

**Text: Ephesians 4:22-24,29-31**

**Title: “Detoxing Your Relationships ... Abuse”**

**SERMON BUMPER** – Let’s open our Bibles again to Ephesians 4:22. We’re in this series entitled “Detoxing Your Relationships.” Spiritual and emotional poison can easily build up in our souls and ruin relationships. We’re learning from the wisdom of Scripture about how to keep our relationships healthy. **Read Ephesians 4:22-24.**

This “righteousness and holiness” is an inward reality that is manifested in our outward relationships. Ephesians 4:25 begins with the word “therefore” and Paul launches into a series of exhortations about how we relate to others. Last week we talked about detoxing our relationships from selfishness, and picking up in v.29 today I want us to think together about detoxing our relationships from abuse.

**Read Ephesians 4:29-31.**

Abuse is so front-and-center in our society today. Just about every week there’s another revelation of a professional athlete beating up his girlfriend or a high profile actor or executive or minister abusing someone. That’s just the tip of the iceberg of what goes unseen and unreported. Why is there such a prevalence of abuse today? There’s a spiritual answer for that question. The Bible explains what the last days before Christ returns will be like ...

**2 Timothy 3:2 - People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy,**

So as the return of Christ draws near abuse will become more and more prevalent. But for us as believers it is part of our old sin nature that we must continually put away as we are putting on the new life we have in Christ. So first we have to ...

## **1. RECOGNIZE ABUSE**

In the verses we just read from Ephesians 4 the apostle has abusive relationships in mind. Particularly he is thinking...

### **VERBAL ABUSE**

**Ephesians 4:29 - Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.**

“Unwholesome talk” is just putrid, rotten, and poisonous talk. Some of these new believers came out of toxic relationships where abuse and violence was just the norm. Maybe that’s true of you. Maybe your family yelled and screamed at one another. Maybe you grew up being afraid that you were going to get smacked by a parent. The people you ran around with were foul-mouthed and violent. But the life you have in Christ now is different.

**Colossians 4:6 - Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.**

Salt is a substance that fights corruption and decay. Our speech should be helpful and truthful. But here’s the deal: the words that come out of our mouths actually reflect what’s in our hearts.

**ILLUSTRATION** – Long ago water was drawn up with a bucket out of a well dug in the ground. So what is in the well is going to come up in the bucket. The same thing is true with our words. What’s in the well of our hearts will eventually come out in the bucket of our mouths. Jesus said in Matthew 12:34 that out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. So when abusive words come out of our mouths it’s an indication that there’s some pretty nasty poison down in our hearts. And that’s what Paul was getting at in v.30.

**Ephesians 4:30 - And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.**

The Holy Spirit is living in us and by Him we have been stamped for ownership by God, set apart for God in holiness. The Holy Spirit is aware of what’s in our spirit. When we have poisonous attitudes in us the Spirit who is living in us is grieved and distressed. Abusive words are totally inconsistent with who we have been made to be in Christ. So we’re taught in ...

**Ephesians 4:31 - Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.**

“Bitterness” is the disposition of a person with a sharp tongue that can cut like a razor. “Rage” is the picture of someone who just blows up on others. “Anger” on the other hand is more like a roaring furnace that is constantly hot. “Brawling” is the picture of screaming and shouting at others. “Slander” is the word from which

we get our word “blaspheme.” It means to speak against someone. “Malice” is the feeling of hostility and hatred toward others that is at the very root of all abuse.

You see, it’s just as wrong to slug someone with your words as it is to slug someone with your fist. So that’s verbal abuse. It isn’t uncommon for verbal abuse to be accompanied by ...

## **PHYSICAL ABUSE**

The bitterness, rage, anger and malice that cause people to lose control of their lips can cause them to lose control of their fists. And over and over the Bible condemns this kind of sinful, hate-motivated violence. And it certainly should never take place in the home. Husbands are not to be verbally or physically abusive toward their wives.

**Colossians 3:19 - Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.**

Parents are not to be abusive towards their children:

**Colossians 3:21 - Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.**

When a parent treats their child abusively the child will become bitter and discouraged. But then there’s also...

