**How Could You? :Avoiding Divine Heartbreak**

**Ephesians 4:25-32 (ESV)**

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Pastor Josh Beakley

Open up to Ephesians chapter 4. We are a church family following Jesus together to the glory of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is to that topic that we direct our attention. We’ve been in a series called *The Helper*, on the Holy Spirit. We continue that series in the book of Ephesians chapter 4.

***25*** *Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.* ***26*** *Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,* ***27*** *and give no opportunity to the devil.* ***28*** *Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.* ***29*** *Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.* ***30*** *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.* ***31*** *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.* ***32*** *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

It was one of my lowest moments as a child. I had made my mom cry. But it wasn’t a normal cry. She was weeping. She was grieved. She had planned this beachside vacation and all the details. We had driven down there. It was all to bless our family. There were hours of driving. Mom had it all planned out. There was a little bit of shopping and meal prep left to do, but I wanted everyone to go to the beach right away and I made it known. My parents were gracious. They eventually let everyone go. My dad would take us down, but I was angry that my mom had stayed to prep for dinner. On my way out, I blurted some unkind words of accusation. When we came back much later, she was still wiping away the tears. Now, the blessing of all the fun, the plans, the vacation, those gifts were still in place. There was no threat of attack or retaliation. There was just grief. I had broken my mom’s heart. It moved me not because I was afraid the blessings would be lost. I was moved because they weren’t. I didn’t have the power to break her love, but I did break her heart.

Do you ever have a moment like that? I remember feeling heart break myself for the first time. It’s kind of a strange expression. I thought it was just a saying, and life has taught me different. It’s actual pain, an anguish that can climb up your arm and tear into your chest and explode out into a flood of tears and groans. It’s a deep grief. It’s perhaps most acute when it’s seen against the backdrop of a gracious love that is knowingly scorned.

God’s promise is amazing! Amen? (Amen!) There is no love like God’s love. Paul’s claim from the beginning of this letter is just that. He opens up with almost a little too over-the-top excitement about God’s promise. He doesn’t even take a breath. Try doing an English diagram of his first couple of sentences. It’s a joke. It’s just too much excitement about how awesome God is and what He’s done through Jesus. He saved us from our sin through His death on the cross. He has raised us to new life in His resurrection from the grave. We who were dead are now alive from the promise of God. Those who are guilty receive grace. There is no love more beautiful. In chapter 3, he builds into this prayer that we would be filled with the knowledge of this love; how wide and long and high and deep. It’s actually too much to know. That’s the loving God in whose Spirit Paul longs for us to be completely saturated. He is a God whose love can never be broken.

Now, with a promise like that, is there anything left to worry about? This is unbreakable love! It turns out that there is. Really? What could that be? If we can’t break God’s promise, what’s the big deal? Here’s the point today. We can never break God’s promise, but we can break His heart. If you truly understand the love of God, you will never want to do that. As a child of God, how do we avoid breaking the heart of our Father? That’s what we’re going to look at this morning. How do we avoid breaking God’s heart? We’ll try to work through five ways.

**#1 The Pattern We’re To Follow (25-29)**

Let’s start with looking at the rhythm or the lifestyle of what I’ll just call practical growth. A pattern of practical growth is taking actual steps towards where God directs. It means real change, rather than theoretical change. It’s not an idea or a concept. It’s an action. It’s a movement that we’re changing, transforming, developing. We’re putting off our old immature and sinful ways of living and then putting on new mature and righteous ways of living. We’re putting off the bad and putting on the good in real, every day life. This is the pattern Christians are called to follow. It’s because of what Jesus has done that now we live differently. Paul has made this argument that we didn’t do anything to get the life of Christ, but since He has given us His life, now it means we need to do something about it. He’s calling us to live differently, to live in practical growth. I don’t know about you, but sometimes we get one, two, three gym memberships, but we never actually make it in there. How many books have you purchased that are on the shelf and have never been opened? We’re good at growing in theory, but often our growth is not actual. It’s not practical.

We had some family staying with us one Christmas break. I won’t share names to protect the innocent, but one of these individuals made a mess and it developed into an unpleasant smell. My wife was going to clean it, but I said, “No, let’s give them a chance to learn.” I asked this family member to take care of it and they said, “Sure thing.” A day later, my wife walks through the hallway and she senses an odor coming from the same room. She goes to get some cleaning supplies. The individual was playing video games with others in the family and my wife said, “I’ll take care of it this time.” She assumed it was a new odor. But the family member said from behind the controller, “Oh no. That’s not new.” I looked and I said, “That was yesterday. I thought you said you’d clean it up. The response comes with eyes never veering from the screen, “I’m working on it.” Somehow the game system just got unplugged. (Laughter!) Do you think we ever do this to God? He exposes an issue in our lives for us to address, we acknowledge it, and then we move on with what matters to us. We ignore His guidance. We take no actual steps. Sunday after Sunday, we just mumble out that hollow excuse, “I’m working on it.”

