must **clothe ourselves** with him. Paul is exhorting believers to a daily appropriation of that which they already possess.

In the **"putting off"** of the **"old man,"** and the **"putting on"** of the **"new man,"** Paul does not direct our attention to a creed, or a code of conduct, or a set of rules and standards. He directs our attention to Christ! It is Jesus Christ who we are to **"put on."** We are in a sense to **"put off"** ourselves and allow the Lord Jesus to be Lord in our lives! We are **not** to work out our own righteousness. We are to work out the righteousness of Christ which He has worked in us! (**Philippians 2:12-13**) The flesh loves to perform **religious activity**, but the Holy Spirit is not interested in merely changing our spiritual appearance. He is interested in our radical internal transformation.

In the following lengthy quotation, the American pastor, and author, **Raymond Charles Stedman**, describes the **"putting off"** of the **"old man"** and the **"putting on"** of the **"new man"** in the context of **Ephesians 4:25-32:**

"There is an oft-quoted prayer of an anonymous child who prayed, 'Lord, make the bad people good and the good people nice.' I think we all empathize with that prayer. **So often it seems that being religious has a souring effect.** We all know people who are undeniably 'good' in the sense that they are moral, honest, upright, and truthful, but so often they are cold, rigid and unpleasant to be with, not *nice* at all. These are the kind who moved that child to pray that way.

If you are that kind of Christian, then you can be sure that you have not yet entered into New Testament Christianity. Such an experience indicates an incomplete Christian experience and, therefore, a counterfeit one. It indicates [you] have learned to **put off** certain negative things, certain wrong things, but have never yet gone on to **put on** the warmth and graciousness and love of Jesus Christ. You cannot read through the *Gospel* records without noting that the Lord Jesus was never gloomy or forbidding. People loved to be with him. Little children ran to him and enjoyed his company. Though he often felt deeply the hurt of others, and so entered into the sorrows of men that he was known as '*a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*,'... yet he continually manifested a spirit of warmth and graciousness that drew people out after him...

Now that same character is reflected in the one who learns to put on Christ. Being a Christian makes a definite difference in your life. It must. A true conversion is immediately evident in changed actions. There are certain things that must no longer characterize your living, as Paul makes very clear. **This is probably the aspect of Christianity that is best known to the world. They know that Christians do not do certain things.** As we read here in this 4th chapter of *Ephesians*, a Christian must no longer lie or steal or fly into a temper, a selfish rage, or indulge in rotten talk of any kind.

But Christianity is not merely stopping these things. That is the mistake of so many. Even Christians feel that if they stop doing

certain things which are prohibited as wrong by the Word of God, this marks them as Christians. **It does not at all.** This is where so much negative Christianity has arisen and why Christians are often stigmatized as being against everything...But it is unfortunate if Christians are known simply for being negative. The world ridicules that and is not impressed by it...

That is the kind of impression that the world gets of Christian negativism, a kind of simpering pietism that is completely wrong. **The trouble is that such Christians have not learned to go on and put on Christ.** As we have been seeing in **Ephesians 4**, we are not only to stop lying but to be positive, to put on Christ, by speaking the truth in love with one another. That is quite a different thing. That opens up a whole new area of living. We are not merely to restrain our selfish tempers, but to seek the restoration of relationship with the one whom we have offended or who has offended us. There is to be a positive action. **You have not acted as a Christian until you have sought out the one with whom you have a difficulty, and have made peace, if you can.** We are not only to stop evil talk but we are to seek to speak positively, helpfully, and graciously in all situations. We are not only to stop stealing but to start giving. There is where Christianity begins to show itself. Now it goes even deeper than changed actions. **In Chapter 4, Verse 30, the apostle goes on to show us that the presence of the Holy Spirit in a Christian must not only change his actions, but his attitudes as well...**

Certainly, the wrong actions he has described before grieve the Holy Spirit, but they are relatively easy to spot. **More subtle, and, therefore, more deadly are these wrong attitudes, the things we harbor within us that we do not let others see.** We can cover these over with a happy smile or temporarily subdue them and keep them hidden by an effort of the will, yet beneath are bitter attitudes and

wrathful feelings, anger, clamor, slander and malice. It is these which are grieving the Holy Spirit...

