

³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. 5 ¹ Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Dear brothers and sisters of our precious Savior;

Most Americans know recognize the name Benjamin Franklin. He contributed to and his signature is found on the Declaration of Independence. He is considered one of the Founding Fathers of our country.

Fewer Americans know this man: William Franklin, the son of Benjamin Franklin. He served as the governor of New Jersey, and remained loyal to England until his death. Their different points of view separated father and son not just in matters of politics, but placed a strain on their relationship that lasted until Benjamin Franklin's death. He viewed his son's loyalty to England as a personal betrayal.

The Franklins were not the first and nor the last who allowed strong personal feelings to tear apart their family. Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers...do you ever wonder how God's people could reach a point where bitterness and anger trump humility and love? Then again, maybe you don't wonder. How can it surprise us that people struggled a few thousand years ago when we see that same slander, spite and hatred everywhere we look today? This was the headline of an online article I read a few weeks ago: "Americans hate each other." Strong words, and a generalization, but certainly a headline that applies to far too many people today.

What is the solution? For Christians, no matter what nationality, no matter what flag they do or don't stand for—the answer is the same as it's always been: Jesus. Our theme this morning is

Christ's love conquers all

- 1. Christ's love overcomes our hate**
- 2. Christ's love forgives our sin**
- 3. Christ's love fuels our love**

1. Christ's love overcomes our hate: In the first verse of text Paul says: **"Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."** Time and again God takes us back to the day of our baptism—the moment that through water

and the Word, God branded us with the Holy Spirit; the day that God snatched us from the jaws of Satan and marked us his redeemed child. What a wonderful, joy-filled, miraculous day. But here's what this day wasn't. It wasn't the day that Satan signed his unconditional surrender papers. Instead, although we were branded as God's child, it's from that day that Satan has been trying to wrestle us away from our Heavenly Father. When we sin, we are grieving that very same Holy Spirit who made us his dwelling on the day of our baptism. If you were blessed with a relative who was an expert in home remodeling, someone who was able to turn a rundown home into a beautiful place to live, you never deliberately trash that house as he watched. Yet each time we sin, we take a sledgehammer to the Holy Spirit's home, to this temple of the Holy Spirit.

How do I avoid that? Paul says, **“Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.”** This isn't just a random list of sins—there is a bit of a progression. Paul starts with **bitterness**: bitterness is a state of mind that keeps a chip on my shoulder toward somebody else. It keeps a score of the wrongs against me while usually ignoring the other side—my side of the scoreboard. And this bitterness in my heart over what someone has said or done—or what I think they meant by what they said or what they did or what they posted—too often those bitter thoughts in my heart and head can lead to what Paul describes as **rage and anger**.

Rage is a sudden outburst, a loss of temper...something most of us have experienced. For many of us, that is often followed by a very sheepish apology. Anger—anger on the other hand describes the more subtle and deep-seated feelings of strong resentment that slowly spiral into feelings of deep hatred, hatred that my sinful nature tells me is justified. And what happens with this anger finally bubbles to the surface? Paul adds **brawling** and **slander** to the list.

I hear the word brawl and I think of the riots in Portland or Racine. And then I think, “Well, at last that's one thing I haven't done.” Unfortunately for me, and maybe for at least a few others, “brawling” is too narrow a definition of the Greek word. “An outcry, a clamoring, an insistent call for attention” would be a better choice of words. Using our words—written, spoken or posted—to incite anger against someone else or a different point of view. Passionate words that take on a tone of condescension or arrogance: *“Not only is this my point of view, it's really the only point of view anyone with any common sense should have.”*

The next word on Paul's “don't list”? **Slander**. To malign someone, speak poorly of them, to paint them in an unflattering light. Like any number of other sins, technology has made the sin of slander far too easy. Snarky social media posts, group texts that take shots at someone who can't defend themselves because they're not part of the group,

shared pictures of someone who has no clue that a picture is going to go public—all of these fit the definition of slander and none of them fit God's command to put the best construction on everything.