We are saved by grace. God has promised to rescue us. He does so with a purpose, though. In Ephesians 2:10 we see that He saves us not because of good works, but for good works. We’re to grow, to change, to walk in newness of life. Following Jesus is not just a thing we say we believe. It also changes to whom we belong and what we’re becoming. It makes a difference! Our lives should follow this pattern of practical growth. When it doesn’t, it breaks the heart of God. He calls us to live differently. That’s Paul’s point in verses 17-24. He says

**Ephesians 4:17** Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.

**Ephesians 4:20-24** But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to 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.

Put off and put on. That’s the pattern of practical growth we see reflected in the passage before us. In verses 25-29, we see some examples that rise. The “therefore” connects us. This is the point. It’s that we’re new in Jesus and we need to now live new, walk new, be different. Here are some of those steps and what it takes to walk in newness of life, as it says in Romans 6:4. It’s to grow practically. He gives four examples that really just demonstrate how this looks in certain areas, but it should affect every area of our life, where we’re putting off and putting on. In these examples, he shows us what we put off or renounce. He shows us what we put on or practice. Then he shows us why. So let’s move through them quickly if we can. First, look at verse 25. He directs us to grow from lying to truth-telling, from deceit to honesty.

***25*** *Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.*

As you follow Jesus, you need to once for all put aside falsehood, meaning deceit or lying. It’s an ordinary part of the Gentile way of living and it’s much like our own. Following Jesus means putting that away. Now I’m going to walk in truth instead of in lies. To be a child of God is to be a child of truth, of the light; not a son of darkness, of deceit. When Satan enters the scene in Genesis 3, he tries to make God look like a liar. He questions what God says. He begins with a lie. Jesus said in John 8:44 that he is the father of lies. He speaks to the Pharisees and warns them that they are of Satan. Satan is a deceiver, but the community of God is not to be defined by lies, but truth. That could not be clearer. In the beginning of the church, as it launches and grows in that community, one of the first sins is Ananias and Sapphira come forward and try to lie to the Holy Spirit. We see God deal with it swiftly. To follow Jesus is to renounce lying and practice instead, truth-telling.

What Paul actually does here is quote from the Old Testament, from Zechariah 8:16. This is a prophet who is talking about this new community. He laments the old community that was abandoning God’s laws and living in deceit and harming. They had suffered destruction. He said there was going to be a remnant and one day, there was going to be a different community who is going to have love and truth and peace. They’re going to be a people that belong to God who are faithful and righteous. They’re going to make true judgments and be in peace and love. Paul is calling on that prophecy and then calling this new community to live the way that God desires you to live. Live differently! This is a beautiful vision of honesty instead of deceit. In each of these examples, just like this one, there is a thread woven of motivation, of why. This thread relates to this idea of togetherness or unity. He says we’re members one of another. Because of what Jesus accomplished in bringing us to God, we who believe now belong to the same family. We’re members even of the same body.

In my family, I’m the only one who really enjoys spicy food. But my kids like this one thing about spicy food. They like to take a taste and then pretend like it isn’t spicy to see if they can lure their siblings to also take a taste. (Laughter!) “Oh, that’s not spicy at all. You should try it.” It happens at the pool sometimes, too. They go in and say, “It’s not cold at all.” Then a sibling makes that jump and they smile. When it’s not so spicy or cold, it’s okay. It’s fun. But it can get mean, right? It can get harmful. As a parent, you grieve when your kids are trying to trick or hurt each other. Don’t lie to each other. You guys are siblings.

Even more strange is imagining members of a body lying to each other. Can you imagine dipping your toe into the water and then your toes tells the brain, “It’s not cold.” Then you jump and your toe says, “Gotcha!” Why would you do that? We’re in the same body. The early preacher Chysostom said, “If the eye sees a serpent does it lie to the foot? Or if the nose smells a deadly drug will it lie to the mouth? Or if the tongue tastes something bitter will it lie to the stomach?”

A church family, a church body is not to be deceptive, but honest with each other. We’re together. We affect each other. We can’t live like that. As we step into these practices of lying, of deceiving, of putting up a false front, of cheating, whether it’s at school or on our tax forms or we’re excusing some kind of shoplifting or false reporting or we’re hiding relationships or all of these things, we start to live and Paul says, “No, you guys are together. Put that off.” That kind of hypocrisy has no place in Christ. Speak the truth, only the truth.

That doesn’t mean that every truth needs to be spoken. There is a danger that we would use this call to truth as an excuse to do hurtful things on purpose. “I’m just being honest. I’m just being real.” We start to dish out hard words that don’t need to be spoken. For that, we need to keep reading the passage here. We kind of touched on the sphere of emotions, where God directs us from being an avenger who uses words and speaks with weapons, to being a peacemaker. If you get into conflict, this is going to arise. Paul says

***26*** *Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,* ***27*** *and give no opportunity to the devil.*

Put off and renounce this sinful anger. Anger is this sense of displeasure that we have at something we don’t like, something that we would say, “I don’t like that. That’s wrong.” We feel it’s wrong. This word “anger” is used to describe God. God is angry against things that are wrong, against sin, against evil, against injustice. So to be angry in that sense is not sinful so long as we’re angry at what God is angry at and in the way that God is angry. The problem is that we often don’t have anger like God. We have anger not as defined by what God thinks is wrong, but as defined by what we think is wrong. Our anger is twisted. It’s distorted. Our culture warps this idea of anger.

