

Conduct Of The New Life

Become Kind, Tenderhearted, and Forgiving

Martin G. Collins

Given 13-Jun-09; Sermon #943

Sometimes, we say or write things that we just do not mean, because of a language barrier. Notice that in these poorly worded signs:

In a Bucharest hotel lobby:

The lift is being fixed for the day. During that time we regret that you will be unbearable.

In a hotel in Athens:

Visitors are expected to complain at the office between the hours of 9 & 11 AM daily.

In a Hong Kong dress shop:

Order your summer suit! Because is big rush we will execute customers in strict rotation.

In an East African newspaper:

A new swimming pool is rapidly taking shape since the contractors have thrown in the bulk of their workers.

A notice in a Japanese hotel (ca. 1950):

Please not to steal towels. If you are not person to do such, please not to read notice.

Office of a doctor in Rome:

Conduct of the New Life by Martin G. Collins (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Specialist in women and other diseases.

Japanese instructions on an air conditioner:

Cooler & Heater: If you want just condition of warm in your room,
please control yourself.

But sadly, there are times when we say things that are of a harsh nature against folks in the world, and even fellow members in the church. The apostle Paul warns against the attitudes behind such harsh words and actions, and he also gives the solution for it.

Ephesians 4:29-32 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

In the last few verses of Ephesians 4, he continues his list of taboos that he is giving the Ephesian members in order to help them put off the old carnal man, and to put on the new converted man. That is the primary instruction that he is trying to convey to these early Christians.

Paul is not interested in 'conduct' as a term or word, he is interested in 'conduct' as it is an expression and a reflection of their new righteous life that they had received as the result of regeneration—or in other words, being born from above.

The exhortations in Ephesians 4:31 remind us of the exhortations found earlier in the context.

Ephesians 4:25-29 Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another. "Be angry, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what

is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

There are references there to speech, and to anger, and so on; but Paul is not just repeating restrictions here.

Even though the terms are similar in certain respects, there is an essential difference; the difference has been brought in by the 30th verse, in which we are told not to "grieve the Holy Spirit of God, whereby we are sealed for the day of redemption."

The difference is, that in verses 25-29, Paul is looking at conduct, whereas after verse 30, he becomes much more personal and intimate, and is much more concerned about our spiritual state. Therefore verses 31 and 32 can be considered a kind of practical explanation of what we are to avoid if we are anxious not to "grieve the Holy Spirit of God."

Paul uses the same formula as before: He puts his negative first, and then his positive, and then he supplies us with a reason, or a motive, or an argument. Actually, he does this in every one of these individual restrictions, so that it is easy to follow his own organization and classification.

In verse 31, therefore, he brings us first of all to the negative, "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice." As we read these horrible words, we are again given a picture of the mentality and the outlook and the inner life of those who are not Christian.

Paul gives us several descriptions of the unconverted world in this epistle, and, of course, what he wants is for people to see that old life as it really is. So, by seeing it they will so hate it as to renounce it and turn their backs on it forever. Those things tend to creep into our lives even after we have been converted.

Paul tells us to put it away from us, have nothing more to do with its evils, get rid of them. These things must never be true of us in any sense. But, obviously, he again feels the importance of being specific. We have to do this as well when we tackle such things in our lives.

It is not enough to confess sin in general; we have to confess specific sins. It is a very dangerous thing to confess sin in general. We personalize these things by confessing them specifically, and Paul teaches us to do this by giving us these lists.

He starts with the word 'bitterness.' "Let all bitterness. . . be put away from you." Bitterness is a state of the spirit. It indicates a kind of persistent sourness and an absence of amiability. It is an unloving condition, and it is a very serious problem.

It is a condition that never sees any good in anything, but always contrives to see something wrong, or some defect and deficiency. The proverb tells us that 'All seems yellow to the jaundiced eye,' and the same is true about bitterness.

