

Sermon: Resentment is like taking poison and then waiting for it to kill your enemy  
Trinity Virtual  
8 August 2021

**Sermon:** Resentment is like taking poison and then waiting for it to kill your enemy

**Readings:** [Leviticus 19:17-18](#), [Matthew 5:44](#) and [Ephesians 4:25-32, 5:1-2](#)

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Make me a channel of your peace [Susan Boyle: Make Me A Channel Of Your Peace \(Lyrics\) - YouTube](#)

A new Commandment I give unto you [A New Commandment - St Mary's Virtual Choir - YouTube](#)

There is one thing I want you to take away from this morning's message and that is that "Resentment is like taking poison and then waiting for it to kill your enemy". And what I want you to do about this is to release resentment.

This is something that is easier said than done.

Holding on to resentment seems the right thing to do. I have been wronged. It gives me a kind of identity: "I am the wronged one here. I am the one that needs sympathy, I am not going to let this go!"<sup>1</sup>

Can you hear who is at the centre of this? "I am".

I have practised as a lawyer in the field of litigation over many years. Most cases deal with the question of what is right and wrong in terms of the law. But many are driven by grudges or resentment. I came to realise that when a client said I don't care what it costs I will fight this to the death that I needed to look closely at whether this was a case based on law or resentment.

I saw men and women twisted by resentment that destroyed themselves, their families, friends and their fortunes.

Holding onto their resentment became their life's purpose. Not letting go because they were the wronged, the victim, and their sole aim became inflicting harm on the target of their resentment whether or not the law supported their claim.

The situations were different whether family, community, church, business or international but often resentment drove the actions.

Have you seen situations like this? Have you experienced something like this yourself or seen this in others?

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<sup>1</sup> For the psychology of this see, for example: Why We Hold Grudges, and How to Let Them Go at: [Why We Hold Grudges, and How to Let Them Go | Psychology Today South Africa](#)

Maybe you have been the target of such resentment?

Can you relate to this?

We have just gone through turbulent and threatening times with the outbreak of looting, rampage, destruction of property on an enormous scale. Apart from the grief, physical and financial losses this leads to polarisation and resentment.

I want us to look at this morning's passage from Paul's letter to the Ephesians<sup>2</sup> to hear what God's Word says about this and how we are to live and react.

Paul had established the church in Ephesus the most important city in what is now Turkey. It was a commercial centre with a harbour that at that time opened into the Cayster River. Paul's longest missionary stay was in Ephesus being there for three years.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike other letters written by Paul, the letter to those in Ephesus did not address any particular error or heresy but rather broadened the understanding of God's purpose and grace and gave guidance on practical ways to fulfil God's purpose.<sup>4</sup>

Before Paul gets to giving guidance, he points out that we have been saved not only for our own benefit but also to bring praise and glory to God. Paul first draws attention to God's wisdom and purpose. In the first 10 verses of chapter 1 Paul deals with how we are adopted as children of God, sons and daughters, how this was done through Jesus in accordance with God's pleasure and purpose. How by grace we have redemption and forgiveness of our sins through the blood of Jesus. This by grace and not because of anything we have done. He goes on then to write:

*"9 God has now revealed to us his mysterious will regarding Christ—which is to fulfill his own good plan. 10 And this is the plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ—everything in heaven and on earth."<sup>5</sup>*

This is the gospel message;

- *God our Father, creator and righteous judge.*

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<sup>2</sup> [Ephesians 4:25-32, 5:1-2](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Acts 19:8-10; Acts 20:31](#)

<sup>4</sup> Introduction to Ephesians in NIV Study Bible pages 1790-1791.

<sup>5</sup> [Ephesians 1:9-10](#) (NLT)

- *Men and women separated from God through sin unable in their own strength to break this separation;*
- *God sent Jesus to die for our sins so that through his life, crucifixion and resurrection that separation would be broken; and*
- *That we are to respond to what has been done for us.*

Paul makes it clear by the repetition of the words "heavenly realms" that that our existence as Christ followers is not merely our lives here on earth.<sup>6</sup>

Practical guidance is given to the followers in the church at Ephesus as to how they were to live and to respond in order to fulfil God's purposes.

