

Sermon for Sunday, April 1, 1979, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"HELPING YOUR MARRIAGE WORK"

Ephesians 4:25-32

Text: "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Ephesians 4:31,32

In recent Sundays I have talked about the difference between the Christian religion and other religions of the world. The point of those sermons was to emphasize that the distinctive thing about Christianity is not its moral code. As a matter of fact, all the great religions of the world have the so-called "Golden Rule" in very similar language to that of the New Testament. This is not to say that Christianity does not have a moral code. As a matter of fact, the New Testament contains the highest ethical code, the finest system of morality ever devised. But the uniqueness of Jesus is not in his moral standards. No, the uniqueness of the Christian faith is that it focuses on a person, not a code. Our faith points to Jesus who came not to give us a new code of conduct, not to give us a new ethical system, but who came to tell us that God loves us and wants to forgive us.

So, when a person accepts the death of Jesus on the cross as done for him; when he received Jesus as his personal saviour, the Bible tells us something happens to him. The Bible tells us that he is forgiven. His sins are washed away. His past is forgotten. Indeed, as II Corinthians puts it, "the old has passed away." And as Jesus put it, a man is born again.

In relationship to that, in verse 24 Ephesians 4, St. Paul writes, "and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God..." But does this mean that the Christian is not interested in ethics and morality? Does this mean that the Ten Commandments are no longer relevant? Does this mean that how one acts, the things one does, are no longer important?

Well, quite the contrary. St. Paul tells us that if a man truly has a new nature because of his relationship to Jesus, exactly the opposite will happen. That is the very man who will want to do what God expects. He is the very man who will try the hardest of all to live by the standards and laws of God.

As a matter of fact, the Bible tells us that not only will a born again person want to do the laws of God, it also tells us that God does something rather spectacular for him. The Bible says that God puts the Holy Spirit in a man's heart to give him inner strength to live out God's laws. Now, that is what verse 30 tells us this morning. It says that if we don't obey God's laws, it grieves the Holy Spirit that God has placed within us.

So, in looking at our text for this morning, we need to keep those three things in mind. First, a man who accepts Jesus as his Saviour is forgiven. He is born again. Second, because he is--because he is forgiven and because he has a new life--he is the very man who now wants to live a new life of obedience to God's laws. Third, to help him live his new life, God puts his Spirit within the heart of every believer to strengthen him and to help him be God's man.

In the light of that, let's ask ourselves some questions. Do I really want--is there an earnest desire, a passionate longing in my heart, to live by the laws of God? If not, maybe it is because we have not truly given our lives to Jesus. You see, if I see my self for who and what I am, if I realize my lostness,

and if I then accept Jesus as the one who saves me from death and sin, then it would follow that I would love him so much, I would be so grateful to him, that I would yearn to be who and what he wants me to be. So, if I do not have that yearning to serve him, I have to ask myself, "have I truly received his saving love."

But, suppose I have truly received Jesus as saviour, and suppose I truly desire to follow his laws, yet find myself not doing them. What then? Is that your problem? I know that's my big problem. I have received Jesus as Saviour and I do long to serve him. Yet, the fact is, I often find myself doing the very things I don't want to do. And do you know why? It is because I am not letting God's Spirit control my life. I am not letting the Holy Spirit control my will. Instead, I'm trying to run my own life and do my own thing when I should be letting the Spirit control my life. Well, that's what St. Paul says grieves the Holy Spirit. And I suspect the lives of most of us grieve the Holy Spirit this morning. Is that true in your life? I know it is in mine.

This brings me to the subject I really want to share with you this morning. In the fourth chapter of Ephesians, Paul is talking about the church. As a matter of fact, some commentaries entitle this chapter, "The Unity of the Church". And Paul says that in the community of believers, in the fellowship of the saints, there is going to be a certain life-style. Now, that life style is going to be different from the way the world lives. The Christian community is going to be different because the way they relate to one another, the way they treat one another is going to be different.

Well, if that is true for the life of the family of God, it is also going to be true for the Christian family. Would you like to know how to have a better family life, a better marriage, a better relationship to your children? Well, you should have the same life-style that St. Paul lays down for the Family of God.