There are always two problems involved whenever a Christian holds a grudge or feels resentment against someone else. There is the situation that caused your feeling, that is one problem. **But there is a closer, more immediate problem, and that is your reaction to this, your attitude toward him. That is where the Christian always has to start. This is our difficulty.** We always want to start with the problem that caused the situation, that caused our feeling. But God says, No, first remove the beam that is in your own eye, then you will see clearly how to remove the mote that is in your brother's eye (**Matthew 7:3-4, Luke 6:41-42**). **Start with yourself, first. What is your attitude toward this other person? That is where you must start.**

First, put away bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander and malice. Put it away. This is where the difficulty comes. **When we get right down to that place we discover, oftentimes to our own shock, that we do not want to do it.** We want to be bitter, we want to be vengeful; we enjoy it. We want to make people squirm. We want to make them crawl back to us and ask our forgiveness. We want revenge, that is what we are after. Why? Because if we talk to them about it, it will all be brought out in the open and the thing will be settled, and we do not want it settled...

Why are we so reluctant? Because we enjoy it. That is what the Word of God reveals. These things are pleasurable to us, and this is where the problem lies. If we will obey God and put them away, then immediately the Holy Spirit who dwells within, whose task it is to give us that character of Jesus Christ which made him the world's most attractive man, will immediately begin to release to us the tenderheartedness and the kindness of Christ and we can forgive as God in Christ forgave us..."

In **Ephesians 4:32** Paul writes, “*And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.*”

The **New English Translation** renders the verse as follows: “*Instead, be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you.*”

“*Be ye kind one to another*” Paul says. The word “*be*” is the translation of the Greek word **ginomai**: (**ghin’-om-ahee**), which means, “to become (come into being), to bring into existence.” Paul is exhorting the believers in Ephesus to **become** kind or to **bring kindness into existence!** One wonders what they had been like before they were brought to faith in Jesus Christ!

Expositors Greek Testament says that the idea is that the Ephesian believers had to abandon one mental condition and, beginning there and then, embrace a new and opposite mental condition. In earlier Lessons we made the point that in verse **23**, Paul informed the believers that the bridge that leads from the “**putting off**” of the “**old man**,” to the “**putting on**” of the “**new man**,” is the renewing of the spirit of the mind. This renewal points to a radical change in the believers’ thinking as a consequence of the increasing influence of the Holy Spirit over their thought processes, so that they increasingly see everything from God’s viewpoint.

The word **ginomai** is a present imperative, indicating that kindness, tender-heartedness, and forgiveness, as they relates to each other, is to be their new lifestyle! In other words, kindness, tender-heartedness, and forgiveness should characterize the attitude and behavior of every believer. The word is in a construction which calls for **the believers to initiate the action** and participate in the results of the action. The idea is for them to **keep on becoming**. Paul is not calling for an “arrival” in this life but for a lifelong process, a journey toward greater and greater Christ-like behaviour.

In **Philippians 3:12-14** he writes,

12 Not that I have already attained this—that is, I have not already been perfected—but I strive to lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus also laid hold of me.

13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have attained this. Instead I am single-minded: Forgetting the things that are behind and reaching out for the things that are ahead,

14 with this goal in mind, I strive toward the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

(New English Translation)

John Phillips in his commentary on Ephesians, wrote the following:

“Here Paul emphasized the positive. He told us we must display spiritual graces instead of soul-destroying vices. How could we do less...We might not be able to achieve the kind of total revolution of inner disposition demanded by the Holy Spirit all at once. God is reasonable. He knows our frame. He makes allowance for us to learn and practice, even though we already have the indwelling Holy Spirit to provide the energizing power needed for change. But God does demand that here and now—right away—we **start** putting away the old nature and putting on the new.”

Brothers and sisters, we must make it a matter of priority to be **kind**, **tenderhearted** or **compassionate**, and **forgiving** to one another.

