

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Forgive Us Our Sins, Part 4

Scripture: Luke 11:4

Code: 42-155

Well again this morning we are so privileged to open the Word of God to Luke chapter 11, if only for a glance at it, but to extend the theme that we've been looking at over the last couple of weeks as we noted last time. Let's turn to Luke chapter 11. And in the opening four verses we have the familiar teaching of Jesus which we often call "The Lord's Prayer." It is a passage somewhat parallel to the Matthew 6 passage where the Lord first gave this instruction on how to pray.

You will remember that one of the disciples, probably on behalf of all the rest, came to Jesus and said, "Lord, teach us to pray." John the Baptist taught his disciples to pray. And now we need You to teach us to pray because in that particular religious environment, the way people prayed, the way the rabbis and the Pharisees and the scribes prayed was not the right way to pray, it was vain empty repetition, demonstration of spiritual pride, etc. They didn't know how to pray as they should pray. They heard Jesus pray and they knew He prayed very differently, and so they came and said, "We want to learn how to pray."

Jesus then teaches not only them, but all of us how to pray. What you have here, as I've been saying, is not a prayer to pray but a way to pray, a structure, a skeleton, a framework for all our praying. And so He said to them in verse 2, "When you pray say, 'Father, hallowed be Thy name, Thy Kingdom come, Give us each day our daily bread and forgive us our sins for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us and lead us not into temptation.'" That last petition in the prayer we will consider next Lord's day and finish this study.

But for today, we are still at the beginning of verse 4 and covering the petition, "And forgive us our sins and the accompanying comment, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us." Part of learning how to pray is learning how to ask for forgiveness. And to expect to receive it, we must give it, that's what our Lord said. We can say, "Father, forgive us our sins, because we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us." We can expect the Lord to forgive us because we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. And, of course, this is exactly what Jesus taught originally up in Galilee as recorded in Matthew 6 when He taught on that occasion for us to pray, "Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors," and then said, "For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions." So this is the only petition in this prayer, this is

the only instruction that has a caveat, that has a requirement, that has a prerequisite. We can go to the Lord as believers, we're talking as believers about this temporal forgiveness, this relational forgiveness, we can go to the Lord and ask Him to keep our feet clean, as we learn in the picture of Peter in John 13, we can go and ask Him to wash us day in and day out and expect to be cleansed and therefore blessed and therefore receive joy and peace and assurance and usefulness and have an effective witness, we can ask Him for that, expecting to receive that daily cleansing when we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

Now, as we've been saying, nothing is more foreign to human nature than forgiveness. It is really an aberrant way of thinking among non-believers. It is characteristic of a sinful nature to be angry, to hold a grudge, to be bitter, to seek revenge, to desire vengeance, to want to get back. Retaliation is just built in to the fabric of our fallenness. Nothing is more strange to the unregenerate than a full and free attitude of forgiveness toward those who have harmed them. And, of course, we've turned vengeance and retaliation and this kind of anger and bitterness into some kind of a virtue that identifies us as strong and resolute and self-confident and sort of unassailable. And so we say nothing is more foreign to human sinful nature than forgiveness. On the other hand, nothing is more consistent with the divine nature than forgiveness. Nothing is more consistent with the divine nature than forgiveness. And now we as Christians who have had God take up residence in us and who have been transformed in some measures by the very life of God, should manifest the character of God. So then, for a Christian to be unforgiving is unthinkable, inconsistent, unacceptable. Unforgiveness, in fact, is a sin. We don't usually think of it when we list sins, but it is a sin to be unforgiving. It seems to us more acceptable a sin say than murder, or more acceptable than any other serious crime or violation of the second half of the Ten commandments. It seems to us a less serious sin than drunkenness, a less serious sin than sexual sin. But it is not. Unforgiveness in some ways is worse than anything because unforgiveness essentially leads to the dissolution of everything. Unforgiveness is more frequently found in the open among Christians. Christians don't usually like to talk about moral sins, they don't like to talk about their violations of the Ten Commandments, they don't like to talk about their breaches of the lists of sins in the New Testament. But it's amazing to me how easily Christians talk with vengeance, bitterness, anger and hate. How they seemingly get some satisfaction out of sucking somebody else into their bitterness by rehearsing for someone else what some person has done to them, thereby parading their lack of forgiveness, forgetting that this is not a....this is not a downgrading of the person who has violated them as much as it's a downgrading of themselves because of their unwillingness to forgive. Oh no, we're very eager to parade the list of offenses against us before other people, we're very glad to talk about all the things that people have done to us and why they're terrible people and why they ought to be considered so and why you ought to know how bad that person is. And we forget that that is an unmasking of the worst of all things and that is an unforgiving heart. Our Lord makes it pretty clear here that He despises an unforgiving heart. In fact, so much so that He will not carry on that daily forgiveness in the life of

