

## Uncommon Grace vs. Common Responses

Ephesians 4:

*“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience...”*

*Colossians 3:12*

**Introduction:** Stories told through the medium of book or media have a way of exposing our heart. Have you ever watched a movie and cheered in your heart when the couple finally gets together, against all odds, but express their love in sexual immorality? (“Did I miss the wedding scene?”). Or have you read a classic story with delight as the harbinger of evil gets what we perceive they deserve in the end, with either financial ruin, pain, or death? Or when we have arbitrated who the “good guys” are in the story, who lie, cheat, and steal to win in the end to beat the “bad guys”, and we accept the lack of morality as a necessary component. What does this tell us about ourselves? There is a **default setting** in each of us, a way we think and feel, that is natural, easy, and takes little to no effort to express. Stories tap into these common responses to elicit the expected outcome (sorrow, anger, delight, disgust, etc) because they are so common and largely accepted. Since these are common responses to all mankind, the effect of the gospel of Jesus Christ creates an **uncommon response**, since the grace of God is uncommon to the world.

As we close out Ephesians 4, Paul focuses on the radical and transformative change that the gospel brings to the life of a believer. When we place our faith in Christ, repent of our sin, and follow Him He gives us a new heart, with transformed thinking and affections, and brings the opportunity of continual change, becoming more and more like Christ. Whenever we dilute the Christian life into a set of beliefs apart from life change, or water it down to simply attending a worship service and being conservative, it not only weakens our witness to the world, but cannot breed the joy that comes through a real, intimate, restored relationship with God Himself, paired with a life that seeks to glorify Him above all things. Diluted Christianity is like the luke-warm life of Laodicea, which means it is NOT Christianity and is good to be spit or thrown out.

The flow of thought by Paul in chapter 4 flows out of the work of God in Christ, the fact that Jesus died as a substitute on our behalf, that God could reconcile sinful humanity to Himself without compromising His holiness or glory. Life now is simply living out our **calling** (4:1), humbly, gently, patiently, and lovingly so that **unity** would be maintained and seen. This unity would take place interpersonally with other called out ones in a way that the world sees it and sees something uncommon and much desired. The design of the church is that leaders and gifts are given to **build up and grow up** (4:12, 15, 16). There should be a **categorically different** life that true believers lead that the world is attracted to the source of our worship and life. So a believer is **proactive** in growth, in identifying sin in all forms, to think rightly and being renewed through the Truth, and putting on righteousness in all ways. There is no such thing as a **neutral gear with Christ**, since we are either walking by the flesh or Spirit, either living for our own glory or Christ’s, either growing in sanctification or stagnating in unbelief.

Paul then gives **5 test cases, 5 revealers of our hearts**, to diagnose sin that is common to all people. Each of these deal with **our actions that flow from our attitudes**, are all **interpersonal**, affecting relationships at every level, and show the fact that true repentance of sin must involve the putting off, renewing of our mind, and the replacement of righteousness. Let’s review three before we delve into the last two:

- **Put away falsehood by speaking the truthfully (4:25)** – Lying is destructive in relationship as it creates hurt, breaks trust, as causes pain, but it is also common to EVERYONE through exaggeration, half-truths, and any form of deception. Instead of solving falsehood by simply saying nothing, the repentant solution is to “speak the truth” with your neighbor, and do that in love (Eph. 4:15). The goal is to be truthful and loving in our speech, not avoiding hard conversations.
- **Put away anger by dealing with anger (4:26-27)** – Anger can creep up in relationships as we can be hurt by both the intentional and unintentional actions of others. Anger will start, brew, steam, and explode if not checked, much like molten lava in a volcano. Understanding the progression in our heart allows us to deal with our anger, not letting the pressure build, and addressing the wrong done with the other (Matt. 5:24; Gal. 6:1-2). Anger is a wedge our enemy uses to split relationships and cause disunity.
- **Put away gaining by thievery for honest work (4:28)** – We steal when we take what is not ours, and that can be materially like money or time, like not working hard to the glory of God (Eph. 6:5-7). We can dishonor God by gaining so much that we forget about Him or by not having enough and being relegated to taking from others (Prov. 30:8-9). When we are content with what God has given, we can work hard to His glory and give away to others in need, moving from takers to givers.