And this guidance is for us today as well.

The heading to chapter 4 in my bible is "Unity in the body of Christ".

I believe that all that Paul is saying in verses 25-32 can be summed up in the words of Matthew and Luke<sup>7</sup>:

*"Do unto others as you would have them do to you".*

Eugene Peterson paraphrases this in easy to understand words in The Message:

"Here is a simple, rule-of-thumb guide for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you, then grab the initiative and do it for them. Add up God's Law and Prophets and this is what you get."

We find a list of things we are not to do which include:

- Do not lie but speak the truth to your neighbour for we are all members of one body;
- Don't sin in your anger;
- Do not steal but do something useful so that you can share with others;
- Use your words to build up, not to breakdown;
- Do not hold on to bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander but be kind to each other, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

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<sup>6</sup> [Ephesians 1:3,20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31](#)

Guidance on how we are to live in response to what Christ did for you and for me.

As you hear these instructions do you see that they are guided by what has sometimes been described as the golden rule?

“Do unto others as you would have them do to you”.

How does one apply this rule?

There is a simple test that you can apply if you feel uncertain. The new Labour Relations Act introduced in 1979 contained a definition of an unfair labour practice. The definition was not helpful at all as all it said was that an “unfair labour practice” was a labour practice that was unfair. No guidance was given as to what actually constituted an unfair labour practice and it was left to the courts to develop the law.

When a client asked me whether an action they were contemplating could be held to be unfair I used to say:

*“Go and sit on the other side of the table. If someone did that to you would it feel fair?”*

If the conduct was potentially unfair this would invariably lead to the reaction:

*“No that wouldn’t be fair!”*

“Do unto others as you would have them do to you”.

Those actions listed in Ephesians 4: 29-32 are all based on love and not doing what you would not want someone else to do to you.

I want to focus on two of the verses this morning being Ephesians 4: 31 and 32<sup>8</sup>:

“31-32 Let there be no more resentment, no more anger or temper, no more violent self-assertiveness, no more slander and no more malicious remarks, Be kind to each other, be understanding. Be as ready to forgive others as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you.”

Remember that this letter was written to the believers at Ephesus to give them a better understanding of how they were to live in response to what had been done for them,

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<sup>8</sup> This from the JB Phillips Translation.

how to minister to one another, and how to promote unity in the church to fulfil God's purpose.<sup>9</sup>

Look at the instructions in these 2 verses.

It starts with the "*Let there be no more resentment.*"

"To resent" means to feel aggrieved about something or toward somebody because of a real, or perceived, wrong or injustice.

I have spoken about resentment and I will come back to that.

The further instructions in verse 31 flow from this.

*"Let there be ... no more anger or temper"*

There will be times when anger is justified. We saw this in Jesus when he cleared the Temple.<sup>10</sup>

There is a time for anger in response to injustice.

But in verse 26 Paul wrote "*In your anger do not sin.*"

This verse in the Amplified Bible reads like this:

<sup>26</sup>BE ANGRY [at sin—at immorality, at injustice, at ungodly behavior], YET DO NOT SIN; do not let your anger [cause you shame, nor allow it to] last until the sun goes down."

There are times when righteous anger is justified. Just because we are followers of Christ does not mean that we lose our emotions. Be angry, express that anger appropriately, but don't sin, don't let that anger cause you shame.

Do unto others as you would have them do to you is not a stand-alone instruction. We find its origin in Leviticus, the 3<sup>rd</sup> book of the Old Testament. In amongst the long lists of instructions and requirements in Leviticus we find this in chapter 19:

*"18 "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord."*

There is a "don't" and a "do".