## **SEXUAL ABUSE**

Everything that applies to verbal and physical abuse certainly applies to sexual abuse. Sexual abuse involves any unwanted sexual advances toward another person. It ranges from suggestive conversations to inappropriate touching to outright rape. And research reveals that churches are full of abuse victims, survivors and abusers.

In Deuteronomy 22 the Bible lays down the principles for how this kind of abuse was to be dealt with. The offender received the harshest of punishments and the woman was to be protected and not shamed. As we recognize abuse our hearts should be broken wherever we see it happening. We should care about and support those who are mistreated and abused.

**Hebrews 13:3 - Remember ... those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.**

By the way, if you have experienced abuse we invite you to email [counselor@travis.org](mailto:counselor@travis.org).

So we must recognize abuse and then we must...

## **2. REPENT OF ABUSE**

**Ephesians 4:31 - Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.**

Abuse is a sin against the character of God and against human beings who have been created in His image. You may think that it's no big deal, but it is. In fact, in Galatians 5 you have a list of the manifestations of the sinful nature. In Galatians 5:20 listed right along with sexual immorality and witchcraft are...

**Galatians 5:20 - idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions**

And it goes on to say that people whose lives have never been cleansed of these sinful attitudes through faith in Christ will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Verbal, physical or sexual abuse has no place in the life of a follower of Jesus. Admit it and quit it. Make it right with those you have hurt.

So we recognize abuse, repent of abuse and then we need to...

## **3. RESPOND TO ABUSE**

I'm thinking now about how a victim of abuse should respond. You need to know that God has you near to His heart. He cares for the oppressed and the abused. You don't deserve abusive treatment and you're not to blame. So first you should...

- **PRAY**

This is what Jesus did.

**1 Peter 2:23 – When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.**

Pray and entrust yourself to God for safety. Draw strength from His presence. Ask God to give you wisdom to know the right way to respond. Pray for God to change the abuser's heart. But having done that the next thing is...

- **PROTECT**

Protect yourself. You are not required to stay in an unsafe, abusive environment. Marriage is a covenant relationship which is broken by abuse. Scripture does not require an abused wife (or husband for that matter) to keep living in that dangerous situation. Do what is necessary to protect yourself and your family. Report it to the police and other appropriate authorities.

**Proverbs 22:24 - Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered,**

Pray, protect and then...

- **PREVENT**

Prevent your own spirit from becoming poisoned by the hatred and abuse of another.

**Romans 12:19, 21 - Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord ... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

You don't have to take revenge or retaliate because you know that one day God is going to deal severely with evil people who do not repent, including abusers. You don't have to be a prisoner to the guilt or to the feelings you have toward the one who has hurt you.

**VIDEO ILLUSTRATION** – The movie, "I Can Only Imagine" tells the story of Bart Millard who wrote and recorded the popular, award-winning song "I Can Only Imagine" with his band MercyMe. The story revolves around the abuse Bart endured from his father through Bart's growing up years. His dad, a non-believer at the time, severely abused Bart physically and verbally. As you might imagine

bitterness and anger grew in Bart to where he couldn't stand to be around his dad. But slowly his dad began to understand how devastating his abuse was and he began to try to change. He realized his need for Christ, and in one particularly emotional scene the dad said, "I have so many questions and I have no one to answer them." And though his dad is trying to reach out to him Bart simply cannot accept his dad's attempts to make things right. The hurt was just too deep. At one point his dad asked Bart, "If God can forgive everybody else why can't he forgive me?" Bart answers, "God can forgive you ... I can't." Bart storms out of the house and in his dad's pickup truck he discovers the evidence that his dad has been diagnosed with terminal pancreatic cancer ... and his heart suddenly changes. Watch this.

So pray for your abuser. Do what you have to do to protect yourself. But prevent the poison of bitterness from building up in you. "I choose to forgive \_\_\_\_\_." Through the power of Christ and the power of the cross, you can be forgiven and you can forgive.