someone who is himself or herself unforgiving. Forgiveness comes up a lot in the New Testament, and we'll see that, we're already seeing it. It comes up a lot. It is constantly a part of the Lord's teaching. It's in His sermons, it's in His parables, it's in His private conversations, and here it's even in His prayers. I mean, the last prayer Jesus ever prayed prior to saying, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit," the last prayer He ever prayed on behalf of anybody was, "Father...what?...forgive them." Nothing is more foreign to the fallen nature of human beings than forgiveness. And so we deal with it as Christians all the time because it's there in that remaining flesh, that fallenness, that unredeemed humanity that's still so much a part of us. And here is a wonderful opportunity for the Lord to say, "Now, you can go to the Father and you can ask Him to forgive your sins with the expectancy that He will do that because you have forgiven others." It is the only petition in this prayer that has an explanation. It's the only petition that has a comment. Of all the things that could have been said about God being Father, about His name being hallowed, about His Kingdom coming, about His will being done, about praying for daily sustenance, even about leading us not into temptation, nothing is said. But what is said is this matter of forgiveness...don't expect it unless you give it. It's not a virtue if you won't forgive somebody. It's not a virtue for you to talk to other people about what some have done to you that's so wrong, that manifests a bitterness of heart that indicates to the person you're telling that to that you yourself have voluntarily, I suppose, cut yourself off, or blocked the path of God's blessing.

Now we're not talking about eternal forgiveness, remember eternal forgiveness we received in our justification. That settles the issue of heavenly blessing. We're talking about temporal forgiveness that moves us on the path of sanctification. That settles the issue of earthly blessing. We need to be forgiving people. We need to be known for our forgiveness. That should be the reputation of all Christians and yet how sad it is that even in the church of Jesus Christ, in many, many places in many relationships and sometimes on a church-wide level, unforgiveness reigns as king, doesn't it? Some of you have lived long enough to see that firsthand in the escalating conflicts and hostilities that occur in a church ultimately because people won't forgive. It's a travesty and you show me a church that is ruled by bitterness and anger and hostility and a lack of forgiveness, and I'll show you a church where people are cut off from the purifying cleansing that goes on or should go on every day and they're outside blessing.

So, the strongest reason, the greatest motivation to forgive is that you're not going to be forgiven if you don't forgive. You will not lose your salvation, you will lose your joy, your peace, your assurance, your usefulness and your witness. But I told you last time there are more motives than just that one. That's not all Jesus taught about this. This seems to be the *sunum(?) bonum*, the *heirpunct(??)*, this seems to be the...the most crucial one because He put it in the formula for all our prayers. But there are some undergirding pillars to reinforce this matter because it is such a problem...such a problem.

Last week I gave you three more reasons or motives for forgiveness. Number one, you remember, was forgiveness is the most God-like act you can do. Never are you more like God than when you forgive. Ephesians 4:32, "Forgive one another even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you." Your model is God. God forgives and you forgive. You're never more like God than when you forgive. Love your enemies. God loves His enemies and even lets the rain fall on them and blesses them and does them good. You're never more like God than when you forgive. And if you say you're a child of God, then you ought to act like your Father. And if your Father is marked by love and forgiveness, then you ought to be marked by love and forgiveness. Don't say you're the child of God and not manifest the characteristics that identify God as God.

Secondly last time we said the sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," does not just forbid murder. The sixth commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," does not just forbid murder, it also forbids hate. How do you know that? Because Jesus said that. He said, "You've been told by the ancients, you've been told by the rabbis thou shalt not kill and if you kill you'll be liable to the court." In other words, you'll be punished appropriately for murder. "But Jesus said, I'm telling you if you say 'raca'...which was sort of an Aramaic epithet meaning somebody was blank minded, empty headed and idiotic. "Or if you even call somebody a fool," which is essentially the same thing, "you'd be guilty of hell fire." John expands on that by simply saying, "If you hate your brother, you are a murderer," 1 John 3:15. So Jesus is saying when...when God commanded "Thou shalt not kill," He wasn't just limiting the commandment to the action, He was also engaging with the heart. If you hate somebody or resent somebody, feel anger and bitterness and vengeance toward somebody, you have broken the sixth commandment. You are in violation of the Law of God, therefore you are guilty, therefore you have put yourself in a position not to receive His cleansing until you have confessed and repented of that, demonstrated it by forgiving whoever it is you've held the grudge against.

