

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

The Blessings of Forgiveness, Part 1

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 2:5-6

Code: 47-8

Second Corinthians chapter 2 and our text, verses 5 through 11. This epistle is turning out to be very practical, very applicable, very instructive and encouraging to my heart, I'm sure to yours as well.

As we come to 2 Corinthians chapter 2 and our text for this morning, verses 5 through 11, we come to the theme of forgiveness. Certainly a theme that our world needs to hear about and learn about, more than that see demonstrated in the lives of Christians. Proverbs chapter 19 and verse 11 tells us that it is the glory of a man to overlook a transgression. What a great truth that is. It is the glory of a man to overlook a transgression.

A person is never more noble and never more like God than when he forgives someone. That is the most godlike thing we can do. There is nothing more glorious that a person can do for another person than to forgive. A truly godly person will be known because he or she has a forgiving heart. God is a forgiving God, Christ is a forgiving Lord, and one who is like God and like Christ will be a forgiving person.

Jesus certainly gave us the perfect example when hanging on the cross, hated, mocked and unjustly being tormented to death He asked God to forgive His tormentors. Stephen being unjustly and viciously stoned to death asked God not to hold his killers guilty for their crime. This is spiritual virtue at its highest, noblest. It is the glory of a man to overlook a transgression.

We as Christians should be known by our forgiveness. The Apostle Paul certainly was and we see it eminently in the text that is before us. This brief text is as good an insight into the attitude of forgiveness as you'll find anywhere in Scripture. On the surface it seems a bit vague and there are certain elements of it that are vague and unknown to us. But when you look at it a bit more deeply, it gives us a rather comprehensive and complete insight into forgiveness. I've titled the message, "The Blessings of Forgiveness," for here you're going to see seven blessings in forgiveness, seven benefits of forgiveness, therefore seven motives for forgiveness, seven reasons to forgive.

Let's begin by reading in verse 5 and we'll read down through verse 11. "If any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree in order not to say too much, to all of you. Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, lest somehow such a one be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him, for to this end also I wrote that I might put

you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. By whom you forgive anything, I forgive also for indeed what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, I did it for your sakes in the presence of Christ, in order that no advantage be taken of us by Satan for we are not ignorant of his schemes."

Now here is the eager forgiveness of the Apostle Paul illustrated. The background, as I noted a moment ago, is generally unclear to us in terms of specifics. We don't know who the individual was, who this man was who needed to be fully forgiven. We don't really know what he did. We can't recover the individual and that by God's design, nor can we recover the specific offense. But we can reconstruct enough of the scene so that the general teaching here becomes clear and poignant to us.

The Apostle Paul, as you well remember, had spent 18 months of his life founding the church in Corinth. God had used him there in a mighty way. Having then gone away from that church after pouring so much of his life into it, he was informed that there were many, many problems. In response to those problems he wrote 1 Corinthians which is sixteen chapters, trying to confront issues in that church. His desire was to correct them, to instruct them, to set them on a path of proper doctrine and behavior so that they could know the joy and blessing of God in their own lives and be an effective witness for Him in their city.

And so he wrote to them 1 Corinthians. Some time after that another problem had arisen in Corinth. Before the first batch of problems could be sufficiently solved, another one arose. Only this time it was a mutiny of sorts, a rebellion against Paul. You will remember that some false apostles, false teachers came into the church wanting to gain an audience for their lies and their heresies, they therefore sought to discredit the reigning teacher, the reigning authority, namely Paul. So they made an all-out assault on Paul's character, on his life and teaching, on just about everything about the man. They did all they could to attack him, to discredit him, to shake his integrity loose, to make him a person with no credibility and then they could take his place as teachers and teach their lies.

Now the sad fact was that even with the wonderful love bond that had developed between Paul and the Corinthian church, and even though they had all really been brought to the foot of the cross and redeemed by the instrumentality of this man, and he was the one who had taught them and established them and given them their direction and their leadership, in spite of all that belonged within the framework of that loving relationship, many of the members of that church bought into the lies of the false apostles so that a sufficient mutiny had developed. Church members were deceived.

To deal with that mutiny, Paul wrote them a second letter, not included in Scripture, which we've called the severe letter. We have lost that letter but there are references to it so we know he wrote it. This was to confront them about this mutiny, about this effort to discredit him which some of them were buying into. Furthermore, he must have made to them a brief visit, just to try to assess what was going on in this mutiny...a brief and apparently on the surface unsuccessful visit which was terminated rather rapidly.