If you want to think through that more, there is a book called *Good and* *Angry* by David Powlison that can help you unpack it a little bit. It’s a complex thought, but our anger is not often like God’s anger. It’s more like the anger of Cain, where we’re angry and it’s defined by us. It’s even against what God would approve and it approves what God rejects. So our anger is flawed and destructive. Instead of being in control of our anger, the anger controls us. Because of this danger, James says there are going to be times when you’re wronged, but he warns us and says

**James 1:19–20** Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Human anger, this flawed, sinful anger is not going to bring about what God desires, what is right. What helps is that Paul is quoting from Psalm 4:4. That’s a prayer where the psalmist is crying out to a God of righteousness for relief in distress. He is being wronged. He’s being accused and attacked. His honor is being shamed. People are speaking vain words and lies against him. The psalmist is able to trust God and able to say, “Even when I’m wronged, I’m not going to retaliate. I’m not going to avenge myself. God will be my avenger and protector even in his sleep.

**Psalm 4:4** Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.

You can almost imagine Paul, who had been wrongly imprisoned, and him having to go to that psalm and read it for his own heart. Now he’s bringing it back to the service. This is helpful. When you are wronged, yes, it’s wrong. Yes, there is an anger that may surface, but don’t sin. There is a sense in which you have to release it to God. There is a call to seek to reconcile as we can and then to release it to God. The image of being on the bed and lying there and the anger and entrusting it to God in prayer, Paul draws on that and he says

***26*** *…do not let the sun go down on your anger,*

The word there he uses for anger, in the Greek he intensifies it a little bit more. The cause of your festering anger, don’t let it continue. Don’t let it simmer. You need to entrust justice and vengeance to God, otherwise, it will lead to sin. Don’t let it simmer.

Jesus knew that anger, left unchecked, undealt with, is the first step towards murder. It’s like a cub that will one day become a lion. It just needs time. So here, Paul says to keep short accounts. Deal with it as you can, on the day. As a community, you should not be a people who have long lists of grievances. You should not have long lists of anger against each other. Instead of resentment, instead of revenge and retaliation, practice reconciliation and then release to God. You reconcile what you can and then you entrust and release what you can’t resolve to God. Paul would have had to work through this principle himself. This is what we put off; sinful anger. Instead, we seek to reconcile as we can and entrust it to God. The reason is given in verse 27.

***27*** *and give no opportunity to the devil.*

There is a danger of giving opportunity to the devil. Satan may not be the direct cause of anger, but just like in Cain’s situation, he loves to crouch and then capitalize on that anger, then tempt us toward sin and division. He looks for those opportunities. He’s a deceiver, a tempter, and then a slanderer and an accuser. He is our adversary and he would love to fuel that anger like a weapon and then give us opportunity to unleash it in friendly fire within the family. Paul is warning against that. Unresolved anger is like leaving your door open when you know that there is a predator outside. You’re giving an opportunity to destroy the family. Paul says for Christians to deal with your anger in ways that are so different. To get a little bit more, I would encourage you to turn to Romans chapter 12. Let’s just take a moment because this passage is so powerful. Paul is talking about this Christian community and he says

**Romans 12:17–21** Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 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.” To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

If you’re wrestling with this, that’s a passage to think through. You heard a phrase in there. He says you leave room for the wrath of God. Do you hear the difference, there? There is a difference between giving opportunity for the devil and leaving room for the wrath of God. In entrusting it to Him, you’re making room for God to act. When you grab hold of vengeance yourself, you’re leaving room for Satan to act. In the context here, we’re talking about the Christian community and the family and interpersonal relationships.

It’s not to say that there aren’t some provisions of God and responsibility for justice through authority and through government. In fact, Paul knows that question is going to be asked in Romans, so in Romans 13, he starts to go there with the reality of government stepping in. There are some situations like that. But we’re setting that aside because there are some deep grievances and some safety issues that would be raised. If you have questions, that would be good to talk about. But we’re talking about in the category of interpersonal relationships here. On a personal level, we say God is the ultimate avenger, not me. He’s always in control, always just, always righteous, always on target, always on time. I will leave it to Him.

Then Paul turns from this idea of being a taker or a robber, to a provider, to a giver. He says

***28*** *Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.*

It’s the same pattern. Put off, put on, and why. He renounced stealing and then practiced working. This is the idea of intense labor, of toil. Work until you’re exhausted. The idea is that you can be giving. In this family, in the togetherness, you can care for those in need. So we’re to renounce stealing, practice working, and instead of being a consumer that is serving self and letting others spend themselves for us, now we’re going to be a contributor and we’re actually going to spend ourselves so that we can help serve others.