Thirdly, this is just review, whoever has sinned against you has sinned greater against God. Whoever has sinned against you has sinned greater against God. You understand that, right? Whoever did something against you has done far, far more against God. I mean, look at yourself. You've accumulated basically against God a massive list of sins, is that not true? Every evil thought, every evil word, every evil action, every thing that was good that should have been done you didn't do, every omission as well as commission. You have accumulated a massive debt. The handwriting of ordinances against you, Paul calls it in Colossians, and all of your sin, all of it, every sin you've ever committed is against God because God is the holy God who is offended by all sin and God is the law giver whose law is personally violated by you. And it is God's glory that is stolen and it is God's will that is disobeyed. Therefore any sin you sin against another person is small compared to your list of sins against God. Somebody may have sinned against you and you've got this little short list of their offenses against you...and you're not going to forgive? And God has this massive list of every sin you've ever committed and will commit against you and He will forgive? The incongruity of that is pretty staggering. Look at yourself for what you really are. You have a severely elevated opinion of yourself.

He is absolutely holy, every sin is against Him, the list of iniquities committed against Him is so far greater than any list committed against you and yet He is eager to forgive. He is marked by forgiveness. He loves to forgive. Who in the world are you to take your little list and make it a source of bitterness, hatred and vengeance. He who is most holy and who has endured all sin against Him forgives. Who are you who are least holy and has endured a small amount not to forgive?

Now with those as a review, let's go on and pick up number four. Here is the fourth motive for forgiveness. It is only reasonable that those forgiven the greater sins forgive the lesser. It is only reasonable that those forgiven the greater sins forgive the lesser.

The last point said that God is more offended than you're more offended. Now we're not talking about the offense against God and against you, we're talking about the sin itself. And we go back to the same idea. We have been forgiven by God this inconceivable unpayable debt, it's just beyond our capability to do restitution. Shall we not forgive the small debts of others?

Now I want to take you to a passage in Matthew 18 because it's really the watershed passage on this, the benchmark passage, Matthew 18, to look at it. It's sort of launched by a conversation that Jesus had with Peter. And what it tells us here is so important because it makes a comparison between sins against God and against us. Not only is God the most holy and He forgives and we are the least and we should, but the greater sins, the more massive debt accrued is against Him, the lesser against us.

Now this all comes about in verse 21 when Peter comes and says to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?" And this is in the context of Jesus talking about church discipline, talking about forgiveness, talking about going to a person who sins and trying to get them to repent and restoring them to the life of the church. And the discussion then is about sin within the fellowship of the church. And Peter says, "How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him?" And I think Peter...he had some background when he asked that question, he knew that the rabbis taught that you only forgive somebody three times...that's it, three times and no more. And they drew that basically out of the prophecy of Amos back in the Old Testament because in Amos, I'll just read it to you, Amos chapter 1 verse 3, you read this, "Thus says the Lord, for three transgressions of Damascus and for four I will not revoke its punishment." And the way the rabbis interpreted that was you get three, on the fourth one the hammer falls. Okay? You get three, number four...you're done. And then in verse 6, same first chapter of Amos, "Thus says the Lord, for three transgressions of Gaza and for four I will not revoke its punishment." Then you come to verse 9, "Thus says the Lord, for three transgressions of Tyre and for four I will not revoke its punishment." So on three different occasions in three different areas of God's judgment, He says, "You get three

and the fourth, the hammer falls." So the rabbis picked up on that, extrapolated off of that and said, "God forgives three times, four times...you're done, and we do the same."

So Peter, feeling magnanimous says, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him, up to seven times?" Expecting the Lord to say, "Wow, Peter, that's big of you. Wow, you're getting the picture here." Well he was sort of getting the picture, at least he was getting a glimpse of how grace operated and he certainly had seen forgiveness in the Lord, hadn't he? The Lord had been actively forgiving sin through His ministry. Peter was being very gracious, magnanimous...seven times?

And Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven." Seventy times seven? That's...that's...that's a lot of forgiveness. I mean, is He saying get a calculator out and when you go one over that you can drop the hammer? No. Here He's saying, "Seventy times seven," He's just taken Peter's number and multiplying it into the absurd. In Luke 17 Jesus said something different but similar to the same discussion. "If your brother sins, rebuke him. If he repents forgive him. If he sins against you seven times a day and returns to you seven times a day saying...I repent...forgive him." So you might have to forgive him seven times a day, you might have to forgive him 490 times, the point is you forgive him, and you forgive him, and you forgive him, and you forgive him. There's no limit to your forgiveness. It's always there, it's always available.

