

Righteous Relationships

Ephesians 4:31-32 (HCSB)

Point: You gotta take the gospel into relationships with you

Context

Many people felt betrayed and devastated by the recent confession by Lance Armstrong on Oprah. In the aftermath, many could do nothing but seethe with anger and unforgiveness.

“I guess I should forgive him....give me 14 years, maybe.”¹

Who can blame them?

This large-scale news story parallels how some of us feel towards those who hurt us. (betrayal, kids, driving) Perhaps a hurtful act has left us feeling vulnerable, and out of control, and being angry and unforgiving gives us a sense of control, even if it simply means, they cannot get back into our good graces. We can punish people with our thoughts. Unfortunately, this backfires.

The trajectory of anger² AP!

- **Disposition (inward)**
 - bitterness (pikria): resentment over the past
- **Demeanor (outward)**
 - rage (thumos): explosion of rage
 - anger (orge): settled feeling of hostility
- **Display (fruiting)**
 - shouting: verbal display of anger
 - slander: verbal display of anger against others

Malice: attitude or action which intends to harm others (killing people with your mind³)

Not necessarily physical harm, but could involve thoughts (Matt 5)

1 John 3:15

Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.

when we become angry, we think we're doing this to *them*

“Not forgiving is like drinking rat poison and waiting for the rat to die” - Anne Lamott⁴

In our trajectory of anger, we are grasping for control of a broken situation.

irony: in our anger/bitterness/rage, we are losing control

Only Jesus can save broken relationships, broken hearts, and the sting of bitterness

illust: Jellyfish stings need the salve of hot water

The gospel salve (to assuage the pain of bitterness)

regeneration...

Ephesians 2:5 (ESV)

even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved

peace...

Ephesians 2:13-14 (HCSB)

But now in Christ Jesus, you who were far away have been brought near by the blood of the Messiah. For He is our peace, who made both groups one and tore down the dividing wall of hostility.

In our personal experience of salvation, let's remember we were saved into church family

Colossians 3:3, 12-13 (HCSB)

For you have died, and your life is hidden with the Messiah in God...Therefore, God's chosen ones, holy and loved, put on heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, 13 accepting one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a complaint against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive.

Two common mistakes... AP!

We romanticize community

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, during pre-war Germany, hoisted the love of Christ amid the hatred of the Third Reich. He wrote *Life Together* explaining basic Christian community,

Innumerable times a whole Christian community has broken down because it had sprung from a wish dream. The serious Christian, set down for the first time in a Christian community, is likely to bring with him a very definite idea of what Christian life together should be and to try to realize it. But God's grace speedily shatters such dreams...Every human wish dream that is injected into the Christian community is a hindrance to genuine community and must be banished if genuine community is to survive. He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial (Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*)⁵

Relationships take work because people are not perfect.

We romanticize Jesus

We sometimes think that if we cling to Jesus relationships will be breezy.

• Even Paul had difficult relational drama...

Paul and Mark AP!

Acts 15:36-38 (HCSB)

After some time Paul said to Barnabas, "Let's go back and visit each city where we previously preached the word of the Lord, to see how the new believers are doing." Barnabas agreed and wanted to take along John Mark. But Paul disagreed strongly, since John Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in their work.

Paul and Barnabas

Acts 15:39-40 (HCSB)

After some time Paul said to Barnabas, "Let's go back and visit each city where we previously preached the word of the Lord, to see how the new believers are doing." Barnabas agreed and wanted to take along John Mark. But Paul disagreed strongly, since John Mark had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not continued with them in their work. Their disagreement was so sharp that they separated. Barnabas took John Mark with him and sailed for Cyprus. Paul chose Silas, and as he left, the believers entrusted him to the Lord's gracious care

Paul and Peter

Galatians 2:11 (HCSB)

But when Peter came to Antioch, I had to oppose him to his face, for what he did was very wrong.

Point: if even the Apostle Paul had difficult relationships, we will too.

• It will never be easy (until the eschaton⁶), so we must "preserve the unity of the Holy Spirit with the peace that binds us" (Eph. 4:3).

John Owen, on how the Holy Spirit mortifies sin in the Christian

"He brings the cross of Christ in to the hearts of a sinner by faith, and gives us communion with Christ in his death and fellowship in his sufferings."⁷ - John Owen

Problem: unforgiveness exposes our lack of apprehending God's forgiveness

Here's what I mean...

