

## Grace Living, part 3

There are always two pathways, choices between right and wrong, righteousness and sin. When we come to that point the path looks like a narrow “Y”; it seems close together at the start, but gradually widens and separates. Believers have freedom to choose. On the one hand they can regress, go back to familiar ground, the soil of common sense that says, “choose what’s best for me.” Or they can decide to follow Jesus, wholly dependent on His strength and leading. God spoke through the prophet Jeremiah,

Thus says the Lord, “Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; and you will find rest for your souls.” But they said, “We will not walk in it.” (Jer. 6:16).

After giving Israel the Law Moses left this challenge,

“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. **So choose life** in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them” (Deut. 30:19-20).

The essence of the choice is life and death. Paul wrote,

“...in reference to your former manner of life, you **lay aside the old self**, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and **put on the new self**, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.” (Eph. 4:22-24)

Ephesians was written to the Christians at Ephesus

to remind them of the spiritual blessings they had in Christ and the importance of living a life that reflected those blessings.

Dr. Caroline Leaf writes,

“Our choices – the natural consequences of our thoughts and imagination – get “under the skin” of our DNA and can turn certain genes on and off, changing the structure of the neurons in our brains. So our thoughts, imagination, and choices can change the structure and function of our brains

on every level: molecular, genetic, epigenetic, cellular, structural, neurochemical and electromagnetic, and even subatomic. Through our thoughts, we can be our own brain surgeons as we make choices that change the circuits in our brains. We are designed to do our own brain surgery.”<sup>1</sup>

The results of living in the new nature is a series of behavioral changes:

**First**, we change from lying to telling the truth.

As believers we must make telling the truth a habit.

**Second**, from stealing to sharing.

Believers change from helping themselves when they have needs, to helping others in need.

**Third**, from angry responses to anger resolution.

Be angry but do not sin...

Being angry is no excuse for sin. Sinning in anger would include saying unkind things or acting in harmful ways toward others. When we get angry we should deal with it in such a way that it resolves anger at it's root cause.

Unresolved anger can give Satan a foothold in our lives, which results in further negative consequences.

*“Deal with anger before you become the ‘hulk’.”*

**Fourth**, from Unwholesome words to wholesome words.

Let no unwholesome words proceed from your mouth...

“If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all.”

I went on an adventure as a new college student and the motto was,

“Nothing is too hard to make me complain.”

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Caroline Leaf, *Switch On Your Brain*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), Pp. 55-56.

## 5. Natural Vices Vs. Supernatural Virtues

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, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Vs. 31-32)

This fifth result of living in the new nature is somewhat of a summary of what has gone before.

“*Put away*” six sins.

“*Put on*” three virtues.

The tendency of the natural man is to sin.

And the natural tendency of sin is to grow into greater sin.

This command is for Christians to beware of opening the door of bitterness, which grows progressively, and then drags you deeper into the ‘old man’.

The apostle says here to “Let the natural vices be put away from you.”

### I. The Natural Vices

- **Bitterness** (pikria) – reflects a smoldering resentment,
  - a brooding grudge-filled attitude.
  - It is a spirit of irritability that keeps a person in perpetual animosity, making him sour and venomous.

Bitterness happens whenever someone wrongs us and we fail to forgive. It becomes a doorway for Satan to do great damage in our lives.

- **Wrath** (thumos) – has to do with wild rage, the passion of the moment. Wrath is like smoldering coals that suddenly catches fire.
- **Anger** (orge) is more internal smoldering, a subtle and deep feeling.

One man complained, “*When I have an argument with my wife, she doesn’t get hysterical, she gets historical.*” She has a ‘timeless memory’. Anger is ageless.

- **Clamor** (krauge) – the shout or outcry of strife and reflects the public outburst that reveals loss of control.

Like rioters who are mad at someone, and want to yell.

- **Slander** (blasphemia, from which we get blasphemy) is an ongoing defamation of someone that rises from a bitter heart.

“Growl all day and you’ll feel dog-tired at night”

- **Malice** – (kakia), the general term for evil that is the root of all vices.