The kind of work he commends is honest work, not the kind of dishonest work that disobeys God’s commands. It’s personal work. He says to work with your own hands. That’s not saying that it has to be manual labor, it’s just that the effort is personal. You’re putting energy into this. It’s not so just the stealing would end, but that giving would begin. So instead of harming, you would be helping. This is the pattern.

Paul set that example himself. He worked. Even though he could have been supported, he worked and labored. In Acts 20:35, he says that he did this as an example and so that we would remember what Jesus said. It’s more blessed to give than to receive. This is what we live in. Instead of being a consumer that is taking, we’re a contributor that is giving.

Then he moves into how we relate in our speech in saying grow from corruption to edification. Grow from being a corrupter to being an encourager.

***29*** *Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.*

Put off corrupting talk. Practice or put on encouraging or edifying talk. Why? Again, this is for the benefit of others, this togetherness of those who are listening. You see the extent of the put off. He says let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths. It’s complete. We’re going to give an account, Jesus said, for every careless word. Paul recognizes that. That’s why David prayed back in Psalm 141

**Psalm 141:3** Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!

I’m concerned about what would come out because what comes out has an effect. It has a corrupting effect. It’s unwholesome. The word here is used of rotten wood, of withered flowers, and of rancid fish. As it comes into contact with other things, it corrupts. It defiles those things. Those who are listening are being ruined.

James, the brother of Jesus, said along with his brother, bitter speech flows from a poisoned inner spring. The foul words, this kind of fruit, stems from a rotten root in the heart. Jesus would say it comes out of the heart and it’s having an impact on those around you. James would say it’s like a fire. It has the power to destroy. Paul says instead, put that aside and harness the power of speech to build up, encourage, speak what is good for building up. It’s not puffing up through flattery, but building up through encouragement. This is talk that is suitable and helpful. It’s appropriate for the moment and it’s a benefit to those present. It fits the occasion and it gives grace to those who hear. This is what words can do. He’s addressing not just physical neediness now, but spiritual neediness. It’s that we not only do good but we also speak good. We’re giving grace. We’re growing from people who encounter others in conversation and leave them less like Jesus and more discouraged. Now we’re people who when we encounter others, we leave them more like Jesus and more encouraged.

Paul says put off the former and become the latter. Don’t be a liar. Be a truth-teller. Put off being an avenger to be a peacemaker. Go from being a robber to a provider, from a corrupter to an encourager. These are just some examples to demonstrate what should be the pattern of every area of life. It’s practical growth. We’re a new people in Christ. It’s that we would refuse to wallow in sin. Just like a pig would wallow and roll around in the mud, that we say, “No. I’m going to take actual steps towards where God directs.” The Christian life is one of change and repentance. It’s not a community of people who have it all together. We know that, don’t we? But it is a community of people who are growing together in real practical ways. We know that wallowing in sin is a real danger. Proverbs gives us a really strong picture.

**Proverbs 26:11** Like a dog that returns to his vomit is a fool who repeats his folly.

It’s just going back over and over and over. The call from Paul is to live new. Jesus has changed you. Take real steps for practical growth. Change! Be different! This is repentance. This is what we’re called into.

When you think about the people who broke God’s heart, some of the first people that come to mind are the religious people. They are the people who are happy to perform a religious ceremony. They were happy to do a bunch of functions, to say things about following God, but then they didn’t actually do it. They didn’t actually live it. Jesus had to talk to the Pharisees all the time about this, and the Sadducees and the scribes. He said in Matthew 21

**Matthew 21:28–31** “What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.

Here are people who, yes, they are living lives of sin, but when they hear the Word of God and then they think, they change and they say, “I’m going to actually follow God.” Here you are feigning obedience, living on the outside, and when God calls you into something, you say, “No, I’m okay.” There is a conviction and a comfort. What’s powerful is it doesn’t matter where you’re at. In one sense, for the Pharisees it was heavy. In the other sense, if you’re a tax collector or a prostitute, “Yes, there is hope for me. Jesus will meet me where I’m at?” He will meet you there, but He won’t leave you there. He’s calling you to follow Him and change. One of the great examples of that is Matthew. In Matthew chapter 9, he is a tax collector sitting at the booth. Jesus walks by and says “Follow me,” and he got up and followed Him. Then Jesus is eating with these tax collectors and sinners. The Pharisees are like, “What are you doing eating with all these people?

**Matthew 9:912-13** But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

You do these religious functions, but you’re not actually living it. Take actual steps. Consider your own life. What are some recent actual steps that you’ve taken to practical growth? At baptism, we often share some of those. We define, here’s who I was and now, here’s who I am. I’m different. I’m growing. God is changing me. For some of us, it’s actually time for us to take that step of baptism and to share that story of what has happened. Others of us, maybe we need to embrace the change that God is calling us into and take some steps. Maybe for some of us, we see God changing those around us and we need to just speak a word of encouragement. We need to say, “You’re not the same person you used to be. By the grace of God, I see Jesus in you.” We need to share that to encourage because it’s so discouraging in the world around us when we do try to take steps. Everything is against you. But if we don’t want to break the heart of God, we have no choice. He is calling us. He’s leading us. He’s guiding us and directing us to take actual steps to follow this pattern of put off and put on. This is not to earn His love, but because we have been given it.

