

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

“*Bitterness*,” from the Greek *pikria*, is used in Acts 8:23, Romans 3:14, and Hebrews 12:15. It can be defined as “bitterness of spirit or language, harshness.” Paul desired that his readers rid themselves of this sin because of its devastating impact. No one enjoys being around those who are “down in the mouth” and “sour on the world.”

“*Wrath*” (*thumos*) means “indignation, rage, anger, or passion.” “*Anger*” (*orge*), according to *Vine’s Expository Dictionary*, “is less sudden in its rise than *thumos*, but more lasting in nature. *Thumos* indicates a more agitated condition of the feelings, an outburst of wrath from inward indignation, while *orge* suggests a more settled or abiding condition of mind, frequently with a view of taking revenge.”¹

“*Clamor*” (*krauge*) “denotes an outcry, and signifies the tumult of controversy” (*Vine’s Expository Dictionary*).² It points to public outbursts of strife that are characterized by loss of control. “*Slander*” (*blasphemia*) is interpreted “abusive language” in 1 Timothy 6:4 and “*railing*” in Jude 1:9, pointing to speech that brings injury to others by speaking evil of others. “*Malice*” (*kakia*) is “wickedness,” or as it is interpreted in Romans 1:29, 1 Corinthians 14:20, and 1 Peter 2:16, “*evil*.” For the church to function according to design, the believer must “*put away*” (Ephesians 4:31) these behaviors.

Ephesians 4:32—And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

We, as believers, instead of exhibiting the negative behavior described in Ephesians 4:31, are to be “*kind*” (gentle, good, gracious), “*tender-hearted*” (compassionate), and “*forgiving*” toward “*each other*” (Ephesians 4:32). Why? Jesus “*has forgiven*” (Ephesians 4:32) us.

“*Has forgiven*” (Ephesians 4:32) is in the aorist tense and points to past action. Thus, we were forgiven all past, present, and future sins the moment we repented and believed while depraved—meaning we received all the forgiveness we will ever need at the point of salvation/justification. (We must never lose sight of the fact that all sin for all time was placed on Christ according to passages such as Hebrews 10:12, yet sin is not forgiven unless a person repents, believes, and is saved.) When we (as believers) commit sin, we confess and repent—not for the purpose of receiving forgiveness, but to have fellowship restored with the Father. We were forgiven once—when we repented and believed while depraved. No need exists to seek forgiveness for sins already forgiven.

We as church saints should never be heard praying the prayer: “Father, if I have done anything wrong today, forgive me.” Jesus would need to be crucified each time we sin should such a prayer be proper, yet Jesus was crucified “*once*” (Hebrews 10:10, 14)—an act that can never be repeated. (For more input regarding this subject, review the notes associated with Ephesians 1:7b. Also, our *Romans 1-8* study has much to say concerning this wonderful truth.) If unity is to inhabit the church, we must learn to forgive each other as God has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32). No other remedy exists!

Ephesians 5

Ephesians 5:1—Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children;

Paul begins with “*Therefore*,” directing his readers to apply his previous statements regarding God’s forgiveness (Ephesians 4:32) to this chapter. The saints at Ephesus were to “*be imitators of God*” (Ephesians 5:1), forgiving one another as God had forgiven them (Ephesians 4:32). “*Imitators*” (Ephesians 5:1), from the Greek *mimetes* (from which we get the English “mimic”), can also be interpreted “*followers*” as in the King James. We must be careful here. Paul is not teaching that God’s people are to “imitate” or “mimic” Him by attempting to copy His behavior. Had this been Paul’s intent, New Testament believers would be required to submit to the Law (which reveals His awesome character). Hence Paul, in Galatians 3:3, confirms that self-effort (legalism) can never produce righteous behavior:

Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?
(Galatians 3:3)

Galatians 3:1-14 verifies that the Galatian saints had been misled to believe that they were saved by faith but kept by the deeds of the Law. “*Flesh*” (Galatians 3:3) in this case points to the believer attempting to live, in his own strength, according to God’s righteous standard prescribed by the Ten Commandments. Many saints endeavor to mimic Christ, or even worse, attempt to abide by the standards prescribed in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)—standards even more impossible to attain through the power of the flesh (a topic covered in depth in our study, *The Gospels from a Jewish Perspective*). Believers can never experience victory through hooking the flesh to rules and regulations (Romans 8:4-6; Colossians 2:20-23). At some point in the maturing process, church saints must realize that the power required to change lives is not imitative in nature, but creative in nature.

