

REVEALING REACTIONS!

The Master's Plan • Ephesians 4:31-32 • FCBC • 7/16/23

Intro: You didn't know Don, but if you'd met him, you wouldn't want to. Don graduated from Wheaton College with me. (Wheaton is a solidly Christian college, and those who attend typically confess Christ, which Don did.) Don grew up in Taiwan where his parents were missionaries; he was intelligent—a double major in literature and archaeology. He played soccer, though he wasn't one of the stars. But life didn't seem to treat him right. He didn't receive the grades he thought he deserved. He resented his parents for leaving him to return to Taiwan the week after graduation. He was bitter at his coach who never gave him enough playing time on the field. Because of his simmering anger, he always seemed on edge, smoldering at everyone. It's no wonder that he didn't have a lot of friends. The last straw came when his girlfriend broke up with him at the end of September and his prospects for a job weren't very inviting. Well, he'd show them. He sat down and quickly scribbled a sour letter, placing the blame for his life right where it belonged—on everyone else's shoulders, especially his ex-girlfriend who just dumped him. Then that evening, he walked outside, toward town. As the westbound Chicago/Western freight train rumbled through Wheaton, approaching the Chase Street crossing, Don stepped out from behind some bushes, and laid down on the tracks. Later, the engineer—visibly upset—lamented that it was impossible to stop the train in time to avoid decapitating Don. That night, the town of Wheaton and the college was in shock. But those of us who knew Don realized that the train hadn't killed him; his resentment did. You can know it all, but not live it. And not living it can tear you apart, if not kill you.

- These past five weeks, we've learned a lot about the *new life* God has in mind for each of us. So:

I. [WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?]

[A. The Insight: *You are no longer the person you once were, so you must no longer live as you once lived.*] How different should our lives be from rest of world? Jesus (Mt 5:14): as different as a well-lit city at night set on the crest of a hill, visible to travelers miles away. Paul (Phil 2:14): as distinctive as stars twinkling in an inky black sky; Peter (1 Pet 3:15): so different others ask us why it's so. If the Bible stopped there, we might all be very frustrated. We know we should think differently, behave differently & react differently than those who have not met the Savior. Yet most of us are *not yet* what we *hope* to be.

- The truth is, all of us at some point have struggled over a lack of change in our lives. We look inward, see ugly things that lurk in dark corners, we know that they don't belong to our new life, and yet haven't a clue how to rid ourselves of them. Some of us are haunted by our failures & our lack of consistency in living up to what we know we should be. I love Scriptures--not only do they tell us what we ought to be, but they help us to understand how to get there; not only do they remind us what God expects, but they free us from our own twisted expectations which can discourage and enslave us. Yes--we are to be different from the rest of the world but the change isn't quick, nor is it all up to us.

Behind passage we've been staring at this past month are:

[B. Three Assumptions about Growth]:

[1. Growth is not optional, but essential.] Growth isn't an elective in God's coursework. Not just one of so many options on the base model. Change *begins* when you embrace Christ as your Savior, but should continue long after new birth is an old fact. (*But*

what if I have never changed?) Either no life, or no health. Either way, no good. Growth is an essential. *But req patience because:*

[2. Growth is not automatic, but deliberate.] When you accept God's offer of forgiveness & new life, something deep inside of you changes. Something new in you is born. But that new life must be intentionally cultivated. You have choices to make. You can't be passive about your growth. Will you read the Bible and listen to good teachers and learn? Will you stretch your faith by obeying God? Will you put areas of your character and behavior on God's workbench for you and Him to work on? It doesn't happen all at once, so you do need to make some decisions to consistently cultivate what God has planted in you. *You can't plant seeds, neglect the garden and expect a great harvest.* Then:

[3. Growth is not merely adding, but transforming.] In saving you, God did not merely layer a new life on your old one. You became a new person! *He made an exchange:* Your sin for Christ's righteousness; your old life for His new life in you. In that same spirit, God teaches us that a key to growth is not just getting rid of old ways of thinking & acting, but replacing them w/newer and better patterns of thought & behavior. Real growth transforms us — we become who we really are! Paul points to five areas of our lives which typically give people fits, but where others should most likely notice a change in us because of our relationship with Christ:

[C. Five Critical Exchanges:]

[1. Our Integrity: *Replace lying with truth (vs. 25)*] When we speak, we tell the truth as graciously & completely as possible.

[2. Our Temper: *Replace sinful with righteous anger (vs. 26-27)*] When we *get mad*, we do so over the right things and in the right way. We deal w/our anger — we don't let it simmer and sour us.

[3. Our Work: *Replace selfishness with sharing (vs. 28)*]. We are no longer takers, but givers. How we acquire and use what we have displays the character of X who gave Himself to others.