It puts into everything it looks at some unworthy element. Because the person himself is jaundiced and bitter, everything he looks at is tinged by the same thing, and it is like looking through colored glasses.

Paul brings this out in many places, for example in verse 22, "that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,"

Titus 3:3 For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.

I Peter 1:18 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers.

So, from our former lustful conduct, when we were serving various worldly desires, we needed to be redeemed from our aimless conduct that we received from our worldly upbringing, society's influence, and Satan's deceptions.

We have all seen the sham, the pretense, and the veneer that the world puts on. It gives an impression of friendliness, while the fact is that behind the paint and the powder there is nothing but bitterness, the result of harping on wrongs done to them, either real or imagined.

Before our conversion, we were all somewhat bitter by nature, but we have to overcome that human tendency toward bitterness when we become a member of God's church.

Granted, there may be genuine grievances. But what makes us bitter is that we contemplate them, and meditate on them, and stay with them far too long. In other words, we nurse our grievances, we dwell on them, we pay great attention to them.

Even if we are trying to forget them, we deliberately bring them back and allow them to work us up again into a state of bitterness.

But, of course, this happens not only with real grievances, but many grievances are purely imaginary, and have no real substance. Because we have become bitter, we see them where they really are not, and we nurse them, and, in turn, become more and more bitter. Satan loves to see this, and he is right there, feeding it with negative attitudes.

Bitterness, then, describes the kind of life that has become sour. It is not ready to believe good of anybody or anything, but always ready to believe evil. It is always somewhat cynical; it takes glory out of everything, and it tries to spoil everything. So we see a world with an attitude and an approach of this negative type.

When the bitter mind is shown something beautiful, it does not praise the 99% that is beautiful, but always points to the 1% that is defective. We all know the kind of person who is always pointing out the troubles, defects, faults, and the blemishes.

Every minister receives comments from people like this from time to time. There are many people who never write and thank you for sermons, but if you have a mere slip of the tongue, saying something wrong, they write to you about it. It is the only time they do write. The bitter spirit sees the faults and the blemishes, but never seems to see the good. This, thankfully, is not a great problem, but it is a problem that has always been there in the churches of God.

There are many people who feel that they have had good cause for being bitter. There are many people who have lost a husband or wife, or an only son or daughter. It is very easy to understand how they can become bitter with regard to the whole course of life. But as bad as that may be, it does not excuse bitterness, because it is wrong, and they should never have allowed themselves to become bitter like that. Of course, that is easier said than done.

They have been dealt some hard blows in life, but that is no justification for bitterness, or sourness or for becoming cynical. Even if life is described to them at its best, even their expression lets you know that they are not really willing to allow themselves to enjoy anything.

Probably, the saddest people in the world are bitter people. They make themselves miserable, and for the time being, they make everybody else around them miserable as well. It is a terrible thing to be nursing a grievance, real or imagined.

The apostle Paul gives several reasons why we must avoid bitterness. Bitterness is primarily a problem of the world, but the world does creep into our lives occasionally, and it is something that we should be aware of. *The sin of bitterness grieves the Spirit*. It is enmity against the mind of God. It does not let it do its job. We parents know just a little of this feeling when our children fight with each other. The Holy Spirit is productive in an atmosphere of peace, because the fruit of the Spirit is sown in peace in those who submit to and obey God.

Our sin of bitterness grieves Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who died for us, and who dwells in us and us in Him. Our sin of bitterness grieves God the Father, who forgave us when Christ our Savior died instead of us for the remission of our sins. God knows the basic cause of our bitter attitudes—it is simply that we cannot forgive others.

Bitterness is something that always expresses itself in action. So after naming it, Paul mentions wrath and anger as the forces frequently behind behavior.

We have already recently considered the terms in my sermons on 'Anger,' so I only remind you that wrath means violent excitement or agitation of the mind, a kind of boiling over; whereas anger is a more settled and regular state and condition of the mind.

