

Ephesians 4:32

Today's verse doubles as the closing text in our series of Christian admonitions. As such, it constitutes a marvelous reminder of the motivation for our faithfulness which is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul wants us to remember that our faithfulness is not conditioned upon whims or sentiment but upon the finished work of Christ on the cross.

1. A few more exhortations

- a. The first few words of this verse encapsulate the entirety of the admonition as Paul says, "Be kind to one another."
- b. This sounds so easy, but it can be quite challenging!
- c. Kindness is one of those things that is great in theory but challenging to put into practice!
 - i. Kindness is not conditional
 - ii. Kindness is not optional
 - iii. Kindness is not sporadic
- d. Some might read this first sentence and wonder what kindness looks like
 - i. The good news is that Paul does not leave that question open, instead he answers with a few more admonitions

1. Kindness looks like tenderheartedness

- a. To be tenderhearted is to be concerned with the plight and difficulty of another
- b. It is to care for them deeply
- c. When we are tenderhearted, we are prone to extend mercy because of the love and compassion we have for our brothers and sisters who are struggling
- d. Tenderheartedness is the opposite of callousness
 - i. A callous person is unconcerned with the problems of others, but a tenderhearted person is one who aches for those who ache
 - ii. Obviously, Paul is not intending for Christians to throw all biblical truth out the window in showing compassion, but he is calling us to lovingly walk with those who are struggling, understanding that their glaring needs and/or deficiencies are not cause for our indifference or anger

2. Kindness looks like forgiveness

- a. It is easy to be kind to someone who has not offended us!
- b. Nevertheless, the admonition here is to be kind AND forgiving!
- c. Forgiveness is an act of unmerited kindness

- d. Those who are quick to forgive are in a position to be chronically kind whereas those who are unforgiving have no recourse to kindness when they are wronged

2. An overarching motivation

- a. Notice that Paul pivots from an instruction to forgive to the forgiveness offered every single one of his readers!
- b. Essentially, Paul is reminding the Ephesians (and us by proxy) that forgiveness is warranted because God, in Christ, has forgiven us!
- c. God is not calling us to anything that He has not already done and this is both good news and a great reminder of our joyful responsibility before the Lord
 - i. How can I withhold forgiveness from others when I have been forgiven so much?
 - ii. Those with an unforgiving spirit are often proud
 - 1. Their lack of grace emanates from a spirit that foolishly thinks they have no need of grace!
 - 2. This is both ridiculous and unbiblical
- d. If you confess Christ as your Savior, you are confessing your need of salvation
- e. If you have a need of salvation, you have a need to be forgiven
- f. If you have a need to be forgiven, you have no right to refuse to extend forgiveness to another
- g. This means that Christians are kind, tenderhearted and forgiving by definition!
 - i. it is an oxy-moron to talk about an unforgiving Christian!

3. A practical admonition

- a. For those who heart these words and find them distasteful and/or exceedingly difficult, let me offer one piece of pastoral advice... think less about what they did to you and more about what God has done for you!
- b. When we ruminate and stew on the wrongs that others have committed towards us, we take our eyes off of Jesus and the grace He has extended to us
- c. Those who are unforgiving often think in terms of what they deserve
 - i. "I didn't deserve to be treated this way."
 - ii. "What you did was unwarranted"
 - iii. "After all I've done for you, this is how you repay me?"
- d. I understand that tendency as I struggle with it myself! This is why I can tell you that the greatest way to overcome such difficulty is by considering all that God has done for me that I don't deserve!
 - i. Jesus (God Himself) came and died in my place
 - ii. Why? Not because my life warranted His kindness but because He is a tenderhearted and forgiving God
 - iii. Now, He has simply called me to forgive far less severe offenses as an extension of His kindness to me...