So Peter thinks he's being very, very generous and Jesus' statement, I think, is shocking, to put it mildly...very shocking. Jesus may have been borrowing a little bit of the imagery, can't be sure about it, but it is an interesting comparison. Go back to Genesis 4 because in Genesis 4 you meet this really awful man named Lamech...Lamech. I never met anybody named Lamech, it's no wonder. What a terrible person.

Lamech had a lot of problems, the first one is indicated in verse 23, "Lamech said to his wives, Adah and Zillah...that was his first problem, one too many...he sits his wives down and pontificates in a very ugly fashion. Listen to my voice, you wives of Lamech. Give heed to my speech. I have killed a man for wounding me and a boy for striking me. Now if Cain is avenged sevenfold, as God said he would be, then Lamech seventy-seven fold." I'm telling you something, girls, don't mess with me. I just killed a man, I just killed a boy...which means a young man with some strength, I took care of him. I'm telling you, and if you do anything to me, you'll get my vengeance seventy-times seven. What a great way to build a relationship, huh? What a horrible guy.

It sort of came to mind as I was thinking about this, and Jesus sort of in the genre of all the sevens that revolve around vengeance and forgiveness says, "No, it's not vengeance seventy times seven, it's forgiveness seventy times seven. That's how much you forgive."

Wow, this is stunning stuff, really shocking. And Jesus then needs to explain this. So he tells a story in verse 23, "For this reason the King of Heaven may be compared to a certain King, for the reason as explaining this. The Kingdom of Heaven, the realm of God's rule over the hearts of those who belong to Him, believers, may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves." Slaves is a big word, these slaves were not the kind of slaves who did menial tasks, these were provincial governors. The imagery is you have a king, the king rules a realm, a nation, and within that there are regions, there are areas that are assigned to vice-presidents, or vice-rulers and their responsibility is to collect taxes. They were called satraps in ancient days. They were responsible to collect taxes for the king in that area and then bring the money in to the king and show that they had done dutifully what they were supposed to do.

Well they come in, these provincial rulers, and they give an account. And he's settling these accounts in verse 24 when he begun to settle with them, "There was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents." Now here comes one of these men who has been responsible to collect all this for the king and he hasn't got anything. He...he literally owes him ten thousand talents, that is the largest means or measure of money in the Roman world, a talent. This would be known as what was called the attic talent, just like the way you spell attic, a-t-t-i-c. An attic talent, now an attic talent would be worth about six thousand denarii, sixteen years' wages for ten thousand men, that's a lot, millions and billions. He owes him a fortune. And, in fact, the word here for ten thousand is the largest word in the Greek language for a number. There is no word for any number larger than ten thousand, this is the word *murion* from which we get the word myriad. And the very same word translated ten thousand here is translated in 1 Corinthians 4:15 countless, and in Revelation myriads. He owed him myriads, he owed him a countless amount. It's very unlikely that it landed exactly on ten thousand, but that's simply a figure to describe an unpayable amount.

To put that in perspective, in the first century we have some historical records that indicate the total...the total annual revenue collected by Roman Israel for a given year was nine hundred talents. So this is a huge amount. Solomon's temple had eight thousand talents of gold, less than this man owed. And so he's in a very dire situation.

Well, verse 25 says, he didn't have the means to repay. Well what do you...how could you possibly embezzle that amount of money and not have anything left? It doesn't tell us because this man doesn't exist, but the dilemma is the man has defrauded the man, the king of all this, and he hasn't got any of it. So his lord commanded him to be sold along with his wife and children and all that he had in repayment to be made. That's a most fascinating thing to me. The lord says,...I'll give whatever I can get, maybe I can get a penny on a dollar. I don't know what he's worthy as a slave and his wife and his kids, but I'll get anything I can out of him...sell him. This is, in a sense, a picture

of eternal punishment, it's a picture of hell. God doesn't get the debt paid in hell but He gets what He can because the debt could never be repaid, that's why hell is forever.

Well the slave in verse 26 falls down, prostrates himself and he says, "Have patience with me and I'll repay you everything." Are you kidding? I like his spirit, but that was ridiculous. It couldn't happen. And sometimes the sinner does get to the point where he thinks he can make restitution with God, you cannot. Your list of sins is so massive, so far-reaching, so incalculable, so unpayable you couldn't pay it back. Silly sinners think they might be able to pay it back, somehow go back and erase the sins by accumulating virtues. You see, the sinner is in a situation where he may initially think he can somehow make things right on his own, but he absolutely cannot...cannot. And the Lord knows that and in verse 27 you have a picture of salvation by grace, "And the lord of the slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt."