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<sup>9</sup> Introduction to Ephesians in the NIV Study Bible page 1791.

<sup>10</sup> [Matthew 21:12-17](#); [Mark 11:15-19](#); [Luke 19:45-46](#); [John 2:13-22](#).

**Don't** seek revenge or bear a grudge – don't retaliate by inflicting harm and don't live with resentment.

**Do** love your neighbour as yourself.

Jesus when asked by a Pharisee, an expert in the law, what the greatest commandment was answered like this<sup>11</sup>:

*"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."<sup>12</sup> 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'<sup>13</sup> 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."*

Jesus quoting from Deuteronomy and from Leviticus.

*"Love your neighbour as yourself."*

*"Do unto others as you would have them do to you."*

Jesus took this even further when he taught:

*"But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be children of your Father in heaven."<sup>14</sup>*

Leave judgment and retaliation to God. Paul wrote this:

*"<sup>19</sup>Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. <sup>20</sup>On the contrary:*

*"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;*

*if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.*

*In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."*

*<sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."*

Are you just to be quiet when wrong is done to you by your neighbour – "neighbour" in the widest sense?

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<sup>11</sup> [Matthew 22:37-40](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Matthew 22:37; Deuteronomy 6:5](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Matthew 22:39; Leviticus 19:18](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Matthew 5:44-48](#)

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Go back to Leviticus 19 and read the verse that precedes the one instructing you to love your neighbour.

Verse 17 reads like this:<sup>15</sup>

*"17 "Don't secretly hate your neighbor. If you have something against him, get it out into the open; otherwise you are an accomplice in his guilt."*

In other translations "rebuke your neighbour".

We are not just instructed to stay silent and burn with resentment. Raise what you see as a wrong to you but don't let your anger let you sin.

By raising this you may find out that you were wrong, that there is an explanation for your neighbour's conduct to you.

Your neighbour may ignore your raising this. If this is the case "Leave room for God's wrath".

But don't let resentment burn as you secretly hate your neighbour, your spouse, your parent, your friend, your opponent.

When Nelson Mandela was released from 27 years of imprisonment serving a sentence imposed by an unjust government he had every right to harbour resentment and retaliate against those who had put him in prison.

But he did not do so. He said this:

*"Resentment is like drinking poison and then waiting for it to kill your enemy."<sup>16</sup>*

Let us think about this for a moment. You have been wronged (whether real or perceived). You don't raise this wrong with the person involved – don't bring it out in the open. But you resent what has been done.

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<sup>15</sup> [Leviticus 19:17 from The Message](#). From the NIV - 17 ""Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt.

<sup>16</sup> From: [Resentment Is Like Taking Poison and Waiting for the Other Person To Die - Quote Investigator](#)

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*"I am the wronged one here. I am the one that needs sympathy, I am not going to let this go!"*

And this silent resentment begins to grow and to twist you. You have taken the poison hoping that it will kill your enemy.

*"I will show her how I can cut her out. I will put him down when speaking to others when he is not there. I will spoil her chances of promotion.*

What are you and I to do about this?

Prayerfully go back to these instructions:

*"Do unto others as you would have them do to you."*

*"Love your neighbour as yourself."*

*"Let there be no more resentment, no more anger or temper, no more violent self-assertiveness, no more slander and no more malicious remarks,"*

*"Be kind to each other, be understanding. Be as ready to forgive others as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you."*

And then test yourself.<sup>17</sup> Think carefully whether you are harbouring resentment and then release that resentment". Psychologists will tell you the same but this instruction comes from God's Word to us.

Resentment is like taking poison and then waiting for it to kill your enemy. Release resentment today!

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<sup>17</sup> 2 Corinthians 13:5-9 The Message. 5-9 Test yourselves to make sure you are solid in the faith. Don't drift along taking everything for granted. Give yourselves regular checkups. You need firsthand evidence, not mere hearsay, that Jesus Christ is in you. Test it out. If you fail the test, do something about it.