

FORGIVENESS:

GOD'S ANTIDOTE FOR ANGER

Forgiveness is God's antidote for bitterness, wrath, and anger. Thus, forgiveness is superior to "ventilation." Forgiveness also is a key to solving problems in communication, such as arguing. Thus, forgiveness is a key principle of Christian living.

Forgiveness is often a key for overcoming other problems: hurt feelings, guilt, depression, postpartum depression, sexual abuse, anorexia, bulimia, marriage, child rearing, and divorce.

People tend to be like pressure cookers. As offenses received from others are stuffed inside, the pressure inside increases.

In pressure cookers, steam is released periodically by a pressure control that makes a jiggling sound as it lifts and returns to its seat. But if the pressure control does not work, the steam pressure will continue to increase until the pressure plug melts, and then the steam will be released in one big burst.

Some people function like the pressure control. With each offense they receive, some of their anger comes out in words or actions that are anything but pleasant and edifying. Others function like the pressure plug. They hold the pressure of their anger inside for a while, and then blow up like a volcano.

One secular way of handling anger is to "ventilate" the feelings of anger. This fits the analogy of the pressure cooker and the "jiggling" pressure control. If it really helped, ventilating feelings would be a reasonable way to handle anger.

But ventilating feelings has one very serious drawback. It is addictive. Each outburst is practice in losing self control. When children ventilate their feelings, we call it a temper tantrum. When adults do it, the world calls it therapy.

Unfortunately, some Christians advocate mini-temper tantrums as a way of releasing anger, thereby supposedly preventing hurtful behavior. One writer teaches that mothers who are angry at their children should break some inanimate object, such as a pencil, to prevent harming them. But, after developing a habit of doing something violent, what if a mother gets to the child before she can find something to break?

God has a better way than ventilation. He has an antidote for anger that works. But, before we consider His way of handling anger, let's consider the nature of feelings, such as anger.

One pastor/counselor teaches that your feelings are like the indicator lights on the dashboard of your car.¹ If the temperature light comes on, what is wrong with the bulb? Nothing. The bulb is faithfully doing its duty--showing you that something is wrong under the hood.

In like manner, when you are angry, your feelings are working exactly as God designed them to function. They are telling you that something is wrong "under your hood." That is why the Bible, paraphrased, says, "OK, so you are angry, don't sin" (Eph. 4:26). Your feelings of anger are not sinful. What you do when you are angry may be.

God's antidote for anger is forgiveness. The Bible says, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger . . . be put away from you, with all malice" (Eph. 4:31).

Since, as discussed above, you cannot control your feelings by acts of the will, it would not make sense to change Ephesians 4:31 to read: "Get rid of your bitterness, and wrath, and anger." And this change would obscure a very important biblical principle of Christian living. Unfortunately, one version makes this serious error.²

Understanding the conjunction "and" that connects Ephesians 4:31 and 4:32 is helpful in gaining an understanding of God's antidote for anger. This "and" in the Greek New Testament is not like "Jack and Jill went up the hill"--it does not connect two things in parallel. Instead, it shows a sequential, causal, or consequential relationship between two ideas, thoughts, or actions.

Sometimes this "and" is translated "that is" to introduce an explanation. If we translate this "and" with "that is," then verses 31 and 32, paraphrased, say, "Let God put away your bad feelings. That is, do what verse 32 teaches."

Verse 32 says that the way to "let God" put away your anger, is to forgive. But how are you to forgive? About half of our English versions say that you are to forgive "as God . . . forgave you." Others say that you are to forgive "as God . . . has forgiven you." The Greek text of the New Testament will allow verse 32 to be translated either way, but the context demands that it be translated "as God . . . has forgiven you."³

"As God has forgiven you" conveys the idea of repetitive action. God has forgiven us, as believers, unconditionally, time after time. Jesus has interceded for us each and every time we have sinned (1 John 2:1.)

If we are to forgive "as God has forgiven us," then, even as God's repetitive judicial forgiveness of us, as believers, is unconditional, we must forgive unconditionally. We must forgive anytime we have anything against anyone (Mark 11:25). We cannot, we must not, wait for repentance of those who offend us (Luke 17:3-4).⁴

So what is God's antidote for bitterness, wrath, and anger? Forgiveness. Pray and release the penalty of the offense to God if/whenever you have anything against anyone, as taught in Mark 11:25.⁵

Perhaps you have noticed that the "clamor" (loud arguing) and "evil speaking" (slander) of Ephesians 4:32 have not been considered. Obviously, one way of avoiding sinful communications depends upon acts of the will in which your mouth is clamped shut. However, in practice, your mouth is likely to pop open at inopportune times.

But if God puts away your bitterness, wrath, and anger, together with your ill will, won't God also be putting away your sinful communications by taking away the pressure that all too often results in sinful communications?

Therefore, the unconditional forgiveness of Mark 11:25 is not only God's antidote for bad feelings, such as anger, but also His way to avoid sinful communications.⁶ It is biblical advice to say, "Don't use corrupt words" or to say, "Use edifying words" (Eph. 4:29). But the power to obey is taught in Ephesians 4:31, 32. Pray and release to God the penalty of offenses against you and against those that you love. Let God put away your unwholesome words ("clamor and evil speaking").

End Notes

1. Pastor Bill Goode

2. New International Version

3. Although some translations render the aorist verb of "forgive" by the English simple past tense, the perfective aspect of the aorist tense is also accurately rendered by the English present perfect, and the context, in two places, demands the English present perfect. See: Chapter 10, "Overcoming Enemy Control " and endnotes 18-27 of Chapter 10, in *Forgiveness: The Power and the Puzzles* by Wendell E. Miller.

4. See *Forgiveness: Obedience and Fellowship* at <http://www.biblical-counsel.org> for a discussion of the clear distinctives between the vertical forgiveness of Mark 11:25 and the horizontal forgiveness of Luke 17:3-4.

5. Vertical forgiveness, the unconditional kind taught in Mark 11:25 and Ephesians 4:32, releases the penalty of the offense to God. Horizontal forgiveness, the conditional forgiveness of Luke 17:3-4, is used to forgive the offender.

6. Although Ephesians 4:32 teaches God's primary antidote for bad feelings, such as anger, forgiveness "doesn't always work." See Chapter 12, "When Forgiveness Doesn't Work" in *Forgiveness: The Power and the Puzzles*. See also, Chapter 10, "Overcoming Enemy Control," and Chapter 11, "Extending the Power of Forgiveness."

Reference/Resource Material

The material in *Forgiveness: Obedience and Fellowship* follows, in general, one of the thirteen chapters of *Forgiveness: The Power and the Puzzles*, by Wendell E. Miller, published by **ClearBrook Publishers**, P.O Box 1534, Warsaw, IN 46581.

Forgiveness: The Power and the Puzzles is a complete handbook on forgiveness. By the use of clear logic, the reader is led to an understanding of the six kinds of forgiveness that are taught in the Scriptures, what principle activates the power of each one, and how problems are solved using the power of forgiveness. Many readers find these chapters to be especially helpful: "Overcoming Enemy Control," "When Forgiveness Doesn't Work," and "Extending the Power of Forgiveness."

For more information, see: [*Forgiveness: The Power and the Puzzles*](#) and [*Overview of Forgiveness: The Power and the Puzzles*](#)

List prices of *Forgiveness: The Power and the Puzzles* are:

- **Paperback edition (261 pages) \$10.95**
- **Clothbound textbook/handbook edition \$15.95**
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