

Three Diseases and the Cure
Called to Belong, Pt. 7
Ephesians 4:25-32

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I. PRAYER

- i. Would you, by the reading and teaching of your Word and by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, right now, teach us what true, Christ-like forgiveness looks like.

II. INTRODUCTION

- a. A while ago, I saw this interesting video on YouTube about the physics of dominos.
 - i. The guy on the video said that a domino is able to knock over another domino up to 1.5x its own size and weight.
 - To demonstrate this, he puts 13 dominos in a line.
 1. The first domino is 5mm tall and 1mm thick.
 2. And the 13th domino is over 100 lbs and about a meter tall and 5 inches thick.
 - And obviously, he ever so lightly taps that tiny first domino and the chain reaction multiplies the energy to the point that it knocks over the domino that is over 100 lbs.
 1. The crazy thing is that if there were 29 dominos, the 29th domino would be as high as the Empire State Building.
 2. And that tiny 5mm tall domino would start a chain reaction that would knock it over.
 3. In fact, the energy generated by that smallest domino multiplies itself by 2 billion to knock down that 13th domino.



- ii. It's a fascinating experiment of how the smallest domino can turn into an unstoppable force.
- b. Have you ever had a friend, a co-worker, a family member...
 - i. And the smallest quark, the smallest annoyance, the slightest offense, that one comment...
 - Created a bitterness...a distaste in your and their mouth...and because it went unaddressed, the smallest rift turned into something that ended or forever changed the relationship?
 - The smallest frustration turned into an unstoppable force?
- c. This has happened in my life.
 - i. My freshman year of college, I was roommates with one of my best friends from High School.
 - In High School, we hung out all the time!
 - But when we got to college and began living together in the same dorm, I think we started to get on each other's nerves a little bit.
 1. And we ended up forming different friend groups and got involved with different activities.
 - And I began to fixate on all of the things that frustrated me about him verses being a good friend.
 1. And through our years in college, our friendship got more and more distant...
 2. Even to the point that we haven't spoken to each other since college...even after my attempts to reach out to him and apologize.



- ii. In my heart, the smallest of annoyance turned into an unstoppable force that ended our friendship...and it really makes me sad today.
- d. We have a problem in our culture today.
 - i. And that problem is that when these small cracks form in our relationships with other people...
 - We would much rather ignore them and hope they go away versus addressing them directly.
 - And unfortunately, all of us probably have experiences where a small crack has turned into an unstoppable force that destroys relationships.

III. SERIES PLUG

- a. In the final paragraph in Ephesians 4, Paul is concerned with this happening in the church.
- b. We've been studying Ephesians 4 in a sermon series entitled "Called to Belong."
 - i. And the point of this study is to see how every follower of Jesus is called to belong to a local church.
 - ii. And in these final verses of the chapter, Paul gets very practical and gives us some specific warnings when it comes to how these small spats can rip apart the church.



IV. EPHESIANS 4:25

- a. V.25 kicks off this final paragraph.
 - i. Let's read it to understand the ultimate point that Paul is trying to make.
 - Read Ephesians 4:25
- b. When Paul says we are members of one another, he is referring to this analogy that he uses where he compares the church to the human body.
 - i. A human body is a unified whole but has many different parts with many different functions.
 - And the people of the church are like individual parts that make up the body.
 1. So, you have feet, hands, ears, eyes, legs, etc...
 2. And although all these parts have different shapes and different abilities, they are all equally important for the body to function properly.
 - ii. This is exactly what Paul says back in v.15-16.
 - And, as followers of Jesus, we are called to be a part in that body and to work in unity with the other parts of the body as everyone seeks to build up the church love.
- c. Back to v.25...Paul tells us that since we are members of the same body...we should put away falsehood and speak truth to one another.



- i. John Chrysostom, a third century early church father, said this in reference to this verse.
 - He said: “If the eye sees a serpent, does it deceive the foot? if the tongue tastes what is bitter, does it deceive the stomach?”
- ii. Our bodies work in unity. If my eye sees a serpent, it is going to communicate that information to my foot...
 - And what’s going to happen?
 1. Depends who you are...
 2. You’re either going to run or stomp.
- iii. But the point is that the body is to speak truth to one another so that it can operate in unity, it can build itself up in love, and it can protect itself against the schemes of the enemy that desires to see the church destroyed.
- d. So, as we read the rest of this paragraph, Paul is going to warn us about three different diseases that can infect our hearts and if gone unchecked it can create a crack in the armor and unity of the church.
 - And if these cracks are not mended properly, the domino effect can take over, and create a lot of damage and pain.
- e. So, for our time together, we are going to look at these three diseases and then take a look at the cure that Paul offers.