Now the last two follow the same pattern, and effect relationships in unique ways.

#### **Dealing with a Harsh Words (29-30)**

*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. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

**Process** – Our words are powerful. In fact, James tells us that there is nothing more powerful or destructive than our tongue, since it is untamable and a restless evil (James 3:8). Our words can bring the most powerful and confident to their knees and encourage the most lowly to heights of action. The word for “corrupting” talk is something that is “rotten, foul, or putrid”. These are words that are not only unwholesome (“bad” words) but unprofitable. They are words that cause things to rot, like the rotten peach at the bottom of the box of fruit, and begins to fester and spoil the whole bunch. Our words become worthless when we are not attentive and proactive with watching what we say, since we default to things that are unprofitable. This is why David connected his mouth and heart in a prayer for both: “*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD my rock and my redeemer*” (Psalm. 19:14).

So to “put on” words proper words, we must be purposeful and intentional with what we say, particularly to those that we love in our home and church. We seek to build up, to encourage, to admonish, and exhort. We seek to use words that fit the occasion, meaning that we don’t encourage when exhortation is needed or admonish when someone simply needs lifting up. It also means that we are truthful in our encouragement, saying things that are true and not words intended to flatter or artificially inflate. We must see our words as a valuable commodity and resource, ones that when harnessed and focused can instill confidence in those we care about. We’re reminded that Proverbs 10:19 cautions, “*When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent*” (Prov. 10:19). So a new heart in Jesus desires to build up and use our words economically. What is at stake? Not only the building up of those we love, but the pleasing of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit indwells each believer, guides in the truth, points us to Christ, and convicts of sin. When we tear

down others who are also in dwelt believers, we **grieve or cause sadness** to Him. We are reminded that this does not take away our salvation, so it is not FEAR mongering that keeps us in line. On the contrary, because we are sealed, we can have confidence and assurance of our salvation, which frees us to please the Holy Spirit of God.

**Implications** - Our words matter. They can be used to build up, encourage, motivate and help. I've told Erin that there is no one else that can motivate me like she can when she says or writes something encouraging. It adds to a confidence that comes from the Lord but is tangible with someone else. But our words can absolutely tear down and cut deeper than any weapon. Even our unintended words or those that we hold back can have adverse affects on our spouse, kids, and friends. Paul was an encourager to the churches, even if he had to correct. Jesus told His disciples that He loved them and desired to be with them. John told the churches of areas they were doing well. No one needs false or artificial sunshine shone at them, but all of us needs encouragement. *Do you actively use your words to build others up? Have you been intentional to be encouraging to those that you love? Where have you used your words or held back your words that have tore down others?*

#### **Put Away Anger with Grace (4:31-32)**

*Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

The final area that Paul addresses overlaps with others he's already covered, partly bringing new nuance, and partly because it's such an important issue. Anger characterizes our enemy (Rev. 12:12) and is the default setting for most of us. Anger does not take any effort but is the response to our personal view of justice or fairness and is absorbed in self, responding to how we've been wronged. Anger kills relationship. We are never more like the Father of lies (John 8:44) when we give into and respond to anger. However, anger is almost expected and normalized in our culture, as it has throughout time. During Jesus' earthly ministry he encountered the teaching of the religious leaders of the day which said, "You have heard that it was said, 'Your shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.'" (Matt. 5:43-44). Hating ones enemies, or those that do you harm or wrong, was taught at a level of justifiable response to the masses. Jesus came to change this by uncommon grace. Everyone will love and be gracious to someone who is loving and gracious, but it takes something supernatural to be gracious to someone who hates you, sins against you, and persecutes you.

So Paul gives a **six-fold** description of anger that needs to be identified and put away, an accumulation of terms that leaves no doubt to the importance of the issue nor the vast scope of the problem in our heart. Understanding these words helps us see this clearly in our own lives:

**Anger at the level of Attitude – BITTERNESS** – Bitterness is the poison we drink for anger directed at another, only to self inflict and kill ourselves. This is the fretted and irritable state of mind that keeps us in perpetual animosity that inclines us to be and have harsh and uncharitable opinions of others. It makes us sour and crabby, repulsive in our demeanor. It's characterized by bile (Acts 8:23) and a mouth full of curses (Rom. 3:14). It is a **root sin** (Heb. 12:15) that grows up to cause trouble and defile many others. This has been a personal revelation in my own life, as I don't consider myself an angry person but am prone to bitterness, having to confess this particular sin to multiple older men in my life. When feeling let down, wronged, and mistreated, bitterness responds in quiet consternation, silent treatment, avoidance, and hopefulness that the other person will FEEL and know the pain they've caused, whether

they are aware of it or not. Bitterness can live for long periods of time, festering deep, veiled in smiles and pleasantries, all the while poisoning ones system.