The Greek word translated “*kind*” is **chréstos**: (**kh**rase-**tos**), which has a basic meaning of being well adapted to fulfill a purpose. It refers to that which is useful, suitable, excellent, serviceable. It means goodness in the sense of being useful and practical. On the spiritual plane, **chréstos** describes what God defines is kind – and therefore also eternally useful! In several New Testament verses the main idea of **chréstos** is **kind**, an adjective which includes the attributes of loving

affection, sympathy, friendliness, patience, pleasantness, gentleness, and goodness. Kindness is a quality shown in the way a person speaks and acts. It is more volitional than emotional. In other words, **kindness** is more a **choice** than a **feeling**. The whole idea of the word **chréstos** is a goodness which is kind.

William Barclay writes that **chréstos** was defined by the Greeks as “the disposition of mind which thinks as much of its neighbour’s affairs as it does of its own. Kindness has learned the secret of looking outwards all the time, and not inwards.”

Mark Lehman Strauss the American biblical scholar and professor of the New Testament, observes that “Kindness should characterize believers in their relationships with one another. Kindness is that gentle, gracious, easy-to-be-entreated manner that permits others to be at ease in our presence... Kindness and tender-heartedness go together. They express a warm sympathy and love for all men, both the righteous and evil doers. I fear that sometimes we are not very pitiful and compassionate toward others. Kindness and compassion find expression in forgiveness.”

The Greek word translated “*Tender hearted,*” or “*compassionate,*” is **eusplagchnos (yoo’-splangkhnos)**, which literally means, “having strong, healthy bowels.” The ancient Greeks considered the inward organs to be the seat of the affections and emotions.” The word means, “compassionate, easily moved to love, pity, or sorrow.” It describes one having tender feelings for someone else. The word refers to that deep, internal caring comparable to the modern expressions of deep feeling such as “broken-hearted” or “gut-wrenching.” It was the strongest Greek word for expressing compassionate love or tender mercy, and involves one’s entire being. It describes the compassion which moves a person to the deepest depths of his or her being. In the gospels, apart from its use in some of the parables, it is used only of Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, believers should **never** be hard-hearted, ill-mannered, rude, irritable or ill-tempered. Instead, we should be noted for our tenderness of heart, or compassion. We should be easily entreated, full of deep and tender affection, in opposition to wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking, and malice, which we are exhorted to abandon. The word **eusplagchnos** does not so much refer to **conduct** as it does to **attitude**. It is more of an “**inside**” word than an “**outside**” one!

Paul says, “*And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, **forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.***” The word “*forgiving*” is a translation of the Greek word **charizomai**: (**khar-id’-zom-ah-ee**), which literally means “to give freely and unconditionally, or to bestow as a gift of grace and then to remit a debt, and hence to forgive.” The word is used of God giving His grace in order to pardon. This is freely done and therefore not based on any merit or deserving on the part of the person receiving forgiveness. **charizomai** may be defined as “**favour that cancels debts.**”

The root of our English word “forgive” is the Latin word **perdonaré**, which means “to give completely, without reservation.” The word **perdonaré** is also the source of our English “pardon.” The last 4 letters of the word “forgive” spell the word “give.” This should give us an indication of what is required of us in order to forgive others!

The word **charizomai** is in the present tense, indicating that forgiving is to be the **continual practice** of believers. It is to be our new way of life. The **present tense** indicates that those who have “**put off**” the “**old man**” and have “**put on**” the “**new man**,” are now to wear this “garment” of forgiveness at all times and in all seasons. When a believer says, “I **can’t** forgive,” what he or she is really saying is, “I **won’t** forgive!”

Paul exhorts us to forgive one another, “***just as God in Christ also forgave you***” (New English Translation). We **can** forgive others because God **forgave** us in Christ! Because we have been forgiven, we must consciously choose to graciously extend forgiveness to those who

have wronged us. The word “*forgiven*” is in the **ao**rist tense in the Greek which signifies that God’s forgiveness of sinners in Christ is full, complete, and final. It is this standard of forgiveness that Paul exhorts believers to strive for in their interactions with others!