Paul's final catch-all: **"Get rid of every form of malice."** Every form of hostility, of ill will, hatred and spite. Paul lists all of these sins and says, **"Get rid of all of them."** Such an absolute, all-encompassing, seemingly impossible command. Paul leaves no wiggle room. Paul doesn't say, "Pick 3 of them and work on those." Paul doesn't say, "Try to cut down on your anger." Paul says, "Get rid of all of it. Eliminate it. Having nothing to do with these things." Perhaps we've never posted hateful words, or given a thumbs up to someone else's slander. But when we log on to social media or watch our favorite news channel, do we dive just a bit too deeply into a pool of spiteful slander that others so proudly profess as absolute truth?

Paul's solution for battling our sinful nature's love affair with hate? Paul's solution is the only solution that works: Christ's love for us and Christ's love for others. **Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.** "Be kind and compassionate." Being kind isn't too difficult to understand. Today there are "be kind" t-shirts, "be kind" websites, "be kind" publishing companies, "be kind" Facebook pages. But "be compassionate"—that might be a little more difficult. When we hear the word "compassion" we often think of showing someone love when they're hurting. And that certainly fits. But it can mean even more than that. Those old enough to remember the beautiful verbiage of the King James Version may recall: **"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."** Be tenderhearted. Not just to our children and grandchildren. Not just to our closest friends and soul mates. But be kind and tenderhearted to those whose political views cause you to cringe, be kind to those who each time you see them seem to find new ways to be intentionally or unintentionally obnoxious. That's a lot more difficult. How in the world can we bring ourselves to do that?

2. We will get to that, but first it's important that we listen closely to Paul's words in verse 31, to all of his words. If we aren't careful, we might only hear more law: "Be kind and compassionate." Another "do". Another command that I so often fail to follow. But listen to v.31 again: **Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.** Christ's love conquers all because it: **1. Overcomes our hate and 2. It forgives our sins.**

Just as in Christ, God forgave you. No matter what grudge I hold against someone else, no matter what someone has done to me, it will never compare to the number of times that I have betrayed my Savior. And yet, every single time, God forgives me. I look in the

mirror of God's law and that mirror reveals so many sins: sins of habit, sins of choice, sins of ignorance, sins of weakness. And then I look in my rearview mirror at the road that stretches back 6 decades and I see a lot of bitterness, rage, anger & and slander...all the things Paul tells me to be rid of. I look back and again and again I see myself doing what I as a child God hate doing and not doing what I know God has asked me to do.

But you know what else I see? Six decades of more blessings than I can count, year after year after year of God's never ending, always amazing grace. No matter how many detours I made, my Savior always rerouted me and got me back on track. And while I look in the mirror and see so many sinful failures, God looks down from heaven and God sees...no sin at all. God looks at me, God look at you and he sees Jesus, because as Paul says in our text, **“in Christ, God forgave you.”** And now what is the result? One wonderful truth is that I am forgiven, but there's another truth at work in this text. Not only am I forgiven, but now I am able to love and forgive others. How can that possibly be doable?

3. That's the third thing Christ's love does for us. **Christ's love overcomes hate, his love forgives our sins, and finally, Christ's love empowers our love.**

How can we love those who seem so unlovable? First of all, with God nothing is impossible. And secondly, because of these two phrases in our text: **“Forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you”, and “Walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”**

For a child of God who is holding on to a grudge, or has a chip on his shoulder, or struggles with feelings of hatred for those who so vocally oppose him, when Paul says, **“Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love...”** the choice is obvious and doable. I look back at the road of my life behind me and all of the blessings and all of God's grace and all of God's mercy...and then it's not, “Love them? I suppose I can try.” “I guess I'm expected to forgive.” Rather, the Holy Spirit dwelling inside of each of us leads us to say, “After everything God has done for me, how can't I, why wouldn't I forgive him?” And we pray, “God, help me walk in the way of love, even when facing those who to me seem so unlovable.”

“Walk in the way of love.” God will help you do that. And when you stumble, and you will—then the Savior who is walking right by your side, the Savior who 2000 years ago walked this same path in perfect love—that tenderhearted Savior will grab you by the hand and pull you back to his side. That's an amazing Savior, and that's his certain promise. Amen.