[4. Our Mouth: *Replace hurtful w/helpful words (vs. 29-30)*] When we speak, our words help, not hurt others; their effect (as Patrick so aptly pointed out last week) is never damaging but encouraging. *And finally, today:*

[5. Our Reactions: *Replace resentment with grace (vs. 31-32)*] In our reactions to disappointing situations and troubling people, we should respond like God does to us. *So:*

II. [HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND?] (4:31-32) **Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.**

[A. Observations:]

[1. There are only two commands]

1) *Let (xxx)...be put away* (vs. 31a): i.e. “let it be removed.” The indirect form of the verb implies you can’t get rid of it by just trying to stop it, but by replacing it—by doing something else!

2) *be...*(vs. 32a) lit. “Start being...” Again, it implies a process.

•NB this is an appeal to our *wills*, not to our *emotions*. In fact, what you may *want* to do is exactly the opposite; but God is instructing us to make a choice that is often contrary to our feelings. These are *commands*—God apparently thinks we have some control in our responses.

[2. The responses are mutually exclusive]. One cannot exist in the presence of another. In fact, the second set of traits is the antidote to the first. You can’t dislodge the first without replacing them with the second; you cannot embrace the second better set when your heart is full of the first set. They’re mutually exclusive.

[3. There is zero tolerance for the bad.] NB the “all...all...” Not a hint, not a trace is to remain. We can't play w/them, toy w/them, or ever allow even one exception. Be ruthless w/them: (*which are?*)

[B. THE SICK SIX] (vs. 31) ...**bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander...(and) malice.** NB all six involve conflicts between people, or destructive responses to situations.

Take them in order:

[1. Bitter resentment]: (*bitterness*) = lit. “sharp.” Describes a sour spirit/sour speech. Sour puss. It's the person who cherishes resentful feelings and resists being reconciled; who harbors resentment, keeps score with others. She's constantly irritable, and cultivates a brooding, grudge-filled attitude that keeps her in perpetual turmoil.

• Why do people get bitter? People become bitter about unmet expectations, about being passed over for a promotion, being slighted in a conversation, being not invited or included in a social activity. You could get bitter about changes in the church, or about the lack of changes in the church. You can become bitter & resentful over nearly anything or anyone! “*Who's bitter?*” I can give you a couple of sure-fire evidences of bitterness:

1) By what we say: Not surprising that Bible links bitterness w/our mouths. Bitterness is usually revealed in what we *say* about other people & situations.

2) Bitterness is revealed in quarrels which turn vicious over minor matters, eg turning off lights, or leaving closet doors open, or not filling up the gas tank, or a messy sink, or a toilet lid left up, or not returning a borrowed item; when the reaction is out of proportion to the particular issue, there's good chance bitterness and resentment have been brewing beneath the surface. Bitterness

is often revealed by inappropriate amounts of emotion attached to an otherwise minor issue.

- But being bitter never accomplishes the thing you wish it would or intend for it to do: [Augustine]. Great theologian, Buddy [Hackett/x]. As believers, we're not to have even a tinge of bitterness in our hearts. (*Stay bitter long enough and you'll probably see this 2nd forbidden trait:*)

[2. Explosive rage]: (*wrath*) Points to an outburst, the out of control type which leads person to punch/hit/strike out/lash out or verbally vomit. It's the yelling at the guy who cuts you off on the road; it's the short fuse, the hair-trigger temper; you don't see it coming; you just blow up. (It makes others think: "Wow. Where did that come from?") NB:

[3. Smoldering anger]: (*anger*) This points to a sinful kind of hostility that seethes & simmers underneath the surface. Makes a person clam up, but all the while charring his own soul & looking for an opportunity to get even. As we've learned earlier, there is an appropriate time and place to be angry; but you must deal with that anger in the day it arises, or it can become destructive to your soul, and open you to damaging others.

[4. Harsh yelling]: (*clamor*). NIV: *brawling*. Not really referring to riots or bar-room fights; rather it pictures people who are polarized, so the decibel level climbs as the quarrel escalates, ending in shouting and screaming at each other. It's forbidding outbursts (public or digital) that reveal a loss of self-control. People get so angry that they are oblivious to those around them—it degenerates into yelling matches designed to inflict maximum damage through verbal abuse, name calling and unrest. (*But not everyone is so frontal with their reactions:*)

[5. Malicious slander]: (*slander*). It's speaking badly of others, thinking the worst of them behind their backs to defame or destroy their reputations. Why would someone do that? It's a way to make another pay for what they did to you.

- How should we respond to others' hurting us or saying unkind or untrue things about us? Should we dish out to them some of their own medicine? Show 'em how it feels? Say worse things about them?" Maybe not: [Prov. 11:12/x] In fact, when I ponder making them pay, I find myself in this final forbidden territory:

[6. Intention to harm]: (*malice*) NLT: *all types of evil behavior* — but it's much more specific than that: New Bible Dictionary defines it as *a feeling of hostility and strong dislike with a desire to do harm; hateful feelings*. It's a *deliberate* desire to hurt another. EG: You don't like that person. At all. You might wish and maybe even look for an opportunity to hurt them or cause them trouble. You're taking your cue from the world: "*Don't get mad, get even.*" But that's *malice*. It's sinful. And it can exist even if you never act on it.