V. DISEASE #1 – VENGEANCE

a. Read v.26-27, and v.31.

- i. This is an interesting text because obviously Paul does not warn us against anger because anger within itself is sin, but anger is a very easy pathway for us to sin against one another.
 - This is why he tells us not to let the sun go down on our anger because when anger festers and goes unchecked...look at v.27....we give the devil an opportunity.
 1. The imagery here is like a foothold.
 2. If you go rock climbing, you look for any crack or any ledge that you can put your fingers in or your feet in in order to use it to your advantage and accomplish your goal of climbing the mountain.
 3. When we have anger in our hearts against one another and we allow it to fester, that becomes a small crack in the armor of the unity of the church that the devil can stick his fingers into and begin to exploit for his goal of ripping the church a part.
 - ii. So, Paul doesn't say anger is a sin but anger should be something that we take care of immediately...
 - He even goes on to say in v.31 to put away all anger.
- b. But here is where I think anger goes from being just an emotion to sin...and that is when our anger gives us a desire for vengeance.



- i. We want them to be punished.
- ii. If you look at v.31, Paul lists some ways that we seek vengeance in the midst of our anger.
 - Bitterness – which is this perpetual state of resentment against someone and maybe we seek to punish them through the silent treatment, being passive aggressive, cutting off the relationship...
 - Wrath – Which is the idea of raging out at someone. Letting your anger come out against someone as to punish them.
 - Clamor – Raising your voice at someone.
 - Slander – Seeking to ruin someone’s reputation.
- c. And so here is the theological problem with vengeance in the church and why it is a big disease that can be so damaging.
 - i. Lisa read from Romans 12 for us earlier and we read this in v.19:
 - “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.’”
 - ii. Our God claims the write of avenging sin and we do not have that right.
 - And He has told us that every single sin, every single act of injustice, will be properly judged and avenged by God himself.
 - And that happens in one of two ways...
 1. If that person has faith in Jesus Christ, their sin was transferred to Jesus and when God poured out his wrath on Jesus in our place as he hung on the cross, he avenged that sin.



2. If that person never places their faith in Christ, then their sin will be avenged on the day of judgement when Christ returns.
- iii. But the problem with seeking vengeance against your brothers and sisters in Christ within the church...is that you are saying that the blood of Jesus was not enough to pay for their sin.
 - That more wrath. More punishment must be endured for that person to be forgiven of their sin.
- d. So, when we hold grudges.
 - i. When we talk about others behind their back.
 - ii. When we give someone the silent treatment.
- e. We have ceased speaking truth to one another, and we have begun lying to one another.
 - i. We have begun to say through our actions that the gospel isn't enough for your sin.
- f. Vengeance is a disease that begins to displace the gospel from the center of a community.
 - i. It's a crack in the armor that cannot go unaddressed.

VI. DISEASE #2 – SELFISHNESS

a. Read v.28.

- i. Last week, we looked at this verse specifically to look at the stages of life change in our life as we grow in holiness.



- This week, I want us to ask why Paul used the example of stealing specifically as he was writing to the Ephesians church.
- ii. And when you look at the example in v.28 and as we noted last week, we see total transformation in this person.
- Formerly, this person was a thief who would take from others for himself.
 - But that has changed in that not only does he not steal anymore, but he labors so that he may have something to give to others.
- iii. And the disease that I believe Paul is warning us of here is that of selfishness...
- As we go about life in the church, where do I have a heart of a thief?
 1. A heart that seeks to take from others for myself instead of working so that I can give to others?
- b. We've already talked about this in this series, but I believe that our culture has infected our hearts with a thieves' mindset in how we view our involvement with the local church.
- i. We join a church with the expectation that we will receive spiritual benefit from others in the church and we can be quick to speak ill of a church if we have a hard time getting fed at a church.
- But a biblical vision of the church is that we are all parts of the body and have different roles so that we all are fed and cared for properly.