Anger is never at the same white heat as wrath. In turn, wrath and anger tend to express themselves in speech. Here, again, Paul uses two terms, and the first is clamor.

Clamor means a kind of brawling. It includes shouting and violence. We have all seen that men and women in a state of rage or of wrath do not speak to one another, they shout at one another. They raise their voices. This is something that should never be present in the life of a Christian, either in an individual sense, or a group sense.

Keep in mind this African proverb: "The axe forgets, but the tree remembers!" So, whenever we have some harsh thoughts, or comments to make about someone else, consider yourself an axe, and that the person that those things are directed at is the tree.

But there is something that is even worse than brawling or clamor, and that is evil speaking. Evil speaking means the cool, deliberate saying of things that are harmful to others. It includes the enjoyment linked with slandering others, deliberately saying or repeating things about others that are calculated to do them harm.

This is the perfect description of modern society today—especially in politics. It is an evil

that makes so utterly foolish all the nonsense talk we hear about social improvement, evolution, and progress. The unconverted world was like that 2,000 years ago, and it is exactly like that today—no change at all! Human nature is always the same; it is always self-serving!

Think about the evil speaking the world does today, and the harm that is done to character, and the harm that is done to life, in this way. The character assassinations prevalent in the news media destroy, on a daily basis, the lives of innocent families. We have seen this, in a big way, in the comments that were made of the family of Sarah Palin, and what she has had to put up with.

And then, as if this were not enough, Paul adds the word malice. Malice is ill will toward others. It means wicked desires with respect to others, a determination to harm others. This is a kind of settled spirit that so hates others that it thinks of ways of harming them, plots such ways, gloats over them, and then proceeds to carry them out. It is a kind of malignity.

Evil, malicious gossip and slander also form a part of this malice that Paul warns us to put far away. Paul says that all these evils must be put away from us once and for all as something loathsome and blasphemous.

Actually, the term evil-speaking is really our word for blasphemy, and therefore the common understanding is that we only blaspheme when we say things that are wrong about God, but we can really be guilty of blasphemy when we say evil things about one another.

After all, people are made in the image of God—we are the children of God, and therefore, to speak evil of another person is a form of blasphemy. So when we are speaking evil of someone who has been made in the image of God, and is a child of God, we are blaspheming in a lesser sense than God is blasphemed. Nevertheless, it is still blaspheming.

So, Paul says that all of this kind of thing is totally incompatible with the new man—God's new creation.

I Timothy 6:1-2 Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed. And those who have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather serve them because those who are benefited are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these

things.

Dishonoring one's boss at work is also a form of blasphemy, because it goes against God's way of life, and breaks His law of honor and respect of leaders.

In its broadest sense, blasphemy is literally a "reviling accusation" against anyone.

Jude 9-10 Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves.

Michael understood his own place in God's design, so he did not pronounce a sentence of condemnation on the devil but left that to God's authority, simply telling the Devil, "The Lord rebuke you." As I have said in other sermons, we do not have the power to rebuke Satan; we have to call upon God to use His power to rebuke an evil spirit.

What is the difference between the reviling accusation that the archangel Michael would not rebuke Satan with, and the rebuke we as Christians are to do to help a sinning fellow Christian? The answer has to do with the areas of authority and responsibility.

In Jude 9, Jude's point is that the archangel did not rebuke Satan because this takes more authority than Michael really had. For the time being, Satan is still the god of this world and age (John 12:31; II Corinthians 4:3-4), that is, until Christ returns to earth to claim His rightful place as King of kings. The angel Michael called upon God (who has the authority) to do the rebuking.

The context, in this part of the Book of Jude, deals with apostasy and false teachers. In their pride, they despise authority and speak evil of holy things in their sin and ignorance. So Jude was inspired to give this example of working within the area of one's own authority, and not interfering in the responsibility of another.

