

Dealing with Bitterness in Marriage

Paul's Three Step Process of Change Applied to Bitterness & Anger – Eph 4:31-32

- *Ephesians 4:22 commands us to put off the old practice*
- *Ephesians 4:24 command us to replace this by putting on the new practice*
- *Ephesians 4:23 commands us to be renewed in motivation (“the spirit of your mind”)*

PUT OFF (Eph 4:31)

All Bitterness

A perceived injustice unresolved

All Wrath

An energy to deal with the injustice

All Anger

A punitive response to a perceived injustice

All Clamor

Avenging wrong through noise

All Slander

Avenging wrong through unwholesome speech

All Malice

Avenging wrong through intent to physically harm

PUT ON (Eph 4:32)

Kindness

A good deed toward an offender intended to spiritually influence

Tender-heartedness

A good and true thought about an offender that promotes a desire to help

Forgiveness

A promise to remember the sin no more (public forgiveness - Luke 17:3)

OR

Forbearance (Eph 4:3)

Not dwelling on offense but entrusting justice/future to God. This allows me to speak the truth and involve others as needed out of love not bitterness (private forgiveness-Mk 11:25)

RENEW HEART/MIND (Ephesians 4:32-5:1)

Biblical Thoughts that Stir & Renew Your Heart for God & Spouse

- *I am to deal with my spouse's offense “just as” God in Christ has dealt with mine*
- *The treatment of God toward my sin becomes the ruling motive and model for how I am to deal with other's sins against me*
- *What sins of my past and present is God continuing to be kind, sympathetic, and forgiving towards? (Think of at least 2.)*
- *I am to extend to my spouse this grace I have received from God in Christ.*
- *The greatest gift I have received in my life is God's gracious responses toward my sin? When I choose to deal with my spouse's sin sinfully, I am provoking the Lord to not deal with my sin with such kindness, sympathy and forgiveness. (Mark 11:25; Lk 6:37; Mt 6:14; Mt 6:12; Mt 18:32-35)*
- *My opportunity to grow in the experience of God's grace and character is strengthened most when my spouse is most unworthy of such kindness and sympathy and I imitate Christ (Eph 5:1)*
- *So, based on all the above, what is God calling me to do and say that would help my spouse most? (Sometimes this question is easy to answer in the moment, but sometimes the answer requires biblical research and counsel from pastors or other spiritual leaders depending on the type of sin your spouse is committing. But regardless of the “next step” in dealing with your spouse's sin, learning to put off bitterness by replacing with these “put on's” and continuing to renew your heart with these thoughts prepares you to effectively discern and fulfill your responsibility in love.)*

ACTIONS STEPS

1. Examine the Injustice (Is it a true injustice? Has the law of God been clearly violated? What specific scriptures?)
2. Examine Your Heart (Why are you concerned? Is it more about me or is it because Christ's will is being disobeyed? Is it about a love and rescue mission? What's my God-given responsibility in this?)
3. Take Bitterness to the Cross Daily (At the cross, lay down your rights with Christ and pick up your responsibilities. Entrust your happiness to him, it is the wisest choice. Luke 14:26,27)
4. Fulfill Your Biblical Responsibilities in Dealing with the Sin of Another. What is your responsibility in this situation? Use list below to help you determine this:
 - a. Keep your conscience biblical and clear as you faithfully fulfill responsibilities in the various spheres of life – Phil 4:9; 1 Cor 4:2; Eph 6:10-13; Eph 5:15-17; Rom 12:6-16; Rom 13:8; Matt 7:5.
 - b. Pray fervently – Eph 4:6-7; Eph 6:18; Col 4:12; Heb 5:7; James 5:16
 - c. Let love cast out fear and self-preoccupation – do what is loving – 1 Jn 4:18; Rom 8:6; Phil 2:3-5.
 - d. Overcome evil with good – Rom 12:17-21
 - e. Keep your thoughts and words pleasing to the Lord – Ps 19:14; Eph 4:29-30; Prov 10:13
 - f. Speak out in loving concern, as needed – Eph 4:15; Prv 27:5-6; Ezek 2:3-7;3:18-19; Col 4:6; Lk 17:3
 - g. No gossip – keep the scope of other's sin as small as possible – Jms 4:11
 - h. Involve spiritual leadership or civil authorities, if needed – Matt 18:15-18; Rom 13:1-4
 - i. Submit and obey spiritual leadership so that the Holy Spirit is not grieved nor His and their work hindered – Heb 13:17; 2 Cor 10:6