Now if you're standing there on that day and you're listening to Jesus tell this story, you're just absolutely stunned by this. Because everything is exaggerated, everything is over the top, as we would say today. The debt is way out there. The man is silly thinking he can pay it back because he can't. And then the king who just hears the guy make this plea, "Have patience with me and I'll do my best to make it right," feels compassion, releases him, forgives him the debt, "You can go." Stunning, shocking, bizarre.

But if you think that's shocking, listen to the next. That slave went out, found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii, a little over three-months work, seized him, began to choke him, "Pay back what you owe me." Verse 29, "So his fellow slave fell down...here's the same language...began to entreat him, gave the same speech, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.'" You can't pay your debt to God but somebody might be able to pay their debt to you. He was unwilling, however, went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. That was hard to do, debtor's prisons were very common, you never really could work so how were you going to pay back what you owe? Prisons have always been a basically bad idea. In fact, they were started by Quakers and they're called penitentiaries because they thought if people sat in there they'd become penitent. It doesn't work like that. But they still threw them in, it was a way to wreak their vengeance.

This is absurd, absolutely absurd. How can a man be forgiven an incalculable debt, turn right around and choke somebody, throw him in debtor's prison for a meager offense? It's just, it's just absolutely unthinkable. And isn't that the whole point? It's only reasonable that those have been forgiven the greater sins forgive the lesser. I mean, who in the world are we to hold an unforgiving, vengeful, bitter, angry heart against someone for the meager little offenses against us when God has forgiven us everything? I would venture to say, if you have unforgiveness toward somebody, you just don't get it...you just don't get it. You have not yet been humbled enough by your salvation, is that fair

enough?

Well let me add a fifth point, and the fifth point would be this, here's another motive to forgive...the one who is unforgiving will lose the love of other Christians. The one who is unforgiving will lose the love of other Christians. Personally, I don't really like to hang around unforgiving people, do you? I don't feel like I want to make my fellowship with people who are bitter, angry, full of revenge, vengeance. They're dangerous. And they tear up the fellowship, or they tear up churches, they tear up marriages, they tear up families, they tear up businesses...you name it. But let's look at that verse 31 and see what happens here.

"His fellow slaves when they saw what happened," it was just incredulous. They saw what this guy did after having been so forgiven, "They were deeply grieved, came and reported to their Lord all that had happened." They told on him to God, it's not as if God didn't know, but in the story they did what they should have done, they went to God. You know what this pictures? This pictures..."We have somebody in our fellowship among us, one of the forgiven who won't forgive and that person is sinful, that person is leaven, that person is a bad influence, this is disturbing and distressing to our fellowship. Lord, you need to do something about this." This really starts to activate discipline, doesn't it? They turned the unforgiving man over to the Lord. It sounds like 1 Corinthians 5, right? When you have somebody who sins, turn him over to the Lord so that he can learn not to blaspheme and the Lord will take care of him, the Lord will discipline him, the Lord will work on him. May destroy his flesh to save his soul.

If you really want to alienate yourself from the fellowship, then be an unforgiving person. Nobody really wants to fellowship with bitter, angry people who tend toward vengeance and have no forgiveness in their hearts. Since all of us are weak and all of us sin, we feel comfortable with forgiveness, right? And so you cut yourself off. You want to be lonely? You want to be alone? You want to have your own little world all to yourself? Then just be full of bitterness and anger and unforgiveness and nobody will want to get anywhere near you. And that's sad. At the same time, they'll want to be pleading to the Lord to do whatever He needs to do in your life to turn around that attitude, even if it's the destruction of your flesh in some severe act of chastening.

And that leads us to a sixth, as long as we're looking at motives and digging deep into this, staying in the story...failure to forgive results in divine chastening...failure to forgive results in divine chastening. And these are all tied together, linked.

So what happens? The Lord now knows because the others have told. They've acted. They don't want this guy in this condition in their fellowship and they turn him in to the Lord, as it were. "Lord, You've got to do something." And He does. Verse 32, "Summoning him, the Lord said to him, 'You

wicked slave," And everybody would say, "Yeah! Yeah!" "I forgave you all that debt just because you asked...no merit, no earning, no gain, you couldn't pay it back, I didn't ask you to pay it back. You asked, and I forgave you, that's all." That is salvation by grace alone. "Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?" Obviously. This is a just anger. This is a righteous anger. "Hand him over to the torturers." Wow...to the tormentors, might be another word, the lictors. What do you mean? Well they strapped him to a post and chuk-chuk-chuk-chuk-chuk, whipped him. You know, this is a good way to put yourself in a very severe relationship with the Lord. You're His child, but I'll tell you what, you step out of line as His child in this category of unforgiveness and you're going to find that you're not going to escape the discipline of the Lord, right? Every son He loves He..what?...chastens, and scourges. Same kind of language. Torturers? Strong word, serious chastening comes from the Lord when we don't forgive. Listen to James 2:13, really good, simple, straight-forward, "Judgment will be merciless to the one who shows no mercy. Judgment will be merciless to the one who shows no mercy." Or the Beatitudes, Matthew 5:7, "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy."