And no doubt the Apostle left heartsick, heartbroken, grieved over what he saw and experienced. Probably on that visit he was assaulted verbally, publicly and to his face by someone, someone who was a member of the church, someone who may well have been known to the Apostle Paul but certainly was known to the congregation. Someone who had fallen into the deception and bought into the lives of the false apostles, and they embarrassed and shamed and publicly insulted the Apostle Paul.

Thus when he left, apparently he told them you have to deal with that man. And on parting left them instruction that that man, that sinner who did that needed to be dealt with in the proper pattern of church discipline. You will remember that it was Paul who wrote that no one should ever rebuke an elder, say nothing of an apostle, unless such can be substantiated in the mouth of two or three witnesses. And you will also know that they were well aware surely of the kind of teaching that Jesus gave in Matthew chapter 18 about a person who sins being confronted. If they refuse to repent, take two or three witnesses. If they still refuse to repent, tell the whole church. And if they still refuse to repent after the church has reproached them, put them out.

Publicly defaming and shaming and embarrassing and insulting the Apostle Paul constituted a sin of some severity which needed to be dealt with. And in view of the emerging mutiny, it really became a more important issue to deal with lest this man get away with it and find others who chime in and a wholesale disruption of Paul's integrity take place. So upon leaving after that brief and rather heartbreaking visit, he must have instructed them to deal with the man.

Then he sent Titus. And he sent Titus to find out how they were doing, how were they responding to the letter, 1 Corinthians, how were they responding to the severe letter, and were they dealing with this man? Titus then was sent as an emissary to bring back word to Paul so that Paul might know of their response.

That's really what's behind this. By the time Paul now writes 2 Corinthians, Titus has returned and Titus has given him a report. Let's go to chapter 7 and hear Titus and his report. Paul is waiting, he's not going to write this letter until he knows how the church responded to the first letter, how they responded to the severe letter regarding the mutiny, and how they've responded to his direct instruction to deal with this man. Titus comes and the news is good.

Verse 6 of chapter 7, "God who comforts the depressed comforted us by the coming of Titus." Titus was a comforter but because God was working through him. And it says here's how, verse 7, "Not only by his coming...that is not only just because we enjoy his fellowship...but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you as he reported to us your longing, your mourning and your zeal for me so that I rejoiced even more."

This was such profound news to Paul because what really was breaking his heart was the severing of the relationship. It wasn't the sin of the man against him that was the issue, it was the relationship, the ongoing love bond and loyalty with the Corinthian church that concerned him. And Titus came back and informed Paul that they had longed for him, they were even mourning over him. They had great zeal for him. He rejoiced.

Verse 8 he says, "Though I caused you sorrow by my letter," that severe letter was a letter that caused them sorrow, he says, "I do not regret it...though I did regret it." At first when he wrote it he felt remorse because he was afraid they would react negatively to it and it would drive them further away. At first in the natural human way he felt bad that he wrote such a severe and strong letter confronting their mutiny and their turning away from him and their disloyalty and their lack of love. But he says, "Now I don't regret it for I see that the letter caused you sorrow though only for a while...verse 9...I now rejoice not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance." It did what I had hoped it would do. It made you sorrowful...but further in verse 9..."You were made sorrowful according to the will of God in order that you might not suffer loss in anything through us."

Your sorrow was a godly sorrow, it was a repentant sorrow. You regretted the way I had been treated and the way you had been disloyal. And verse 11, "For behold, what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow has produced in you." What he's reflecting on there is this earnest, zealous mourning, this longing for Paul. His letter had had a positive effect and brought them back to the place of loyalty and the place of commitment. He says, "What vindication of yourselves." You vindicated my confidence in you, my trust in you. What indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong...and here we find that they no doubt had dealt with the error and dealt with the offender. "In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter. So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the offender...and there is the identification of this individual...not for the sake of the offender did I write, not for the sake of the one offended myself, but that your earnestness on our behalf might be made known to you in the sight of God."

I wanted you to have to face your attitude toward me. That's what concerned me. I didn't write that letter because of the offender. I didn't write it because I was offended. That wasn't the primary thing. I wrote it because I wanted you to have to deal with your attitude toward me. That's the concern. He wanted them to be sure they maintained their place under apostolic authority and that the love and loyalty they had demonstrated to Paul was sustained.

But what we find here is, obviously in response to the severe letter, in response to the assessment that he made when he visited and told them about dealing with that man, they had had a good reaction. They had done what was right and now they were affirming through Titus their love and their zeal, their holy awe of God, their indignation over sin, their desire to avenge what was wrong in a

godly way. They were dealing with that offender and all of that was demonstrating their love and loyalty to Paul and he was so pleased.