If God has already rescued you and the promise is secure, you might say, “Why do that? Is there more motivation there?” Here’s the next point. It’s that if you want to not break the heart of God, you have to appreciate how much He cares. Here we turn to

**The Pain We’re Not To Inflict (30A)**

This is the pain of spiritual grief. By grief, we’re talking about sadness. We’re talking about sorrow, the inner groanings over something that we love.

I don’t know if you have memorable moments of discipline with your parents, but I have a few. In those moments what stands out to me is not the physical pain. I remember a couple times, and one in particular, going in with my dad and sitting, just sitting there, and him just saying, “I am so sad.” The heaviness of that was on me. I thought, “Let’s just get the discipline over with. I don’t want any more of this. This is the worst.” The person who loves me more deeply than anyone else alive, my parent, my dad or my mom, I had grieved them. They could love me that much and yet be so sad because of me. The grief that Paul warns us here not to inflict is not against another human. It’s against God. It’s not physical, but it’s still very personal. He says

***30*** *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God,*

It’s a simple warning. I don’t think we need to overthink it. It’s worth pondering for a moment. When you think about the Old Covenant people of Israel and how they had so often rebelled against God and He had been the God of steadfast love and He delivered them and He poured out wrath on their enemies and they just rejected Him such that Isaiah said

**Isaiah 63:10** But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit;

They grieved Him.

**Psalm 78:40** How often they rebelled

It was just over and over. If you’re reading the Bible with your children and you tell these stories, they’re like, “Again? They’re doing that again? Didn’t they learn?” Paul is warning us that there is a sense in which they were breaking God’s heart and having resistance against His guiding influence, against His direction. It’s what Stephen seems to appeal to and then you see in Acts 7:51 that they’re resisting the Holy Spirit. God’s own children can resist and ignore and rebel in such a way that they grieve the Holy Spirit. You look at His nature and character. This is God the Spirit. This is God. He’s everywhere. He’s including here anywhere you go, God is there.

He’s God! This is God the Holy Spirit. He’s not a force, but a person. And this is the Spirit. You see His character. He is holy. He is fully devoted to the glory of the Godhead. He’s fully devoted to the glory of God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit. He is forever given to what is fully good and perfect and right. That’s why we grieve Him, so. We insult His holiness when we disregard what He’s like and disdain those whom He loves.

We grieve Him not in a mere physical sense, but in a relational sense because He loves us. God cares! Because God cares, it makes Him grieved when we don’t. It’s not that we hurt God by attacking Him directly so much as God is hurt as we insult one another. Just like a parent is grieved when the children fight each other, the Holy Spirit is grieved when we tear apart the church family He is knitting together. We tear down what He is building up. We destroy and defile the very people that He is unifying and purifying. A big way that we do this is related to our speech. What we say to and about each other is what causes God so much grief, because He cares. That’s a love that we have to refuse to ignore so that we wouldn’t inflict the pain of that spiritual grief. It’s grief that flows from love. We need to appreciate how much God cares. That reminds us so that we don’t continue to break His heart.

If you want to see the heart of God on display in the flesh, you look at the person of Jesus Christ and you can see His grief over people’s sin. You see His heaviness of heart at their mistreatment of others and of Him and of their refusal to listen. Think about that image of Peter promising His love. “I love you, God.” Jesus said, “You’re going to break that promise.” I’ll never abandon you! “You’re going to break that promise. I won’t break my love for you, but you will break your love for me, Peter.” Just a little bit later, in Jesus’ moments of need, Peter denies Him three times, swearing that he never knew Him. Then what happens? There was eye contact and Peter, in that moment, his heart is broken because he knows what he has done. He goes out and he weeps bitterly.

He understands the care of God in part, and yet it goes through Jesus dying on the cross and rising again. All of a sudden, Peter is out there on the boat and he sees Jesus. He swims to Him and there is a reunion. Does he truly appreciate what is going on here? Peter declares his love and Jesus asks, “Do you love me more than these?” Peter says, “You know I love you.” Three times, Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him. The third time, Peter’s heart is grieved again. Each time, Jesus is pointing him to “Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep. Show your love by caring for the body. I’m the Shepherd. I laid down my life for the sheep. Care for the sheep. Love one another. This is how you know you’re my disciples. Love one another.” We join together and worship this Savior who suffered the grief of the Judge’s wrath, so that we would only know the grief of the Father’s love. This is the Savior that we worship.

We work at appreciating how much God cares. We read about it in the Word. We think about it in prayer. We confess our sins out loud. Maybe you get on your knees when you pray or you can use the Psalms to know God’s heart. Then when you need to, you cry. These are not wasted moments of worship. They are humbling seasons that we need to brave so that we learn how to avoid breaking God’s heart. The proof He has given is there. You can look at what is done. This is

**The Promise We’re To Cherish (30B)**

It’s the promise of eternal glory. In verse 30, Paul is just giving one more way to help us vividly remember what God has done, to remember this gift. This is the same Holy Spirit

*by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

The day of redemption is that wonderful future day.