God isn't going to take away your judicial forgiveness. He's not going to take away your salvation. You're not going to lose your status as a son of God, you're not going to forfeit heaven. But you're going to have a touch time on earth because you're going to be under the ongoing discipline. Strong word, that word torturers, again the NAS does us a service by translating it in that strong way. What is this torture? Well, it could be a lot of things. It's when no matter where you turn in life if things are not the way they should be, your joy isn't there, your peace isn't there, your assurance isn't there, your usefulness isn't there, your witness isn't there. The Christian life isn't what it should be, there's a dryness and a dullness and an emptiness. There's a sadness, perhaps. There's conflict, stress, hardship, difficulty, trouble. And you're looking all around wondering why it's all going on and here you go, get back to this. If you're willing to forgive, then all you have to do is bring the rest before the Lord and ask Him to forgive and you'll receive that forgiveness and everything will be cleaned and purified and you'll be on your way to blessing. Listen to Luke 6:36, "Be merciful just as your Father is merciful." That's a summation of the whole parable. God was merciful to you and to the same extent that He was merciful to you, be merciful to others. How merciful was God to you? He was massively merciful to you. So how merciful are you to somebody else? You forgive him how many times? Three times? No, seven times how many? Endlessly. Isn't that how God's forgiven you? That's how God's forgiven you.

Now number seven in this little list, another motive for forgiveness, the absence of forgiveness renders us unfit to worship...the absence of forgiveness renders us unfit to worship. Now while you're in Matthew, if indeed you are, go back to chapter 5 and because in chapter 5 we get a little bit different angle on this. Forgiveness is so important that it is to be pursued in the fellowship. And by that I simply mean, not only am I who am unforgiving to forgive, but if I am in fact forgiving and I know

someone who is not forgiving, I need to address that. I mean, I need to go to the people who aren't forgiving and address that sin...particularly if it relates to me. Look at verse 23 of Matthew 5. "If therefore you're presenting your offering at the altar," okay, this is a sort of a motive worship. You...we don't have a temple here and you're not bringing animal sacrifices or anything else, but you come here to bring the fruit of your lips, even praise to our God, this is your offering. You come to offer your worship and your praise to God. "There you remember that your brother has something against you." There is somebody in the fellowship who hasn't forgiven you, or you have done something to someone that has never been made right because you haven't gone and asked for that forgiveness, He says, "Leave your offering, drop it on the spot, go your way. First be reconciled to your brother then come present your offering."

Now what Jesus is saying here is the absence of forgiveness renders you unfit for worship. If you have offended somebody and so they hold a grudge against you, or if they've offended you and they know you're offended at them and therefore that is compounded, if those things exist, make them right before you come to worship. See, what should reign in the church is forgiveness. I don't think this means, you know, oh my goodness there's so many people who have things against me, I can never go to church. Are you kidding me? I mean, there are people who have things against me, and the list of things that people have against me, there's a long list of those things...am I supposed to say on Saturday, "Okay, get out all the phone numbers and I'm going to call everybody up and try to make everything...." I don't think that's the idea at all. I don't...in fact, I'm not looking for things I don't know, please, if you have something against me and I don't know it, don't tell me because the condition here is I have to remember it. Did you see that? If you remember...it's something you know about, it's something that's in your experience. I don't want to know what I don't need to know. People have come to me, especially when they used to go to Bill Gothard's seminars and Bill Gothard would tell these people, "You go if you have bitterness against anybody and tell them how you felt and ask their forgiveness." Well, I had people, I thought, loved me come to me and say, "You know, I don't really like you at all and I've held this in my heart." And I would say to that, "That is not helpful. I liked you better before you told me that." I'm not trying to uncover...I'm not trying to uncover everybody's animosity, but where there is an engagement with somebody that I know has left them with an attitude that isn't right, I need to make that effort to make that right. If I hadn't participated in it, if it's oblique to me, I don't need to get engaged in that because I'm not holding out anything. This is the person who knows that there's something that isn't right and that it should be made right and is not willing to go. Before you worship, you need to take care of that because when you do come to worship, you know, you want to be sure all those relationships are as they should be, that's what the Lord says. Don't draw near to God with the intention to worship Him if you have an unsettled grudge with somebody else. Reconciliation proceeds worship. And even if we don't hold any anger, we know how that person feels and that gives rise to certain attitudes in our own heart, doesn't it? As best we try not to have them regardless of whose fault it is and sometimes whose fault it is gets lost,

you know, in what you hear when you get into these kinds...there's always two sides to every story. I've never believed that for a minute. There's always sin on both sides, but there are people who are at fault. But whatever the fault may be initially, out of that rises bitterness, reciprocity, anger, unforgiveness. You need to resolve those things. And if you know they exist, take care of those before you come to worship.