If you are bitter, the cross is insufficient to you.

You still want people to pay for their sins, so you make them "pay" by your anger.

NT: this trajectory is impossible for Christians to stay in: "put away": past tense (already happened!)

Perhaps deep down, you are still trying to pay for yours.

We need the power of the gospel...

- **God forgave you in Christ⁸...**

forgave us, justified us, absolved us, adopted us.

- **...so you are to forgive others⁹**

But what does that say about God?

- It says he will be just

justice will be met out, either on that person, or on Jesus

- It says you have been vindicated

- So you are able to show...

- forgiveness (absolve those who have wronged you)

- compassion¹⁰ (desire to alleviate the pain of those who wronged you)

- benevolence (desire to do good to those who have wronged you)

This will NEVER happen apart from the power of the gospel. Too much hurt.

Romans 6:6-7 (HCSB)

For we know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that sin's dominion over the body may be abolished, so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin, since a person who has died is freed from sin's claims.

you don't have to be enslaved to anger anymore. do you ever feel you are?

Some of you need to relive your forgiveness in Christ.

You'll never be free from anger towards others, until you have understood how God has forgiven you.

Until then, it will eat away at you, and the community you belong to.

Example: My anger

Hebrews 12:14-15

Pursue peace with everyone, and holiness—without it no one will see the Lord. Make sure that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no root of bitterness springs up, causing trouble and by it, defiling many.

The light went on, as the Holy Spirit applied the Gospel to my heart

Charles Wesley

Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's night;

Thine eye diffused a quickening ray—I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;

My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.¹¹

You'll never be free from anger towards others, until you have drank deeply from the fountain of God's mercy **until the cross is blazingly glorious to you.**

Is there a root of bitterness in our church? As a believer, the Holy Spirit within you will grieve.

We must yield.

You gotta take the gospel into relationships with you, and the Holy Spirit will be continually applying to those who are willing.

Ephesians 4:31-32 (HCSB)

All bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander must be removed from you, along with all malice. And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ

Theme: relationships

Point: even Christians got baggage

FCF: baggage

App: you gotta take the gospel into relationships with you

Works Cited

- ¹ Rick Reilly. *It's all about the lies*. ESPN. Jan 17. 2013. http://espn.go.com/espn/story/_/id/8852974/lance-armstrong-history-lying
- ² Ernest Best. *Ephesians*. (ICC; New York, NY: T&T Clark, 1998). 460-461
- ³ Andrew T. Lincoln explains malice as “any attitude or action which intends harm to one’s neighbor. *Ephesians*. (WBC; Thomas Nelson, 1990). 309. Jesus also compares hatred with murder in Matthew 5:21-22.
- ⁴ Anne Lamott. *Traveling Mercies*.
- ⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*. (New York, NY: HarperOne, 1954) 26-27
- ⁶ The Last Day when Jesus brings in the consumation of all things.
- ⁷ John Owen, in his chapter on *How the Spirit Mortifies Sin*, brings up three ways in which this is accomplished: the Spirit causes our hearts to abound in grace and the fruits of the Spirit, He weakens our desire for sin making it easier to break off, and lastly, He applies the Gospel of Christ to our heart. *Overcoming Sin and Temptation: Three Classic Works by John Owen*. ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Justin Taylor. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006). 61
- ⁸ In his seminal work on union with Christ, Constantine R. Campbell in exegeting the phrase “in Christ” (Eph. 4:32), points out “a subtle but important distinction compared to instrumentality. While God’s redemptive and reconciliatory work is carried out through Christ (instrumental), his forgiveness is based on that work; God forgives *on account of Christ*” (italics mine). *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012). 88
- ⁹ “The present tense of the participle (χαρίζομαι charizomai) combined with the present tense of the main verb stresses that this is to be a regular practice in the Christian community.” Clinton E. Arnold. *Ephesians*. (ECNT. Grand Rapids, MI: 2010). 309
- ¹⁰ Tenderheartedness (ευσπλαγχνοι, eusplagchnos) “literally means to have healthy intestines or bowels; the uncompounded form simply refers to the viscera.” Clinton E. Arnold points out that when this word is used figuratively--as seems to be the case here--it is “as a way of expressing an internal feeling.” Clinton E. Arnold. *Ephesians*. (ECNT. Grand Rapids, MI: 2010). 308
- ¹¹ *And Can It Be*. Words: Charles Wesley, 1738. Music: Thomas Campbell, 1825.