So that gives you a little bit of background. Paul acknowledges because of the message from Titus that they had done what was right. They had pursued that man, they had confronted him about his sin, they had brought him through the process of discipline, and I believe it's safe to say, as we shall note, they had brought him all the way to repentance. They had brought him all the way to repentance. They had repented for their sins against Paul, sins of disloyalty and believing the deceptive lies that had been foisted upon them by the false apostles. But they had also brought this man all the way to repentance. And we'll see more about that in a few moments.

Now there is a group of people in this Corinthian church that perhaps pose a bit of a problem here. To come to know them we need to go back to 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and this will help us to form up the framework of this whole issue here. If you go back in to chapter 1 of 1 Corinthians, you will remember that the first issue that Paul deals with in regard to the Corinthian church was this issue of divisions and quarrels. In chapter 1 verse 10 he notes that there are divisions among them. In verse 11 there are quarrels among them. And those divisions and quarrels were basically because certain people had certain spiritual heroes.

Verse 12, "Some were saying I am of Paul, some were saying I am of Apollos, some were saying I am of Cephas, or Peter, and some were saying I am of Christ." And he spends a great amount of time dealing with this kind of division and quarreling and fragmentation. He is still talking about it in chapter 3 verses 4 through 6. He is still talking about it in chapter 3 verses 21 through 23. So really three chapters confront this issue.

Now they had lived in a culture where this was commonly done. Everybody had his pet philosopher, his pet teacher, and people would gather around their own personal, private, pet teacher and identify with him. They carried that same mentality into the church and they began to sort of draw around one or other of the key names in Christianity. And it became an issue of division.

We can assume that the Paul party, the folks who really identified strongly with Paul were the most offended when Paul was publicly shamed and publicly assaulted by this offender. So it is also fair to assume that they may have been the least satisfied when this man repented. And when the man acknowledged his sin, which he obviously did, as we shall note, and repented, it may well have been that the majority of people in the church were willing to acknowledge him and accept him back into restored fellowship, but the Paul party was having a little trouble and they wanted to turn the screws a little. They wanted to add a little more pain, maybe it seemed to them such a frighteningly bold and brash sin to commit, to come face-to-face with the beloved Apostle Paul and to insult him in front of others that they wanted to make sure nobody ever did that again. And they were protecting the one they particularly revered, whatever it might be, apparently we can assume that some were not

satisfied with the punishment inflicted on this man, and they were not satisfied with his repentance and they wanted to tighten down the noose. They felt perhaps that more discipline was needed, like the bishops of old who when a penitent sinner came in would only grant repentance if penance were done from three to seven years or in some cases for a life time. They wanted to continue to inflict the pain.

Paul did not agree. He didn't agree and he doesn't side with the Paul party, should they have indeed been the culprits in this. But rather in this passage demands full and complete forgiveness for this man. Obviously he had been told that the man repented and that is enough.

Now this text finds its way into Paul's letter at this point I think as an illustration of what he said in verse 4. In verse 4 he said, "Out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears, not that you should be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you." He said...Look, I never wanted to do anything to just make you sad, to put you in despair, I just want you to know how much I love you and it's out of pastoral love for them that he says, "I don't want to make you sorrowful," and now he picks an illustration of the fact that he did temporarily make them sorrowful, but it was in the end to confirm and demonstrate his love.

He has a pastor's heart. He has a tender heart. Back in chapter 1 verse 24 he said that he is a worker with them for their joy, not someone who wants to lord it over their faith. He had a tender heart toward his people. Based upon Titus' report about this man, he wanted to demonstrate that tenderness and demonstrate that love. Because he was not committed to endless sorrow, but to joy, he wanted them to know that if ever he caused sorrow it was to produce joy. He didn't want to become overly associated with sorrow. So he urges that the chastening stop and that the man be fully restored to the communion of the church.

Now remember, there's no doubt in my mind that Paul instructed them to deal with that man until he repented. But now that he's repented, he is to be fully restored.

Now as he teaches this simple truth to them about restoring the man, there are seven blessings of forgiveness outlined here. They're just wonderful and I wish I could give them all to you this morning, but I can't. But let's get a running start.

Number one, the first reason to forgive that is illustrated by Paul is because it deflects self-pity...you forgive to deflect self-pity...to deflect--if you want another word, pride. One of the chief causes of an unforgiving heart, of course, is pride. Your ego is wounded and you're not going to just take that. Somebody has done something to you, you don't like it, you don't appreciate it, and you're not about to let go of it. This proud reaction to an offense can run a spectrum all the way to wallowing self-pity to violent retaliation and everything in between.