Lord willing, in a week, I’ll be officiating a wedding ceremony with a few of our church family. In my office, I have their wedding certificate. If you take that and you lay it out, it’s already been prepared and stamped with the official seal. You can run your finger over it and you can feel the embossing of the eagle encircled by the state and county name. It’s official. It’s ready even now. You can bet at least there are two people who are eagerly awaiting that day of consummation. The seal is there. It’s official. It’s been done and yet, we’re awaiting that moment.

When Jesus died and rose again, He accomplished decisive victory over sin and death. He secured redemption for His people. At that moment that we believe the good news of what He did, God stamps His seal upon us. It’s actually Himself, His own Spirit. Look back at Ephesians chapter 1.

**Ephesians 1:13–14** In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

There it is! We know because the Spirit has sealed us. His presence has influence in our lives. He is the One through whom we are securely and officially sealed in Christ. This is what God has done. We’ve been marked as His own. Just like a wax seal would close a letter or something, you would put it there and it would show this is the one who has the authority and the day and the time or whatever. It belongs to them and it’s secure for them. Here we are, secured for Christ, this day of redemption; that future day when we’re rescued out of all our troubles and freed from the presence of sin and death. Paul is calling us to live in light of this.

We know that things will get worse. Has anybody read the news lately? We know things will get worse because Jesus said they will. But He also said

**Luke 21:28** Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Paul said in Romans 8

**Romans 8:23** And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

We are longing and looking forward to this. This is the promise that we cherish. The whole Bible comes to a close in Revelation 22.

**Revelation 22:20** He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

We sang about it. Just like a bride ready for the groom, we’re waiting. We’re cherishing the promise that has been given, the seal that’s here and the day that’s coming. We’re waiting for the gift of glory and we refuse to insult that gift by forgetting what God has done. We vividly remember through pictures like the seal. We can’t be like Israel, who were redeemed out of Egypt and then just after, are trampling the grace of God. While God has rescued them and brought them to Sinai, here they are, worshiping the golden calf. They forgot. It took just a few short days as it is said, to get Israel out of Egypt, but it has taken generations for God to get Egypt out of Israel.

Here we are. We’ve been redeemed out of this world, out of this darkness. He says to live differently. Live new. Remember that God has set you apart. This is different. This is the hope of glory. It’s the promise that you can cherish. It’s a promise He can never break, and because of that, avoid breaking God’s heart by remembering what He’s done. That involves looking to what we’ve been redeemed out of; what not to do. Look next at verse 31. We’re going to look at

**The Weapons We’re To Forsake (31)**

You might call these relational grudges. There are weapons that we’re tempted to use. We need to put those away and to abandon any attacks on those whom God loves, those whom He has made.

***31*** *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.*

A grudge is this persistent feeling of ill will or resentment from a past hurt. It is staying upset at someone for what they did and we harbor a grudge. We let it grow. We let it fester and get worse. It can build into feuds, rivalries, and even all out war. It’s sad, but also sometimes a little bit funny when you see it.

There is a story about a wealthy suburb in Munich, Germany that had two next door neighbors who were at war with each other. They actually built a twelve foot high fence, supposedly with barbed wire on the top. There were bird boxes with cameras inside. It’s a beautiful neighborhood and all of a sudden it looks like a war zone, like a prison camp. The one neighbor had boarded up their windows with wood to protect from stones coming in. There have been allegations of telephone calls, of deliberate flooding, of spraying garden hoses and grass seed being sown in each other’s vegetable beds. It’s kind of a sad story. They’re suing each other over the stereo system. One brought out a chainsaw to try to cut the fence. As far as anyone can tell, this all began over fourteen years before, when apparently, one of them had planted an elderberry bush a little too close to the fence. Then it started a war.

We look at them and we think, you guys are neighbors. It doesn’t make any sense. Then you think about a church family. Have you ever seen a church family at war? You think this is such a great neighborhood, and all of a sudden you ask, “What is this high fence doing over here? Why are these windows boarded up?” You might think, “This is a great ministry. Why are these…” “Well, because that ministry person over there.” This is a church. How could you be at war? Have you ever been inside a family, a home? You’re like, “This place is at war.” That’s what happens. In our human nature, we start to go to war and sometimes over the smallest things Satan uses to divide and bring hostility. As redeemed children of God, we should renounce, we should abandon, put away, forsake, rid ourselves of all those kinds of weapons that are used in that kind of warfare. We depend on the Spirit to wash away those weapons so that we would not use them against each other. It’s complete commitment. Every kind of all sorts of weapons like this, do away with them.