The apostles also honored and respected one another's areas of responsibility, choosing not to overstep the areas over which another apostle had jurisdiction.

Now the principle related to a Christian's responsibility is that we should not judge (or rebuke) those who are outside of the church. That is God's area of responsibility

exclusively at this time.

I Corinthians 5:9-13 I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now, I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person."

But to a Christian who sins flagrantly, we must make sure that they know what they are doing is wrong. We must uphold righteous standards in the church as we see in Paul's rebuke:

I Corinthians 5:3-5 For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Now let us go back to Ephesians 4:

Ephesians 4:31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.

The apostle Paul exhorted the Ephesians members to put away—to overcome—all this evil.

Just because they had become Christian does not mean that these evil ways had just dropped off of them. And 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 have to do the same.

It is not pleasant or easy for us to have to face these things, but we have to search our hearts to see if there is any bitterness of spirit, or any malice, hatred, wrath, or anger. These things must be overcome and destroyed because they will destroy us mentally and spiritually. We see the world in a bitter attitude, and angry.

All those things are contrary to the fruit of the spirit, and must be put away.

Then Paul goes on to his three positive virtues, in verse 32, "And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you."

The way to get rid of the defects is to cultivate the virtues. We have to force out the old carnal man, and promote the new righteous man. Let me illustrate this with an example from the environment.

The way that the dead leaves of winter are removed from some trees is not that people go around plucking them off, but rather that the new life grows and the new shoot comes and pushes off the dead in order to make room for itself.

In much the same way, we Christians get rid of such things as bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil speaking, and all malice. The new qualities develop and the others simply have no room. They are pushed out and they are pushed off.

So what is the precise instruction the apostle Paul gives for this process? We read here, 'Be kind,' but what he really wrote was 'Become kind.' Not simply be kind, but become kind. In other words, he is suggesting here a process of cultivation. We are quite deliberately to cultivate this type of personality and of attitude towards life, and as we do, our lives will be filled with these positive qualities, and there will be no room for those of a contrary, negative kind.

Notice what Jesus Christ illustrated about this point. It is no use just getting rid of the demons that are in the house and sweeping it and decorating it. If the Holy Spirit does not come in, the spirit you have driven out will come back and bring others with him much worse than himself.

Matthew 12:43-45 When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. "Then he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. "Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked

generation."

This is an example of when, in the final analysis, morality in and of itself never succeeds. We live at a time when we are witnessing the breakdown of morality every day. Here, at the end of this age, we have seen people turning their backs on truth because it is not what they want to hear. They love to hear lies because they seem more soothing to the ears than the truth that can set them free.

In its ignorance, the world forms its own immoral rules of conduct in competition with God's immutable laws. And what is the result? The present immoral, and even amoral, state of society is suffering from depression, misery, mental disorders, and insanity at an alarming rate!

We cannot get rid of the negative without replacing it with the positive. The apostle Paul says, 'Become kind and tender.' Cultivate it, take the time and make the effort to achieve it. That word 'become' indicates that this does not happen automatically. You cannot suddenly get rid of the bitterness and become kind immediately. 'Kindness' is a settled condition, a process of cultivation, that results from the application of the truth of God that we have seen and believed. So the world cannot cultivate true kindness because it has not seen the truth of God.

Ephesians 4:32 And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

In verse 32, Paul introduces his great positives. In getting rid of all the horrible negatives, what should we become? Paul says we are to become kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving!

Let us look at these great virtues again. What is the meaning of the statement 'Be[come] kind to one another'? It is definitely the opposite of being bitter, but beyond that, the real meaning of the term in its origin is to be[come] useful to, and to be[come] helpful to others in manner, or morals.

So, it is not just a condition or a state, but it is a condition and a state leading to a desire. The kind person is a person who is useful and helpful to others. The bitter person, of course, stands apart and looks, and in his sour way he is never helpful, is never useful.