Paul would have none of it...absolutely none of it. Self-glory, self-protection, ego, pride, self-pity, vengeance, retaliation had no place in his heart at all. He didn't want any pity. He didn't want the Paul party coming along and pitying him. He wasn't basking in that like we do, you know, when we're offended and someone says...that was terrible, that was awful. And we're saying...keep it up, keep it up, I love it, I love it, you poor thing, oh how you've endured, oh how you've suffered. You have shown yourself so noble that you have gone through this excruciating pain. And you're just loving every word of it.

Paul wanted nothing to do with that. Look at verse 5. "If any has caused sorrow, he's caused sorrow not to me..." The first part of that sentence is in a form, I think, that introduces a condition assumed to be true...someone had caused sorrow, it's in a perfect tense, an ongoing and continual sorrow, that is reality. This person has caused sorrow. I acknowledge the reality of the offense and I acknowledge its ongoing effect, "But I want you to know he has caused sorrow not to me."

Now that immediately defuses all the people who want to turn the screws because of what the guy did to Paul, right? It just takes the sword out of their hand. He says I don't take this personally. I love that. I don't take this personally. Immediately he minimizes his personal sorrow, his personal anguish, even though he was the target of this. He hasn't taken it personally. He's not going to wallow in self-pity. He doesn't want some commiserating people to join in his despondency. He doesn't have any bitter resentment. He's not going to seek a vendetta on a personal level against this man. He doesn't want his pound of flesh no matter what the man did to him, to embarrass, to insult him publicly, to discredit him and to play into the hands of the false apostles and even lead the church in that direction. He is not going to take this thing personally, it is not a personal issue with him.

The grief, the embarrassment caused to him is not, never has been and never will be important. Consequently he softens the charge against the penitent offender. And he leaves the church to deal with the man with pure objectivity. They don't have to carry out some personal agenda on his part. They don't have to do something for him. He doesn't take it personally. You don't have to do anything to him for my sake. He didn't...he didn't cause sorrow to me. Paul had learned long before how to be abased and how to abound, right? In fact, he will soon write in this very letter chapter 12 and verse 10, "I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties." Maybe that very word "insults" goes right back to this incident. Insults don't bother me. He reminds you of that little thing you said when you were a kid, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me."

Paul is saying I don't take that personally anymore than Jesus took it personally on the cross and wanted some eternal vendetta against His crucifiers, or Stephen under the bloody stones. There's no personal offense taken.

Here is virtue at its noblest. Here is the virtue to rise above the offense and above the offender and take yourself out of the victim status. These people in our culture wandering around wallowing in their victimism are really exercising for the whole world to see evidence of their fallenness in their unbelievable pride. Self-pity is an act of pride. The wounded ego, the wounded person who cannot rise above the offense only demonstrates his utter sinfulness. Paul was a godly man. He was a noble Christian. He was too humble to wallow in his dented pride or public embarrassment.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 4 he says, "It is a very small thing to me that I should be examined by you, or by any human court." I mean, this is some guy who said this, big deal. I'm going to make an issue out of this? I'm going to be victim of that? It is not an issue with me.

Sorrow-yes, but sorrow not to me. That's not my concern. You don't owe me anything. And then he further says, "But in some degree," and here are two disclaiming qualifiers, "but in some degree in order not to say too much to all of you." He says my concern isn't me, it's you. "In some degree" means to a limited extent, "in order not to say too much" means not to exaggerate the point. He double qualifies it. Yes he has caused sorrow to a limited extent, but let's not exaggerate it. I mean, let's not turn this molehill into a mountain. Let's not make this a crusade in the church. Let's not overthrow the whole deal because of this. Let's not make more out of this than needs to be made. Sure it caused some sorrow for you. Why? Cause you've got to deal with the guy. He's in your fellowship. You've got to confront him. You've got to put him through the discipline process. You've got to bring him, if he continues to be unrepentant, to the church and that's not a happy thing to do. The sorrow must be yours for here is your beloved brother sinning and tearing at the fabric of the unity of the church. But don't overdo the significance of it. To some degree, to some extent, he has affected you in a sorrowful way.

I love the way Paul wants to just minimize this. You don't need...you don't need to blow this thing so out of proportion that it becomes the controlling issue in everybody's mind. Get on with life. He has repented. I don't want you to do anything on my behalf to the guy. And it isn't that big of a deal to you, move on. I acknowledge that the sorrow has been greater on your behalf because you're there and you've got to deal with him. But don't make more out of than you should.