- Meaning that the mindset in the church cannot be what I can take for myself, but it is to be how can I labor in order to provide for the others around me.
- ii. The idea of that I am not here this morning just for myself, just so I can worship, just so I can learn from the sermon, but I am here for everyone else, so that I can encourage them, so that I can pray for them, so that I can be sure that they are being taken care of.
 - That's a counter-cultural view of church!
- c. And it's so easy for our hearts to be infected with this selfishness that causes us to be more concerned about our own personal spiritual health more than those around me.
- i. And that selfishness is a crack in the armor of the church that can be easily exploited.
 - If everyone is here for themselves, no one will be cared for properly and the church is weak.
 - If everyone is here for the health of everyone else, everyone will be properly cared for and protected, and the church will be untouchable by the enemy.

VII. DISEASE #3 – MALNOURISHMENT

a. Read v.29-30.

- i. If you noticed in v.26-27, Paul connects the presence of anger as giving the devil an opportunity.



- ii. And here in v.29-30, Paul connects what comes out of our mouths as having the ability to grieve the Holy Spirit of God.
- As followers of Jesus, we have been indwelt with the Holy Spirit of God.
 - And the Holy Spirit plays a number of different roles in our lives.
 1. The Holy Spirit is our helper who leads us to live holy lives for the glory of God.
 2. Paul tells us in Galatians 5 to keep in step with the Spirit...follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit.
 3. The Holy Spirit is also a seal as Paul mentions here in vs. 31.
 4. He is a mark on our lives that we belong to God, that we are his children.
- iii. When corrupting, foul language comes out of our mouth, it grieves the Holy Spirit of God because the Holy Spirit of God is supposed to have control of our hearts.
- And Jesus has told us in Matthew 15:18 that **“what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart.”**
 - When we use our tongues as a way of tearing down others, it is a window into the heart and it is an indication that that person is not following the leadership of the Holy Spirit but is allowing their flesh to take control.



- b. And so, I see this as a disease of malnourishment because I believe that when we fail to fill our minds and hearts with the things of God, we slowly forget what the Holy Spirit sounds like.
- i. His influence over our hearts becomes less obvious, and we begin to treat each other and speak to each other like the rest of the world and not as brothers and sisters in Christ.
 - If we are not filling our minds and hearts with God's Word.
 - If we are not bringing our circumstances and desires to God in prayer and seeking His guidance.
 - If we are not opening our lives to the people of the church so we can be built up in the faith.
 - ii. Then our hearts will become more influenced by the world than the Holy Spirit and our tongues will be the first sign.
- c. Malnourishment and as loose tongue in the church is a crack in the armor that must not be ignored.
- And James warns us of this in James 3:5-6: "How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! ⁶ And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell."



VIII. THE CURE

- a. So, we have three diseases that we are warned of by Paul.
 - i. Vengeance, Selfishness, and Malnourishment.
 - ii. All three of these diseases can put a crack in the armor of the church and if left unaddressed can split a church apart.
 - iii. But we have to be realistic.
 - We are people who still deal with sin. These things are going to happen.
 - These diseases will find their way in.
 - So, what is the cure? What do we do when this happens?
 - What immune system has God built into the church so that we can properly mend these cracks before they get out of control?
- b. **Read v.32** - The cure for these diseases in the church is Christ-like forgiveness.
 - i. See, the Kingdom of God is backwards in comparison to the world.
 - In the world, if someone were to do something that made you angry, if someone were to act selfishly, if someone were to say something offensive...
 1. The offending party is the one who must do something to make amends and make it right.
 - But God demonstrates to us a different pattern in and through Jesus Christ.
 1. As God's creation, we have sinned against Him. We are the offending party.



2. But God does not wait for us to somehow make things right with him...because that would be impossible for us to do.
 3. Rather, in his grace, God makes the first move and provides a way at great cost to Himself that we can be forgiven of our sin through His Son Jesus.
- So, in the world, we expect the offending party to take the first step towards reconciliation and to do it at their own expense, but God reverses the pattern and it is the offended party that makes the first step towards reconciliation at their own expense.
 1. This is what differentiates Christ-like forgiveness and forgiveness as maybe the world would define it.
- c. A counselor that I used to see helped me understand Christ-like forgiveness in this way.
- i. Let's say I were to grab one of your smart phones out of your hand and smash it on the ground.
 - So, obviously, I have sinned against you. I did something that was unjust and I have incurred a debt against you....I owe you a new phone.
 - Now, when it comes to this debt that I owe you, we have three options.
 1. That I should go out and with my own money, buy you a new phone. I should pay off this debt at a cost to myself.