Bitterness, as we have seen, always takes from, it detracts, but kindness gives, it is useful, it is helpful, it is always valuable. It means being benevolent toward others. 'Kind' in verse 32, is translated from the Greek word *chrestoi*, literally meaning, "what is suitable or fitting to a need."

Next, the apostle Paul introduces another wonderful term—tenderhearted, which hardly needs explanation. Earlier Paul told us that these same people, before their conversion, were 'past feeling;' and that meant that their hearts had become hard, in a kind of calloused condition.

The lining of the heart, that is meant to be smooth and soft, becomes hard and leather-like. It prevents the heart that is inside it from responding and beating and moving, as it should.

So Paul tells us, that as Christians, we are to be the exact opposite of that. We are to become tenderhearted, or according to what is probably a better translation, having strong bowels of compassion.

It is an appeal for us to become understanding, compassionate and loving. The ancients invariably put the seat of the affections in the bowels. They regarded the bowels, that is, the abdominal organs in general, as the seat of emotions.

We find Jeremiah crying out:

Jeremiah 4:19 (KJV) My bowels, my bowels! I am pained at my very heart; my heart maketh a noise in me; I cannot hold my peace, because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war.

And he does so again:

Lamentations 1:20 (KJV) Behold, O Lord; for I am in distress: my bowels [stomach, ESV] are troubled; mine heart is turned within me; for I have grievously rebelled: abroad the sword bereaveth, at home there is as death.

Jeremiah is expressing the suffering anguish he feels deep down in his spirit and attitude. Sometimes when we have been offended very badly, or hurt seriously, we say, "Oh, that hit me in the gut."

If we are to understand certain expressions in the New Testament, it is essential that we bear this in mind, because as Paul says to the Philippians:

Philippians 1:8 (KJV) For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels [affection, NKJV and ESV] of Jesus Christ.

Paul means, 'I long for the affection and feeling and the sentiment of Jesus Christ Himself.'

And then again later in

Philippians 2:1 (KJV) If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels [affection, NKJV and ESV] and mercies."

So Paul is talking about sympathy and compassion, and an understanding and loving nature from the depth of one's being. This means that we are not to have a calloused condition, where nothing that has happened to anyone else makes the slightest difference to us. It means that we have not come to the sorry conclusion that life is hard and terrible, that it is 'every man for himself,' that we are going to live for ourselves, and that we really cannot give our time and energy to others and their problems. If that is our attitude, then we are not Christian.

That is the attitude that we must put away. And the opposite of that is to become tenderhearted. This means that we are concerned about other people, and that we can feel for others, and that we are sympathetic towards others. Also, that we have a great heart of compassion towards them; that we can see so much of the troubles of others that we forget our own troubles. That is also a resolution, or a solution, to depression: getting your mind on someone else, and then you get your mind off your troubles.

The world is in dire need to be tenderhearted. It is appalling about life today that there is such hardness. We see it in politics, education, and healthcare. Politicians want us to sacrifice our money and lives for their views of the greater good. Too many teachers see their students as chattel; many doctors and nurses regard their patients as mere numbers or dollar signs.

It is beyond comprehension how health care professionals can treat their patients so indifferently and impersonally. Life in this society has become hard. Service professions

have become strictly a means of making money so that people can enjoy themselves in various ways. The caring and personal attention and understanding has become a thing of the distant past.

Society has been re-engineered with people who somehow seem to be so narcissistic that they can avoid their humane responsibilities, and can harden themselves against the need of others; they are out for themselves against the need of others. That is wickedness! Against all this, it is imperative that we become tenderhearted! By becoming tenderhearted, we travel in the opposite direction that the world is traveling, and we are getting farther and farther away from the world and its attitudes.

And then the apostle Paul goes on to say, "forgiving," which is the very opposite of malice.