Number eight, not to forgive is to usurp the authority of God. It's a sort of "who do you think you are," right? Not to forgive usurps the authority of God. This is the ultimate ego trip. "Well, God may forgive you, but I won't." Really...really...are you the judge of all the earth? Romans 12, I think Romans 12 says it...this is stated a number of places even in the Old Testament, but Romans 12 pulls it all together, both Paul and the Old Testament which he quotes. But if you'll look at verse 14 of Romans 12, Paul says, "Bless those who persecute you, bless and curse not." Now how would you bless somebody by forgiving them? By wishing them well, by praying for the best for them. And then you drop down in to verse 17, when somebody persecutes you, somebody curses you, you bless them. Verse 17 says, "You never pay back evil for evil to anyone, never." That's...you never do that...never. Verse 19 tells you why. "Never take your own revenge, beloved, leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'" That's a couple of places in the Old Testament.

You don't have to do the vengeance part. God will do that. God will do that. You give back blessing. You give back forgiveness. You give back peace. Never take revenge, allow room for the wrath of God. On the other hand, verse 20 says, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him a drink. In so doing, you'll heap burning coals upon his head." Also drawn out of the Old Testament. You'll bring shame upon him. His face will be so red it will be...it will be demonstrating his shame that he would treat you the way he treated you and you would treat him back with such kindness. And when people do you evil, verse 21 says, "Overcome it with good." You're not God. God will take care of retaliation. God will make all things right. God will do what He knows is best. If vengeance is to be done, God will do it. If revenge is to be taken, God will take it. If you do that, you are presuming to take the sort of divine judgment out of the hand of Almighty God, wield it yourself and that is audacious. In fact, it's blasphemous, if you think about it. God alone is able to deal with sin, He has a perfect understanding of it. He has a perfect understanding of the offense, you don't. Your's is limited and biased. God has the highest standard, your's is lower. He has the unlimited authority, you have none. He is impartial, you're not. He's omniscient and eternal, sees the end from the beginning, you're short-sighted and ignorant, see nothing beyond your nose. He's wise and good and acts in perfect holiness. You're blinded by anger and liable to act in unholiness. It doesn't make sense for you to be the judge of anything or anybody. You're not qualified. And as long as you think about that, the more likely you are to blow the whole thing out of proportion anyway, so one who does not forgive sees himself, really, as God. And that's a horrible thought.

One final point, number nine. And I think I like this one especially cause this pulls everything into a sort of triumphant note. Number nine, your injuries and the offenses against you are the trials that perfect you. Your injuries and the offenses against you are the trials that perfect you. God uses all the trials in your life to perfect you, right? James 1, "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials because these have a perfecting work." First Peter 5:10, "After you've suffered a lot...awhile, the Lord make you perfect." Or 2 Corinthians 12, Paul says, "God's strength is made perfect in weakness," so he says, "I would rather rejoice in insults and distresses and persecutions....and on and on and on and on." Why? "Because when I am weak then I'm strong." They break my pride. They keep me from exalting myself.

Listen to this, folks, the offenses against you are the trials that perfect you. That's the way you embrace those things. I, you know, I look at these things that come at me, and they come at you, I know, but I get my own package of trials and false accusations and misrepresentations and I don't like that, I don't like to be misrepresented. I don't like to be misunderstood. I don't like to be accused of things that aren't true. I don't like to be thought of as unfaithful to the Lord, or unfaithful to His Word. I don't like things to be said that are lies about me or about the ministry or about the church or whatever, whatever. I don't like those kinds of things. I don't like to be discredited. I don't like to have things written about me that aren't true and misrepresent me. I don't like that when it happens to me or to the place I minister, or the church.

So what am I going to do? I think I'm going to try to get back at everybody? No. Paul didn't like a thorn in the flesh, either. And so he prayed three times for the Lord to remove it, and the Lord said I'm not removing it because it's sent to keep you from exalting yourself. It's sent to break your own self-confidence and pride and remind you that you're weak. And the only way you'll ever be useful is if you are weak and the strength of God can flow through your weakness.