**Anger at the lever of Disposition – WRATH & ANGER** – These are synonymous terms, with wrath (orge) being the more subtle and deep flowing anger, one that is settled and abiding keeping you in a state of anger, and anger (thumos) is the outflow or temporary excitement or passionate rage (Heb. 11:27). The first is the lava flow creating pressure, the second is when the pressure bubbles to the surface in an explosion. The first can fester for far too long. Some of the most seemingly laid back, relaxed, and chill people are truly angry at the subtle level, and in moments they can no longer control on their own, anger overflows in words or actions, revealing what had gone on for years.

**Anger at the level of Speech – CLAMOR & SLANDER** – Invariably, anger reveals itself in our words. Clamor (Krauge) comes out in a cry of strife or fear, shouting, or complaint (Ex. 3:7,9). Complaining is a form of anger that sees God as not delivering according to OUR expectations, falling short of what we want. Every complaint directed at people or circumstances (“I’m not complaining, I’m just saying”) is a complaint out of anger directed to God Himself. Slander (Blasphemia) is words directed against someone else, reviling or speaking evil against them. Simply do a quick survey of social media to see slander that is rampant and out of control, where name calling and condescension is normative. Our words reveal our heart, and most often harsh words come out of an angry heart.

**Anger at the level of Summary – MALICE** – All of the identified parts of anger must be **put away**, done away with, having no place in the life and heart of a believer. Then Paul summarized all of them with the word malice (Kakia), a generic term for “badhardiness”, the root of all of these vices. Malice is the opposite of moral excellence and the core of all forms of anger.

So before you raise the hand of your heart and say you don’t struggle with anger, simply consider how any aspect of these descriptions characterize you at any level. When we can identify these areas, we can know, turn from, and put on something brand new. But what is the opposite of anger, and how do we put that on?

### The Grace of Forgiveness

Replacing anger means we must first put on **kindness and compassion**. Kindness is something we learn in pre-school and kindergarten, treating others well. Here, however, the context demands that we are to be kind to those who we would naturally be angry or bitter with. So kindness is more than being nice, it comes out of a characteristic of God’s nature. *“But love your enemies and do good and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.”* (Luke 6:35) In fact, we are all recipients of God’s kindness if we’ve believed and repented of our sin. *“Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”* (Rom. 2:4). So we are to express the kindness of God to those who may seem ungrateful, and we do this with patience and forbearance, matched with **compassion** or being tender hearted. Compassion has the idea of empathy and understanding, seeing the other through the lens of mercy, which allows us to pray for the salvation of those who have wronged us. I talked to a friend recently about this as he prays for his estranged wife who has left him, and how he is fighting to pray for her restoration even as she runs hard toward her own passions. Kindness and compassion sees others through the lens of the gospel, meaning a goal of reconciliation with God, rather than retribution and vengeance.

This leads to one of the most powerful, difficult, glorious, and often misunderstood commands in all of Scripture. ***“Forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”*** The parallel passage in Colossians 3:13 says it similarly ***“bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, you must also forgive.”*** The typical Greek word for ‘forgive’ is *aphiemi*, which has the idea of send away, to set free, or take away. Here Paul uses a unique word (*charislomenoi* in terms of forgiving and *echarisato* in terms of being forgiven) which has at its root “Charis”, which means ‘Grace’. It is the exercise of grace that allows us to provide help to the undeserving and unworthy, just as God did with us. The reality is, that as we dig into the idea of forgiving one another, it will ramp up from general to specific, from easy to difficult, from shallow to deep. It’s one thing to forgive someone for an off-handed comment or verbal wound, quite another to forgive someone who lied to our face or committed adultery in a marriage. So if we are going to fulfill this command, we must first understand the second part, ***“forgiving just as God forgave us in Christ.”***