Ephesians 4:32 And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

Paul does not say that we should refuse to see any wrong in people. That is ignorant and unrealistic; Christianity is always realistic. Some people have done and will do wrong to us, so Paul says, 'Forgive them!' He does not say pretend they have done nothing wrong; that is not forgiveness.

Forgiveness is by definition, understanding the wrong the offender has done, and then forgiving him for any pain and anxiety that he has caused you.

In Luke 17, Jesus emphasizes that the spirit of forgiving love does not recognize any boundaries or limitations. To follow Jesus' teaching, we are to forgive the repentant offender without ever stopping.

On the one hand, we are to steer clear of causing others to stumble, and on the other, we should always be ready to forgive. This requires strength from above. Believing that this strength will be given to us in answer to our prayers requires more faith.

Luke 17:3-4 Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. "And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him."

We have there a direct command—no mincing of words.

Jesus Christ was speaking to the Pharisees from Luke 16:14 up to here. And now, here in Luke 17:3, He picks up where He left off in His conversation with the disciples, in verse 1. Christ said that the things which cause people to sin are the familiar traps, but generally He is referring to anything that causes people to sin.

In verse 3, the point of Jesus' exhortation is that: if your brother wrongs you and if, upon being admonished by you, he repents, you have to forgive him.

In this situation, Jesus says, 'take heed to yourselves,' that is, so as to guard each other. The moment a brother commits a sin (this is in the aorist tense, indicating a single act of sin), whoever sees and knows it, is told to rebuke him by showing him that he has sinned and how deadly the guilt of that sin is. The indication here is that you do not unload on the person and tell him about all of his sins at one time. That would overwhelm anyone, and also it does not come across very well. I will add here, we have to always do it in love and tenderheartedness.

This is the first place in Luke's gospel where "brother" is used to indicate the relation of one disciple to another. This word used by Jesus, is also used for the sinning brother; he has to know what Jesus orders others to do for him, and what Christ expects of him; he is expected to promptly and genuinely repent. So there is responsibility on both sides.

To "miss the mark" set by God's law, is the ordinary verb for "to sin," and there is no restriction here in verse 3, such as the added words "against you," which were not in the original, and were added to the text by the translators of the King James Version and New King James Version. But "against you" does occur in the original of verse 4.

The ESV correctly words verse 3 this way, "Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him."

So this is referring to any open sin into which anyone of us may fall. The one aim of this rebuke is to help and encourage the brother to repent, and the rebuke should be done in a considerate, not nasty way.

Jesus approaches this from the perspective of hopeful expectation of a positive reaction from the offender. We are not to approach the person saying, "Oh well, he is not going to believe me, or he is not going to take it to heart." We are to approach it in a positive way, that the person will have the right attitude in receiving it. We also have to have the

right attitude in expressing it. Again, the aorist tense indicates the one act of repentance, which is usually accompanied by a confession of the sin.

The moment repentance occurs—the admonishing brother has the order: "Forgive him." We have to forgive, even if we do not detect repentance in the other person.

In verse 4, the intention of the principle taught here 'seven times in a day,' is easily understood when combined with the principle Jesus taught in Matthew 18.

Matthew 18:21-22 Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

In Matthew 18:22 the principle, "Up to seven times, but, up to seventy times seven," means that we are not to limit our forgiveness to any fixed number of times. As often as a brother injures us and asks forgiveness, we are to forgive him. It is also the offender's responsibility to ask forgiveness.

If he does this, it is our duty to again treat him as a brother. Regardless of whether he asks for forgiveness or not, we have a Christian duty to treat him kindly and to do good to him. Of course, if he accepts the admonishment about his sin, then you are even closer to your brother than you were. But if he rejects it we are still to treat him kindly and with respect.

Luke 17:4 does not establish a specific number of times for forgiveness, but rather shows the principle of being generous in forgiving others. God is the epitome of generous forgiving.

Matthew 6:12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

Humility is absolutely necessary for genuine and generous forgiveness. This is the only right response for those who have themselves been forgiven. Every day we have to humbly acknowledge to God that we are sinners, and ask for His forgiveness.