For years, I strived to imitate God, only to experience frustration and despair. I discovered the solution to my dilemma only through realizing that God’s “*Beloved*” Son (Ephesians 1:6) demonstrated how God’s “*beloved children*” (Ephesians 5:1) are to live. He lived by the life of Another (by the life of His Father), trusting Him to perform every deed (John 14:10). Instead of imitating the Father, Jesus lived by the Father’s very life. For this reason the events surrounding His earthly ministry were creative in nature rather than imitative in nature. Thus, deeds resulting from attempting to imitate God are of no benefit (John 15:1-5; Colossians 2:20-23). (For more input, review the notes associated with Ephesians 2:10b).

Scripture teaches that God’s “*life is in His Son*”:

And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. (1John 5:11)

“I and the Father are one.” (John 10:30)

Therefore, to live by the life of Another (to live by the Father’s life) is to live by Christ’s life. Paul says it well in Romans 5:10 and Romans 5:17:

For if while 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. (Romans 5:10)

For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life

through the One, Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:17)

The phrase, “*reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ*” (Romans 5:17), can also be interpreted, “*reign in life by the One, Jesus Christ*” (emphasis added). Hence, to live according to God’s blueprint is to live by the Son’s life. Wasn’t this God’s original plan in the Garden? Adam and Eve were to partake of the tree of life, not for the purpose of imitating God’s life, but to share His life—live by His life. Had they obeyed, all their offspring would have lived in like manner, and the first Adam would have fulfilled God’s ultimate plan for man. This scenario would have resulted in God’s family living, on a moment-by-moment basis, by His very life. However, because “*the first Adam*” sinned, God sent “*the last Adam*” (Jesus—1 Corinthians 15:45) not only to die for sin but to demonstrate what it means to live by the life of Another—by the Father’s very life.

We are now equipped to properly interpret the phrase, “*be imitators of God, as beloved children*” (Ephesians 5:1). The Father’s child (Jesus), as “*the Beloved*” Son (Ephesians 1:6), lived by the Father’s life (John 14:10). Not once did He imitate the Father. We, as the Father’s children, must also live by the Father’s life if we desire to live supernaturally. The Father’s life is in His Son (1 John 5:11; John 10:30). Thus, by living by Jesus’ life we live by the Father’s life flowing through the Son.

No doubt, Scripture teaches that we are to be imitators of believers who walk righteously (1 Corinthians 4:16-17; 11:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2:14; Hebrews 6:12; Hebrews 13:7) and imitators of “*what is good*” (3 John 1:11). This arrangement is fine so long as we imitate those who have learned to live by the life of “Another” for the purpose of learning to live in the same manner. Imitating legalists, bound by the letter of the Law, brings nothing but despair.

Because Christ “*is our life*” (Colossians 3:4), we have one basic goal as a believer: to know Him as intimately as possible (Philippians 3:10). As we pursue Him, His divine power works creatively in and through us! As we know Him more intimately, our behavior is changed (2 Corinthians 3:18), He ministers to others through us (1 Corinthians 15:10; Philippians 2:13), and He sustains us (Philippians 4:13)—while we remain in a state of “*rest*” (Hebrews 4:9-11): No more struggling to change our behavior through rules and regulations, and no more striving to accomplish what only God can bring about. Why would we choose to live in such drudgery when enjoying Him and living by His life (Galatians 2:20) is all He desires? (DeVern Fromke’s, *The Ultimate Intention*, is a wonderful read on this subject.)

Paul states that we are to “*be imitators of God, as beloved children*” (Ephesians 5:1). Believers are “*beloved*” of the Father (Ephesians 5:1) because they are special to the Father. This special status grants us the privilege of living “*in the Beloved*” Son (Ephesians 1:6) throughout eternity. Amazing!

¹ Vine, W.E.; Unger, Merrill F., White, William Jr. (1996). *Vine’s Expository Dictionary*. Thomas Nelson. Nashville, TN. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Ibid.