All of these terms describe someone whose mind is focused on wrongs, evils, and negative experiences. Their perspective is dominated and distorted.

“Two men looked through prison bars – one saw mud, the other stars.”

The perception of the Old Nature becomes its own evil end.

“An optimist may see a light where there is none,  
but why must the pessimist always run to blow it out?”

(Michel de Saint-Pierre)

All of these, Paul says, must be **put away from you**.

### **Put away**

“To pick up, carry away, sweep clean.” --Aorist passive, imperative “artheto”

1 John 1:9 - *The Believer’s Bar of Soap*

“If we confess our sins,  
He is faithful and righteous  
to forgive us our sins  
and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Our part: Confess

His part: Forgive and Cleanse (We confess/ God washes them away)

‘*Replacement Theology*’: God always has something better for us.

Replace natural vices with supernatural virtues

## II. The Supernatural Virtues

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other,  
just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

The graces God has shown us,  
are the gracious virtues we are to show others.

The reason we do this is because it's the way God treats us.

Ask: "What would Jesus do?"

Answer: "3 B's"

### 1. Be unconditionally kind

Be kind to one another...

Showing kindness first benefits others, then it benefits us.

"But love your enemies and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men." (Lk. 6:35).

If you want to act like God and be like God, then be kind.

### 2. Be Tender-hearted – "compassionate,"

showing empathy of someone else's need that is felt deeply.

An old but true saying,

"Others will not care how much we know until they know how much we care."

Pooh Bear is walking along the river bank. Eeyore, his stuffed donkey friend, suddenly appears floating downstream... on his back of all things obviously troubled about the possibility of drowning.

Pooh calmly asks if Eeyore had fallen in. Trying to appear in complete control, the anguished donkey answers, "Sill of me, wasn't it?" Pooh overlooks his friend's pleading eyes and remarks that Eeyore really should have been more careful.

In greater need than ever, Eeyore politely thanks him for the advice (even though he needs action more than he needs advice). Almost with a yawn, Pooh Bear notices, "I think you are sinking." With that as his only hint of hope,

drowning Eeyore asks Pooh if he would mind rescuing him. So, Pooh pulls him from the river. Eeyore apologizes for being such a bother, and Pooh, still unconcerned, yet ever so courteous, responds, “Don’t be silly you should have said something sooner.”

### 3. Be Forgiving

– means to cancel a debt.

forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Peter asked Jesus about forgiveness:

*“How many times should I be required to forgive someone’s wrongs against me?”*

He added a helpful suggestion: “7 times?”

Jesus answer was forgiveness without limitation “7 times 70!”

Then Jesus gave a story about a man who had embezzled a lot of money from the king’s treasury (an unpayable amount). And when he was found out was sentenced to be jailed and his family and possessions sold to repay the debt. But when the man pleaded with the king for mercy and time to repay the debt, the king had compassion on the man and forgave him the entire amount owed. Afterwards the servant found a friend who owed him a small amount of money but he was unable to repay. The servant who had just been forgiven a great amount showed no mercy and had him thrown into prison. When word got back to the king of what he had done, he withdrew his former forgiveness and threw the man into prison, to the place of tormentors until he should repay the entire debt.

The story was about God, who forgave us our great debt of sin.

We forgive because we have been forgiven.

The final verse of the story says,

“My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.” (Matt. 18:34).

Dr. Caroline Leaf in her book, *Switch on your Brain*, writes,

“Every morning when you wake up, new baby nerve cells have been born while you were sleeping that are there at your disposal to be used in tearing down toxic thoughts and rebuilding healthy thoughts.”<sup>2</sup>

“Research shows that when we don’t engage in this disciplined and focused self-reflective pattern of thinking that activates the DMN [default mode network that links our minds to our spirit], we may experience negative self-esteem depression,

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<sup>2</sup> Caroline Leaf, *Switch On Your Brain*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), p. 25.

worry, anxiety, and health issues, and over-focus on generalized and short-term memory issues. We may get stuck, unable to cope, and have a tendency to focus on the problem and not the solution..."<sup>3</sup>

In Paul's letter to the Colossians he writes,

"So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity." (Col. 3:12-14).

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 85.