Dr. David Martyn Lloyd-Jones made the following remarks in respect of this verse: “I say to the glory of God and in utter humility that whenever I see myself before God and realize even something of what my blessed Lord has done for me, I am ready to forgive anybody anything...If we really know Christ as our Saviour our hearts are broken and cannot be hard, and we cannot refuse forgiveness.”

Paul uses the **Middle voice** which pictures believers as those who are to initiate the decision to put on the “garment of forgiveness” and participate in the effects of this new “attire,” one of which is the freedom of spirit that comes from an attitude of forgiving the injuries of others and remitting the debts that they owe to us.

The words “*even as*” are the translation of the Greek word **kathós**, which means “according as, just as.” It conveys the sense of “in the same way as,” or “to the degree that.” The word is used here to indicate the grounds on which believers are **enabled** to forgive each other and the basis of their **motivation** to do so.

In **I John 3:16**, the Apostle writes, “*We have come to know love by this: that Jesus laid down his life for us; thus we ought to lay down our lives for our fellow Christians*” (**New English Translation**).

Earlier, in **John 13:34-35** he had written:

34 “I give you a new commandment—to love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

35 Everyone will know by this that you are my disciples—if you have love for one another.”

(**New English Translation**)

Brothers and sisters, the underlying **motive** for believers to forgive each other is God's act of forgiving us in Christ. The underlying **power** for us to do so is the Holy Spirit who enables us.

The believer's **duty**, indeed the believer's **privilege** is to forgive, based on the **doctrine** that he or she has been forgiven. **Revelation** always demands a **response** from the heart. If the revelations that we receive from God's Word are not transmitted from our heads to our hearts, we will inevitably become modern day Pharisees. The **New English Translation** renders **James 1:22-25** in the following way:

22 But be sure you live out the message and do not merely listen to it and so deceive yourselves.

23 For if someone merely listens to the message and does not live it out, he is like someone who gazes at his own face in a mirror.

24 For he gazes at himself and then goes out and immediately forgets what sort of person he was.

25 But the one who peers into the perfect law of liberty and fixes his attention there, and does not become a forgetful listener but one who lives it out—he will be blessed in what he does.

What we **believe** should always determine how we **behave**. If we understand and appreciate, even to some degree, the immensity of God's forgiveness of **our** transgressions, that understanding and appreciation should motivate us to extend forgiveness to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The children of God are most like their heavenly Father when they exercise the supernatural grace of forgiving those who have offended them as they are enabled by the Holy Spirit.

In "*The Merchant of Venice*," Act 4, Scene 1, **William Shakespeare** put these, almost biblical words in the mouth of Portia:

"The quality of mercy is not strained.
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes
The thronèd monarch better than his crown.
His scepter shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
But mercy is above this sceptered sway.
It is enthronèd in the hearts of kings;
It is an attribute to God Himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,
Though justice be thy plea, consider this:
That in the course of justice none of us
Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy,
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy."

We will conclude our Lesson with the words of **Ray Stedman**:

"How did God in Christ forgive you? Have you forgotten that?...Think of it. He forgave you before you repented, did he not? He forgave you before there was any sign of turning on your part. You discovered that the moment you began to respond to him. His forgiveness was already there...

Not only did God forgive us before we repented, He forgave us despite the hurt to himself. This is our problem. We say, 'I know I should forgive, but he doesn't know how he's hurt me, and I can't forgive that hurt.' Well, God did. There is no desire for revenge on his part. He does not try to pay us back for what we have done. He forgives it; he wipes it out. He forgave us completely, did he not? Is it not wonderful

that God never gets historical about our sins? He is not forever bringing them up and throwing them in our faces. We shall never forget them, and that is quite right. Paul never forgot that he was a persecutor of the church. But God did. Now this is the word for us. **This is where Christianity begins to be manifest.** *'Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you...'*

Perhaps there may be some who are even now harboring unforgiving attitudes toward someone else. The Word of God says if you come to the altar to offer a gift and there remember that you have ought against your brother, leave your gift at the altar and go and first be reconciled to your brother. Then come and offer your gift. You may not be able to do that physically at this moment, but if there is something in your heart against another you can go in spirit. You can put it away, you can forgive him, and then come and offer your gift of praise and thanksgiving unto God."