First, St. Paul says to put away certain things from us. There are certain attitudes, certain ways of relating, certain characteristics that we need to get rid of, to get out of our lives. First, there is bitterness. What is bitterness? It is hurt today over something that happened in the past. We say of a person, "he is very bitter about life". And what does that mean? Doesn't it mean that things have happened in his life in the past that make him hurt and distrustful today? Do you have any bitterness? Is there something someone did to you in the past that you still remember with hurt and resentment? St. Paul says let the Holy Spirit help you deal with that attitude. Lots of us hold out on the Spirit. We don't want to let our bitterness go. And that grieves the Spirit. If you have bitterness over some past deed by your spouse or a child or a relative, it is hurting your relationship to the person. It is breaking down your fellowship. So, St. Paul says to let bitterness go.

Second, St. Paul says to put away wrath. The Bible says that wrath is uncontrolled emotions. Wrath is letting your feelings and emotions control you. Are you ever guilty of that? Do you ever have uncontrolled emotional outbursts? St. Paul says we should not let our emotions rule us, but our hearts should be controlled by the Holy Spirit.

Third, St. Paul says to put away anger. Anger comes about when the ego of a person has been offended. That means that anger is basically self-centered. It is the person who thinks a lot of himself whose ego gets wounded. And the angry person is the person who thinks too much about himself and too much of himself. To get rid of anger means to get rid of self-centeredness. To get rid of anger means to get self out of the middle. Stop and remember the times you have been angry. Why were you angry? Wasn't it because in some way your ego had

been offended? But if I lead a spirit-controlled life, He is at the center and not the "I" and the "me". And when God is at the center of my life I have nothing to get angry about. So, says St. Paul, put away anger.

Fourth, St. Paul says to put away clamor and slander. Actually, they are two sides of the same coin. Clamor is raising a fuss which is a way of saying, "Hey, look at me. Pay attention to me." People who are always raising a clamor are crying out for attention, trying to be the center of things and the focus of things. And if some other person gets the center of attention, then we cut them down, we try to make them look bad, so we slander them. That's what I meant when I said they are two sides of the same coin. Clamor is crying out for the center of attention and slander is cutting down anyone who is a threat to that. Are you ever guilty of those attitudes? I know I am. But St. Paul says to let the Spirit control our lives.

So, first St. Paul says the Christian lives a new life style by putting away certain things--things like bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander and malice. But second, St. Paul says there are some attitudes and some attributes that build human relationships. First, he says we should be kind to one another. Kindness means to treat another as a person of worth. To care about them, about their feelings, their needs, their wants. Most marriages lack kindness--many family relationships between parents and children lack kindness. And unfortunately the worst offenders are the children--the young people. They have such emotional needs, such ego needs, they lack kindness. They fail to be sensitive to their parents and what they feel. And wives are frequently unkind to husbands because they fail to be sensitive to their needs and their struggles and the threats in their lives. And husbands so frequently are not kind to their wives, not attuned to the kinds of frustrations they have, the burdens they carry. Oh, how families need kindness today.

Second, St. Paul says to be tenderhearted. Being kind has to do with how you treat ~~each~~ another person. Being tenderhearted means being sensitive to how somebody else feels. How does your wife feel when you make fun of her in public? How does your husband feel when you criticize him before your friends? How do the children respond when you get laughter at their expense? How does your wife feel when she works hard on dinner and you gulp it down without comment? How does your husband feel when he brings home his paycheck and all you do is complain because there isn't enough money? How do your parents feel when you do poorly in school or when you do something that breaks their confidence in you? Being tenderhearted means being sensitive to the feelings of others.

Third, St. Paul says to be forgiving. And forgiving means also forgetting. If somebody tells you, "I'll forgive you but I won't forget it", do you think they have really forgiven you? No human relationship works without forgiveness. Maybe that's why St. Paul put it last, to emphasize it. He says to forgive even as God in Christ forgives us. That's hard, isn't it? And neither of us can do it unless we let God's Spirit control our lives.

Well, that's how to improve your relationships with others, especially your family. If you have Jesus as your saviour, you will truly want to be a person who lives by God's rules. And God puts his Spirit in our hearts to help us live out our new lives in Jesus. So when we let God's Spirit control our lives, we will put certain things out of our lives--things like bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander and malice. And by the power of his Spirit we will let certain other attitudes characterize our lives--things like kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness.

Do you want to have good relationships with others, do you want to have better family relationships? Then let God's Spirit control your heart.