We owe God a debt and it is our duty to repay it continually throughout our lives. Our failure to do our duty toward others is a sin to God. The sin is against Jesus Christ who died for our sins, and our Father in heaven who sacrificed His Son.

The principle of compassion and mercy come into play here. In the original Hebrew and Greek, virtues that receive distinct names in English Bibles often merge in ways that are virtually indistinguishable. So, mercy is closely related to compassion in the Bible, and sometimes those words are used interchangeably.

We can think of mercy as compassion in action. The Greek word from which compassion is derived means literally "from the bowels," signifying the 'gut reaction' to someone or something. Mercy, therefore, is both feeling compassion and acting upon it, right from the depth of our being.

Probably the best biblical picture of it is in Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. You remember the parable: a lawyer tested Jesus by saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Then Jesus asked him what his interpretation of the law was. And the lawyer correctly answered, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.'"

Then, Jesus told him to live that way; and the lawyer tried to justify himself by saying, "And who is my neighbor?"

Luke 10:30-37 Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. "Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. "Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. "But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. "So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. "On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' "So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Jesus says the Samaritan "had compassion," and then acted decisively as benefactor to the wounded traveler on the roadside, an action that identifies the Samaritan as having "showed mercy" on the wounded man.

Showing mercy, as the result of love, is the main intent of forgiveness. Jesus was very clear on who receives His mercy.

Matthew 5:7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

The primary facets of God's mercy are: forgiveness, deliverance, and restoration. Therefore, in Jesus we find the mercy of God embodied and displayed in action. This divine mercy is found in the several instances where, Jesus faced with crowds or individual human needs, had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Jesus Christ was able to have a proper perspective of people's needs and faults, because He was enabled by the Spirit of God to see into the hearts and minds of those whom He lived and walked among. No other time in history was a human being so able to perfectly apply compassion and mercy on those in need of it.

In a lesser, but similar way, only the true Christian is enabled to look at the offender from a right perspective and extend compassion and forgiveness. Before our conversion we saw the offender as a person who was doing harm; now we see him as a victim of sin and a pawn and a dupe of Satan. Nevertheless, he is still responsible for his own actions.

As Christians, we realize that we were like that, and there are relics and remnants of that still in us. How can we possibly refuse to forgive others?

We reason it out from God's perspective, because we have learned from the inspired written Word of God, and received spiritual strength through God's Spirit, to view things as God does. The only way to truly have mercy and compassion on someone is to view it from God's eyes, and that can only be done with the Holy Spirit.

With this perspective, we begin to feel sorry for the offender, because he has been deceived. Ideally, the Christian's heart has already become tender toward the offender; he is already kind in his outlook, and inevitably the result is that he forgives him.

We move on to the last section that the apostle Paul gives us, which supplies the reason why we should forgive others, or how we are to do this. What is the grand motive for it all?

Ephesians 4:32 And be[come] kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

It means that if we forgive, and are kind and are tenderhearted towards others, we become like God. Jesus Christ put the same teaching in the following words:

Luke 6:35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.

'Become kind,' Paul says, and as you become kind, you become like God, because God 'is kind to the unthankful and to the evil.'

We find the same teaching in Psalm 103:

Psalm 103:1-18 Bless the LOORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the LOORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. The LOORD executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel. The LOORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the LOORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But the mercy of the LOORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children, to such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them.

We see that there is an important element of obedience seen there. This is what we

should be like, and hopefully this is what we are becoming like.

God is entirely different from man by nature, and from man in sin.

Isaiah 55:8-9 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.

There is no true comparison between man and God. We are trying to become like God, but we have a long way to go, and we can only do it if He is the one who changes us. We have to make the effort and work hard at doing our part and our responsibility.

The apostle Paul himself also wrote about God's mercy and kindness, in Ephesians 2.