These examples of weapons almost seems like they’re building. He gives six. It goes from internal attitudes to sudden outbursts to full on combat. You see it start internally with bitterness. He says to put away the bitterness. Bitterness is the opposite of kindness. It’s the opposite of sweet. The Spirit produces fruit and then there is this rotten kind of bitterness that comes from a poisoned internal root. It’s a brooding that happens inside our hearts. Some call bitterness drinking poison and hoping that it’s going to hurt somebody else. It’s this idea of someone who is hard to reconcile. There is a sharp or piercing nature to it. In Hebrews, we’re told that a root of bitterness like this can spring up and in fact, it can bring trouble and it can defile many. Resentment, Paul says to put it away and if we don’t, it’s going to lead to an outburst of wrath and anger.

These two words are nearly synonymous. If there is a distinction, maybe wrath is more of the flash of harshness, the suddenness when it shows. Anger is a little bit more of that seething resentment under the surface. These things are going to start to go and move. The use of those kinds of weapons are going to escalate into a conflict of all out combat through clamor and slander.

Clamor is sort of the close range weapon of shouting and of cursing and abusive speech. The image is like a horse trying to dismount its rider. On the other hand, slander is like a long range weapon where we start to try to destroy a person from afar by talking about them, talking to others, using media, whatever it is. Then Paul just uses the general term malice to talk about all the forms in which we attack people. It’s an all-inclusive word. All of this is what we’re to put away.

If we’re to avoid breaking God’s heart, all of those weapons, we need to disarm ourselves and let the Spirit wash those away. We have ammo against each other and we have to let the Spirit wash it away. We have to abandon any attack on those whom God has made. Those are the weapons of the world. Satan would have us use those to divide in the church. The model that Jesus gave us was to love our enemies and to let those wash away. It’s to not draw lines of territories in the sand or turf that is ours to protect and we dig up bunkers and we stock up on weapons so that we’re ready for attack.

Do you think that there are ways in which we’re tempted to use weapons like that? Do you think there are things over which we might be tempted to go to war with each other over? The world around needs to see what God’s Spirit does in the body. Have you seen any of these weapons used recently in a friend group or in a family? In a ministry?

Years ago, I had a certain coach who I felt had wronged me. I thought I dealt with it. I told the story of what happened and there was a faithful leader friend in the church, one day. He heard me tell the story a couple of times at different points and then he said, “Are you okay?” I was like, yeah. I’m fine. He said, “Well, you shared that a couple times and it might be worth thinking about whether or not you’re holding onto some resentment.” That was not what I wanted to hear, but it was what I needed to hear. That was a loving and courageous friend to tell me.

Here’s a scary exercise. Ask a friend or a spouse or someone you trust, “What’s the most recent way you’ve seen me use a weapon like this?” The reality is, if they have a hard time answering, it may not be a good sign. They might be afraid of your wrath even then. If that’s the case, you’re in a major danger zone. There are some situations that are so volatile that you can’t even ask a question like that. It could be that God is bringing someone to your mind right now that you’re in cold war with. Maybe you rehearse in your mind, in your mirror at night, conversations where you defeat them or you put them to shame and later on, they realize their folly and they get what’s coming to them. Then you hope for their downfall. It could be a family member, teacher, a former boyfriend or girlfriend, even a spouse. In your mind, you’re thinking, “No, not that person. Let’s move onto the next point.” But the Spirit and your conscience are saying, “Yes.”

Now, it could be so difficult and the grief so deep that you need some help and you need to maybe schedule a meeting with someone wise that you trust, so you can get some counsel and say, “I need to talk about this.” But if there is opportunity, maybe you do need to arrange a meeting or write a letter. Maybe you need to get off social media. Or maybe there is a former pastor or church member or a family member that you need to talk to.

You might know of someone who keeps bringing you into their resentment. Maybe God is asking you to speak gently, but boldly and humbly to encourage them to think about the issue. I’m not saying to do this lightly, but the reality is that if we’re not to grieve the heart of God, we have to abandon all attacks on those whom He has created. We have to forsake these kinds of weapons.

Now, that kind of a point is going to prompt us to ask, “What if people are doing that to me? What if I’m under attack? How do I respond in a fallen world with people that are hurting me?” Here’s where Paul ends in verse 32.

**The Posture We’re To Maintain (32)**

This is the stance of how we approach people. Here’s the posture. It’s one of supernatural grace. Grace is kindness or favor that isn’t deserved. It’s a gift. Supernatural grace is the kind of kindness that only comes from God. That kind of grace can empower us to be kind even to our enemies. It’s the kind of grace that is open-hearted. It’s modeled and given by Jesus. It’s the opposite of close-hearted condemnation.

Have you ever learned how to play the guitar? You start learning and you put your fingers on the strings and initially, it hurts. It hurts your fingers because they’re sensitive. But over time, all that friction builds up and you develop callouses and you can’t feel it so much anymore. It’s like a scar that develops. It’s a natural process. The body protects itself from pain and tenderness.

It can happen in relationships. We get hurt over and over and there is friction and we start to harden in our hearts. We lose sensitivity and tenderness. We close off our hearts. We grow callous and cold towards people. That’s natural. But there is a grace that is supernatural, where we’re able to have open hearts and offer kindness that is undeserved and we can even be tender-hearted towards people that possibly can hurt us. That’s the posture we maintain.