2. You could choose to cancel my debt and live life without a phone. So, although I don't have to pay off the debt, you still have to live your life differently than before I smashed your phone.
 3. You could choose to go buy for yourself a brand new phone with your own money. In other words, instead of just canceling my debt, you could pay my debt for me and you would not have to live life without a phone.
- See, option #1 is not forgiveness because I am having to pay for what I've done.
 1. Option #2 is regular forgiveness in that your canceling my debt but there is no restoration of your phone. It's like your saying that my sin against you didn't matter.
 2. Option #3 is Christ-like forgiveness because you're paying my debt with your own money. What I did was serious, and the debt has to be paid. So, we're not minimizing the fact that I smashed your phone. You're just paying it on my behalf.
- ii. We have all sinned against God and the Scriptures tell us that we have incurred a debt against God.
- But God in his grace and at great cost to Himself, offered his Son Jesus as payment for the debt that we owe God.
 1. **Let me just say**, if you have not trusted in Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, you need to know that this is the kind of forgiveness that God is offering.



2. Not a forgiveness where you have to clean your whole life up before God will accept you.
3. But a forgiveness that has been purchased because Jesus paid the debt that you owe, he took the punishment that you deserve on the cross, and he rose from the dead verifying the fact that your debt has been paid in full.
4. The offended party (God) has stepped toward the offending party (you) and is offering grace and forgiveness...will you accept it?

d. And when Paul tells us in the church to forgive one another in the same way that Christ has forgiven us, this is what he is talking about.

- i. When we sin against one another. When we let our anger get out of control. When we are selfish. When our tongue is loose...we incur debt against one another.
 - The question is, when you get offended, when you are sinned against...who is going to pay that debt?
- ii. If someone says something to you that is offensive...
 - They have sinned against you and you are angry. They have incurred a debt against you.
 1. Now you could make them pay the debt by souring the relationship until they come to you to apologize...you could talk about them to others...you could give them the silent treatment.
 2. You could shrug it off and pretend that nothing happened.



3. Or, you could pay the debt by trusting that Christ has properly dealt with the sin on the cross and you could go to them directly, let them know what they did and how that made you feel and forgive them and allow the relationship to be restored by not treating them as if they owe you something.
4. This is what Christ did for us! So, we do this for one another.

iii. BIG CAVEAT

- I am talking about regular, everyday conflict between people in the church.
 1. There are ways that we can sin against one another that are more severe and although we are still called to forgive in a Christ-like way, the process will look much different.
 2. So, in cases like abuse, just because you seek to forgive in a Christ-like way does not mean trust is restored.
 3. Christ-like forgiveness does not mean we don't get law enforcement if the law has been broken.
 4. And in some cases, the sin might be severe enough that the relationship is not restored although forgiveness is being pursued.
- So, in these cases, forgiveness needs to be pursued with wise, godly counsel.
 1. Understand? I am talking about normal everyday conflict here.



- iv. So, Grace Hill, if someone makes you angry. If your bitter. If someone's selfishness is rubbing you the wrong way. If someone has sinned against you with their tongue. And a number of other things!
- Who are you going to make pay the debt?
 - This is the question I want us to ask ourselves all the time when conflict comes up.
 1. Who's going to pay it?
 - Are we going to forgive one another as Christ has forgiven us or not?
 - Because when these cracks form in the armor of the church, it is gospel-centered, Christ-like forgiveness that mends the cracks.
 - And if we refuse to let Christ rule how we deal with conflict, then these cracks can exponentially grow into something that can rip the church apart.
- v. And you might say, Allan, this is really radical.
- People should pay for what they've done!
 - And doesn't that just give all of us a picture of the radical, scandalous grace that God has shown us in and through His Son, Jesus.
 1. May that kind of radical forgiveness exist here.

IX. PRAY