So...so, you embrace all the criticisms, you embrace all the injustices, you embrace all the offenses, persecutions, mistreatments, misrepresentations and you embrace them because they are the offenses that perfect you. Your sin doesn't really contribute to your perfection. So when that stuff goes on in your life, you have to recover from that. But unjust suffering is the primary means that God uses to refine us. That's laid out for us and...and this is a good place to wrap up, 1 Peter chapter 2. Here's the model. I mean, this is the perfect model for this. First Peter 2, unjust suffering, verse 19, "This finds favor. God is pleased with this. God likes this. "If for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly." God likes it when we suffer unjustly and we endure it. How could He like that? Oh, because that's how you build spiritual muscle, that's how you're humbled, that's how you become dependent on God, that's how your pride is broken. That drives you to prayer. I mean, verse 20 says, "What credit is there if when you sin and are harshly treated you endure it with patience?" God doesn't like that. He doesn't want you to sin and then endure the chastening with patience. That's...that's a secondary work that He will do but that's not

His favorite work. He would rather have you suffer unjustly than to suffer justly for your sin. Verse 20 says, "If when you do what is right and suffer for it patiently and you endure that, this finds favor with God." God really likes you to suffer unjustly. Do you ever think about that? This might be good news for you for the first time...God wants you to suffer unjustly, it's helpful to you, very helpful. And if you think somehow this is God picking on you, verse 21 says, "You've been called for this purpose, all of you."

There isn't any other way to sanctify you. There isn't any other way for God to accomplish His purpose in you than to make you suffer unjustly. So the more righteous you become, the more godly you become, the more holy, the more obedient, the more likely you are to have suffered unjustly and to continue to suffer unjustly. And by the way, lest you think you've been given something that's sort of a special gift, you might want to know, verse 21, "That Christ also suffered the same way." He suffered unjustly, did He not? Over in chapter 3 Peter says He suffered the just for the unjust. He suffered unjustly, verse 22, because He committed no sin, there was no deceit found in His mouth. And what was His reaction? What was His reaction? Verse 23, "While He was reviled, He didn't revile in return. And while He suffered, He uttered no threats. He just entrusted Himself to Him who judges righteously and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross that we might die to sin and live to righteousness, for by His wounds you were healed." I mean, that is just staggering stuff.

You want to know how productive unjust suffering is? It was by unjust suffering that Jesus redeemed sinners. You can't get more productive than that, isn't that true? What is the most productive thing that ever happened in the history of the world? The death of Jesus Christ. And it happened in the midst of unjust suffering. Don't underestimate the power of unjust suffering. Unjust suffering leads to the greatest triumphs so you embrace it. You embrace it in the model of Christ and you don't revile and you don't threaten, you just trust yourself to God who judges righteously, that is He didn't make a mistake in bringing you through this, and out of this in some way will come triumph as triumph came out of the unjust suffering of Jesus who in that, the most unjust act ever committed in the history of the world, the greatest triumph came. So if you want to really reduce it to its bottom line, the greatest triumph in the history of the world came at the moment of the greatest act of injustice in suffering ever. Don't underestimate then the power of unjust suffering, it has tremendous, tremendous power...not only in Christ's life, but in your's as well.

Drop down to 1 Peter 3:14. "But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed." You're blessed. So what did I say number nine? Your injuries and the offenses against you are the trials that...what?...perfect you. For all these reasons we are to be forgiving.

People always ask me the question, "Do I forgive the people who don't ask for it?" Of course...of course. "Is it important, however, that they ask for it?" Of course because you can forgive them but

the relationship will never be restored until they come and desire that forgiveness. But I believe the Bible is very clear that we forgive from the heart completely, knowing that the relationship may never be what it could be, what it should be, until that person comes and confesses and repents and seeks the restoration. But I'm not waiting for that because I will not live with unforgiveness. I want my sins forgiven and I want to fall in line with all these other marvelous motives.

Father, we thank You that You have called us to this forgiveness and You have modeled it for us. We know that we don't always need to confront the offenses of others and request apologies and offer forgiveness if they're petty, unintentional, or if we in fact are the only one affected and it's...it's not a big issue. At that point, love covers. But we know that serious offenses that harm the church and harm the offender and break relationships and produce sin must be confronted and restored. But in all cases, from the heart teach us to forgive, even those who have not come to ask that we might be free from any thought of bitterness or vengeance and leave that work to you. May we never return evil for evil, insult for insult, but as Peter wrote, give a blessing instead for you were called for this very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. We who have received the blessing of forgiveness, must always give it. Thank You for this Word to us, this is Your Word, O Lord, amen.

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