Ephesians 2:4-7 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

So, in Paul's exhortation to become kind, he is exhorting us to become children of our Father who is in heaven, to become children of the Highest, to become perfect, even as God is perfect.

He says in Ephesians 4:32, 'even as God in Christ forgave you.' It has already happened! This is most important, because the only people who will carry out this exhortation of the apostle Paul's are those who know that God has forgiven them. Nobody else! We understand that when we sin, if we have genuinely repented, that God will forgive us. Upon baptism and the washing away of our sins, and applying the blood of Christ, and accepting Him as our personal Savior, that all of our sins are forgiven and we come up out of that water completely sinless, and we work on our next sin that happens in who knows what period of time, but more quickly than we would like.

The apostle Paul emphasizes the essential principle and he tells us to forgive others in this way because God has forgiven us. Notice that he does not say to forgive others because God is going to forgive you. Remember that we have already been forgiven, and that God will continually forgive us as we obey Him, and overcome our sins. It says,

in Ephesians 4:32, "even as God in Christ forgave you." So that has already happened.

For a partial indication as to whether your sins have been forgiven or not, ask yourself this conditional question, "Am I forgiving others? Am I ready to forgive others who have harmed me and sinned against me?"

Or, look at it in another way: Does this exhortation of the apostle Paul's appeal to you? As I read out these words, "be[come] kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you," are you ready to forgive at this moment, or do you have to think about it?

But if bitterness is still plaguing you, and if you are saying in spite of these kind and merciful words of God, 'but I did nothing to deserve such treatment,' then it is time to go back and examine your spiritual foundation. Can such a person be a true Christian?

This is the point Jesus Christ made in a parable found in Matthew 18. A servant owed his master ten thousand talents; he could not pay, he pleaded for time, and his master said, "Okay, go and take your time." But when he went out from his master, he met a servant who owed him a hundred pence, a mere fraction of what he himself owed; he took him by the throat and said, "Pay me what you owe me." And, no doubt, he did that with an element of anger and bitterness. "Have mercy, have compassion, give me a little time and I will pay it," replied the other. "No," he said, "you owe me this and you have to pay me now."

If a person thinks in such an unforgiving way, does he have any right to think that God has forgiven him? The teaching of that parable is not that God forgives us because we first forgive. That, of course, is the wrong perspective.

But the teaching is definitely this—that the person who realizes what forgiveness is, forgives! The person who realizes the mercy, kindness, and the compassion that has cancelled his own great debt, says, 'I cannot refuse to forgive.' His heart is not hardened, it is compassionate. God has forgiven us for Christ's sake. Since God has done it for us, we cannot refuse it to another.

And now, finally, consider the way that God has done it.

Ephesians 4:32 And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

In Christ! That is the only way that God forgives. We are not only relying on the love of God for forgiveness of sins. God forgives sins in Christ, for Christ's sake. He forgives sins in spite of us; and it is not because of any goodness in us, or anything we have done or ever will do, that God forgives us.

Romans 5:6-10 For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

We are not forgiven because of any merit or any goodness in us, but God does it entirely of His own grace. It is all of God. It is a pure gift. But there are conditions to gaining entry into the Kingdom of God. Two important conditions are that we must be overcoming sin, and we must be forgiving of others.

God who owed us nothing, because of His kindness, His tender-heartedness, His love, His grace, His mercy, His compassion, not only sent His only begotten Son into the world of sin and shame, but also even to the death, so we can be forgiven.

If He has done that for us, can we possibly refuse forgiveness to another? Remember, here is the test. Is your heart tender? Are you bearing malice at this moment to any individual? Can you refuse forgiveness to any, even though they may have hurt you to the very depths of your being?

We will end on this final scripture that concludes what I have been talking about.

I Peter 3:8-9 Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tender-hearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.

Do you want to inherit the blessing of eternal life? 'Be kind, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you.'