**God cannot forgive without payment:** It is imperative to understand that God’s holiness and glory comes with demands. He demands that his creation be holy as He is (Lev. 11:44; 1 Pet. 1:16) and must attain perfection since He Himself is perfect (Matt. 5:48). Now, obviously our problem is that we have all sinned and fall short of His glory (Rom. 3:23) and thus fall well short of His standard. But why can’t God just waive a wand and forgive? If He did, He would no longer be JUST, since He would break His own standard. This is why Christ HAD TO DIE for sin. Look what Paul wrote in Romans 3:24-26, ***“and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation (which means the “turning away of wrath”, cf. 1 John 4:10) by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in His divine forbearance He had passed over former sins. It was to show His righteousness at the present time, so that He might be JUST and the JUSTIFIER of the one who has faith in Jesus.”*** In other words, God could forgive only when He received payment (just) and needed One who’s death actually was worthy to justify. Christ provided the payment

**God offers forgiveness freely (but it ain’t cheap):** Grace is free in the sense that we cannot earn it, but it has been offered freely at a great price: ***the blood of Christ!*** We are justified by His blood (Rom. 5:9), have been redeemed (Eph. 1:7) brought near (Eph. 2:13), and made at peace with God (Col. 1:20), since it is the blood of Jesus that cleanses and scrubs us (1 John 1:7). God accepted Christ’s sacrifice on the cross as Jesus became a curse, satisfying the wrath God had stored up for all the sin that we have committed, past, present, and future. When God says He forgives us, it’s ONLY because He looks at the blood poured out by Christ on our behalf as the means by which we can be forgiven.

**God remembers our sin no more:** Does God forget our sin? Not exactly, since God cannot forget anything, but He does something with even greater implications: He remembers our sin no more! Forgetting is passive, remembering no more is active. He **removes** our sin as far as the east is from the west (Ps. 103:13), casts our sin behind His back (Isa. 38:17), **remembering** them no more (Isa. 43:25) casting our sins to the depths of the sea (Mic. 7:19). The difference is staggering and has great implications for our forgiving of each other. When His wrath is satisfied, He no longer sees us through our sins but through the righteousness of Christ as new creations (2 Cor. 5:17-21) so that we can be **RECONCILED to Him.**

**God grants us faith and repentance:** *Does God forgive everyone?* No, even though the offer of forgiveness is give to everyone. Only those who turn away from trusting ourselves (repentance) and turn to Christ for forgiveness (faith) will be saved. **Acts 20:21 says it this way, “testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”** Forgiveness is activated when

we understand our sin in comparison to a holy God, ask in faith for forgiveness, and turn from our selfish ways to Christ.

**God uses consequences to train:** *Does forgiveness imply we have no more consequences?* In a word, no, and this is an extremely important point. When King David repented of his sin of adultery, lying, and murder (Psalm 51) after being confronted by Nathan the prophet (2 Samuel 12), God levied heavy consequences to David: strife in his family (12:10 – in 13:1-22 his son raped his daughter; another son killed this son – 12:23-33; and Absalom tried to take the throne from David – 2 Sam. 15-18), as well as the son born to Bathsheba would die (2 Sam. 12:14). But through all of these consequences, David realized that his sin was against God alone (51:4) and that the restoration of a joyful relationship with God was his highest goal and value (51:12). We often, wrongly, equate forgiveness with a termination of any kind of consequence, but that is not the case. This will play when we examine forgiving each other.

**Conclusion:** Understanding how God forgives us frames all the struggles against sin we have looked at in this section. God is gracious to offer to take away our sin by nailing it to the cross, paying the debt of sin through the blood and death of Jesus. In this, He commits to remember our sin no more and to have a reconciled relationship with us through faith and repentance. As we consider forgiving each other, these realities are ***pre-requisites for reconciliation with each other***. In other words, the most important thing we can do today and every day is make sure we are reconciled to God, forgiven through Christ, and repenting actively of our sin. Not only will this breed unity among us, allow us shine brightly and differently in the world, but also allow us to experience joy like never before. Holding onto anger, bitterness, or harsh speech is a recipe for misery, where truth, love, building up, and kindness lead to joy.