***32*** *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

Instead of weapons of malice, Paul says offer up the flag of kindness. The idea here is that the Ephesians haven’t been all that kind and they need to become that way. It’s time to be kind. It’s not natural. It’s not self-produced. This is a fruit of the Spirit and it’s produced in a climate of intense heat. The beauty, the choicest fruit of true patience, true kindness, true gentleness are most clearly tasted when they’re tested by the most obnoxious, undeserving, fragile people. That’s when you go, “Whoa! That person is really patient.” What they mean is, “That person is very difficult.” When the situation is very difficult, those are the trials that bring out what the Spirit alone can produce. This is how we relate like God. We imitate how He relates. There are three traits I’ll point out.

First is the tenderness. This kindness is shown by tenderness. We’re tender-hearted. Instead of callous, we’re tender. Instead of hard, we’re soft. This is sort of a courageous emotional tenderness. It’s to be compassionate. This is our inward parts, our feeling that is the center of our mercy and compassion. In our heart of hearts, in our gut, we have compassion. We’re going to empathize with one another and maintain an open heart even if they’re in pain and suffering.

Now that doesn’t mean that we let them dictate or control our emotions or decisions, that we’re held hostage to sin. There is a passage in Romans 13 that we don’t have time to go to today, but there is a provision of authorities and the law and things that intervene and protect. Those need to be sought after when the time is right. It’s not that there aren’t consequences for sin. It’s not that trust is automatically fully healed or that pain goes away. It just means we cannot close off our hearts. We must keep them open. It’s courageous emotional tenderness and along with that, graciousness. It’s costly relational graciousness. He says

*forgiving one another,*

It’s giving grace. It’s a kindness that is undeserved. Then the motivation that is so powerful here at the end is an awareness. It’s an awareness of what we’ve been forgiven. It’s an awareness of what God has done for us. The kind of grace we needed and received in Christ through His death on the cross. This is what we’re to learn from and then embody to one another. In Ephesians 5:1, it says as children of God the Father, we’re to imitate our Father in that kind of love. The grace of God that is given to us, that now we’ve been brought to life in Christ, now we need to unleash that grace through Christ in us. This is what Paul is calling us into. If we don’t want to break God’s heart, we need to refuse to close off our hearts and keep that posture of supernatural grace. Imitate how He relates. Give love. Grace is at the center of the heart of God.

You see Moses grieving over the people of God. We see him crying out, “God, I want to know you. I want to see you. Tell me.” God proclaims His name. He is a God slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love. He’s righteous in justice against those who reject His love, yet fully forgiving all who trust in Him. He’s a God who saves. He’s the same God who sent Jonah to Nineveh.

Jonah said, “I don’t want to go there. I know what you’re like. I don’t want to have a Sunday sermon on Ephesians 4:32. I know what kind of God this is. He wants forgiveness. He wants tenderheartedness.” Jonah didn’t want to be a part of that grace because he believed they were unworthy. But he was forgetting the grace he had received.

The heart of the Pharisees was closed off against the sinners around them. They failed to appreciate the love and forgiveness that was needed by and offered to them. It’s what grieves a Father’s heart. There is a parable in Matthew 18 where there is a servant who is forgiven an exorbitant amount and then he goes and he holds the other servant, “Pay me what you owe me!” He was failing to be aware to appreciate what he had been forgiven.

We dare not close off our heart to others in the church family. It means we don’t want to listen to them. We interrupt them. We talk around them. We lack compassion for them. We say they are unforgiveable. We are a church who has experienced some deep wounds. I’m not saying that lightly. There may be nothing more difficult in life. But remember that for all the evil sins you have committed, God has not closed off His heart to you. Broken and grieved as it may be, it remains open because the bridge of grace He has promised in Christ will bear your weight while you learn to love like Him.

One of the more famous plays in the last several decades has this man named Jean-Val Jean. He is introduced to us as a prisoner 24601. He had stolen a loaf of bread and was sentenced to years in prison. He gets out and right as he is released, he is given a place to stay by this kind priest. He takes advantage of the grace. He steals some silver and runs away. He is caught and brought back. He thinks he is in judgment and the priest refuses to hold it against him. He gives him more, in fact. It’s this kindness that causes him to change. It’s a grace that causes him to cry out, “What have I done? Sweet Jesus, what have I done?” He is a man consumed with hate and now filled with love. He was raging at the thought of not receiving what he felt he deserved. At the end of his life he recognized the grace he had been given not to suffer what he did deserve. At his last breath he sings, “Forgive me all my trespasses and take me to your glory.”

It’s the heart of God that turns us from asking those who sin against us, “How could you?” and it makes us wonder to a God who would forgive sinners like us, and ask “How could you?” It’s only then that we feel the weight of this warning and we feel the weight of our mistreatment of brothers and sisters that He has welcomed and He says to us with His broken heart, “How could you?” The steadfast love of God’s promise cannot be broken. May that move us to be more responsive to His heart!