- And all these sick six must be intentionally, completely rejected by us who follow Christ. *But you can't rid yourselves of these simply by trying to stop. You have to dislodge/replace them with:*

[C. THE TELLING TRIO] (vs. 32) **Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you.** *Note the prescription:*

[1. Be Kind]: This is the exact opposite of bitterness and malice; it involves doing good for them regardless how they have treated you. Jesus says we're to take our cue from God: [Lk. 6:27-28, 35-36/x]. Kindness is doing good to those who *don't* deserve it. ("*In an ideal world—fine; but have you any idea of the kinds of people I have to deal with?*") Once famous columnist for the Chicago Sun-Times, Sydney Harris told the story of accompanying his friend to a

newspaper kiosk. (This was when daily newspapers were a thing.) His friend greeted the vender very courteously, who responded gruffly & rudely. Accepting the newspaper which was shoved in his face, Sydney's friend politely smiled, paid for the paper and wished him a nice weekend. As they walked away down the street, Sydney asked, "Does he always treat you so rudely?" "Yes, unfortunately he does." "And are you always so polite and friendly to him?" "Yes, I try to be." "Why are you so nice to him when he is so rude to you?" Sydney's friend paused, and answered: "*Because I don't want him to decide how I'm going to act.*" In the same way, God doesn't want others to determine how you will act. This really is a choice. When you encounter an obnoxious person, ask yourself, "*What doesn't this person deserve?*" Then give it to him (sincere complement, your time, understanding, appreciation, thanks). That's being *kind* to him. Kindness *depends on 2nd trait*:

[2.Be Compassionate]: "*tender-hearted.*" In both the OT and NT, the term for *compassion* is related to the word "womb" — i.e. the way a mother tenderly feels toward the baby in her womb is how a compassionate person feels toward person who is suffering. It's the ability to think and feel for another, to care about them and about whatever they're suffering. 7x in NT it is identified as one of things that motivated Jesus deeply.

- How do you develop it? Can be developed from at least 3 sources:

- 1) From our failures: Our sins and failures can knock the chip off our shoulder and help us feel the pain, frustration, and helplessness in another person who is experiencing what we once did. I'm convinced that God uses our sin to help us identify with other sinful people. If you've suffered divorce, you know how painful it is; if you've been scorched by transgressing sexually, you

know how much shame, and frustration and regret comes as a result. If you've struggled with an addiction, or judgmentalism or having a potty mouth, you can identify with and feel for others struggling with the same. *Compassion for others can come from your failures. But also:*

2) From your observations: by watching/listening to others, we can begin to see & feel what they are facing & suffering. That's why it's important to be around people who are hurting (whom we tend to avoid). God may use them to instruct you, and create compassion in you. It's good to expose yourself to suffering people and painful situations. Then:

3) From your imagination: We tend to get hardened to suffering. Media reports assault us with victims of violence, so we turn down our nerves so we don't feel as much. "3 die in apartment building." "7 shot at birthday party." "961,000 abortions were performed last year." "Thousands homeless in Central America." They become just words, numbers, images, but we feel little; there's no compassion, unless we use our imagination. These are *people*. It was someone. What would it feel like to hold that baby with no future? Or to be homeless because of a wildfire? Or to be promised freedom for your family if you just get across the border, but end up selling your body to pay off drug runners? Or to be a border guard having to turn back or corral desperate people from desperate situations? Or to be abducted from a mall as an eight-year old and sold in human trafficking? Compassion will grow w/understanding—if you use your God-given imagination.

•Compassion will short circuit your anger; compassion closes our mouths but opens our hearts. When another lashes out, compassion realizes that you probably aren't the problem; that

more is going on beneath the surface, that the person who is angry is also needy. How easily could I be him?

[3. Be Forgiving]: And it's not usual word. This one means, "to forgive *freely, graciously*, even without asking." You're not holding any grudges, not wanting to see someone hurt or pay for how they hurt you; you're releasing them and letting God be the judge, rather than you being judge, jury, and executioner. The person doesn't have to grovel, or suffer, or squirm before you forgive. ("Yes, but you don't know what he did...") No, but I know what God in Christ did: He "completely and undeservingly forgave you." [Klyne Snodgrass/x] This is so basic to becoming Christlike. At heart of bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, and malice is an unwillingness to forgive. *Once you forgive, as Christ has forgiven you, those sick six die in the light.* [x]

End: Ask Don. You can know it all, but not live it at all. The bad stuff can creep up on you and take hold of you. So you must be ruthless with what is forbidden and embrace what is commanded. You *are* a new person. You are *different*. So you need to intentionally live a new life! Take off everything that God saved you from: you've showered & been cleansed by X's warm forgiveness! So dress appropriately w/the fresh clothes of your new life:

- *Respond to people and situations differently:* quickly forgive and show yourself to be kind and compassionate as you remember the kindness, compassion and forgiveness that God has shown you.

- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe said: ["If I accept..."] And that's not far off from what God is saying.

- You are no longer the person you once were, so you must no longer live as you once lived. *Let's make this confession together:*

[I am no longer...] 3x