It's a great way to approach this. Paul will not allow his ego to get involved. He will deflect self-pity. Forgiveness does that. It deflects the pride that wants retaliation. The great Apostle refuses to receive the offense.

He's a very hard man to offend, do you know that? Cause he won't take an offense. That's a wonderful virtue. That is godliness. To be very difficult to offend because you won't take an offense. Paul will not allow his ego to express itself. This is a clear indication, by the way, that Paul had nothing in his heart but love and forgiveness for the offender. He had already forgiven him from the

heart. But he wanted discipline done until there was repentance before he could be restored. The crucifiers didn't ask for the forgiveness Jesus gave them. The murderers didn't ask for the forgiveness Stephen gave them. And Paul from the heart forgave the man. He wasn't about to let that man steal his joy, steal his usefulness. He wasn't about to let that man become the reigning issue in the church so that the church was perpetuating its sorrow. Certainly he remembered the words of Jesus when Peter said to him, "How many times shall I forgive, seven?" And Jesus said, "Seventy times seven."

I think one of the most beautiful illustrations of this kind of forgiveness that has no wounded ego is the case of Joseph. Joseph had some...really some treacherous brothers. They hated him because he was the favorite of the father. They wanted him dead. They wound up selling him to a caravan wandering through the desert, thinking he'll go off to Egyptian slavery and we'll never have to deal with him in our life. Sold their own brother. Then in Genesis 45 they met him again. Just really amazing. They go down to Egypt to get some food and Joseph said to his brothers, Genesis 45:4, "Please come closer to me." By now, what is Joseph? Prime Minister of Egypt. They came closer and he said, "I'm your brother Joseph whom you sold into Egypt." Can you imagine their first reaction was..."Let's get out of here. This guy's got to have pent up vengeance for years."

Then he says, "Do not now be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here. For God sent me before you to preserve life." Don't be upset. "For the famine has been in the land these two years and there's still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting, and God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth and to keep you alive by a great deliverance."

See, it was God all the time in His providence just getting me down here so I could feed you when you got hungry. Where's the ego in that? Where's the "poor me?" Where's the misery? Where's the vengeance? There isn't any. You ask yourself whether this is a godly man, I tell you this is a godly man.

"Now therefore it was not you who sent me here but God. And he has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Hurry, go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son, Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt, come down to me, do not delay and you shall live in the Goshen and you shall be near to me, you and your children, and your children's children and your flocks and your herds and all that you have. And there I will also provide for you, for there are still five years of famine to come, lest you and your household and all that you have become impoverished. And behold, your eyes see and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my mouth which is speaking to you. Now you must tell my father of all my splendor in Egypt and all that you've seen and you must hurry and bring my father down here.' And he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept and Benjamin wept on his neck and he kissed all his brothers and wept on them and afterward his brothers talked with him."

That's an absolutely magnificent scene of forgiveness, isn't it? Total disregard for self-pity. Chapter 50 of Genesis kind of wraps the story up. Joseph said to his brothers, after they said, "We're your servants." "Don't be afraid, I am in God's place, as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result to preserve many people alive. So therefore do not be afraid, I will provide for you and your little ones. So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them."

Forgiveness frees you from the bitter chains of pride, self-pity, vengeance that lead to despair and alienation, broken relationships, a loss of joy. Great thing to forgive, it just frees you from pride.

Secondly, a great reason to forgive because it shows mercy...it shows mercy. This verse fills in a little more detail for us, verse 6, "Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority." You know what that means? The guy has had...what?...enough. Back off. Show him mercy, you who have received mercy, right? Remember the parable that Jesus gave about the man who was forgiven the unpayable debt in Matthew 18, starting there in verse 23. A man who had this incredible debt and the king forgave him. And then he went out and strangled some guy who owed him a pocketful of change and threw him in prison. It's unthinkable. And the king confronts him and says..."You came to me and I gave you mercy and you can't give mercy to somebody else? You who live by mercy better know how to pass it out." Paul says that's enough.

This is evidence to me that the man had confessed his sin and repented. Paul said that's enough. Sufficient for such a one is this punishment. Now take the word "punishment," a minute, I want you to look at it, epitimiain Greek, it's only used here in the New Testament. It is a word, however, used outside the Scripture in Greek writings, it refers to a legal penalty...a penalty that would be enacted by a law court. It refers also to commercial sanctions that would officially placed against a city or a nation. So it indicates not personal vengeance, not private pain inflicted on somebody. It isn't describing some kind of vindictive attitude but rather an official penalty placed on the mandate(?). What's the significance of that? It's a good indication they went through the due process, that Paul had told them you need to go to the man, you need to confront him, you need to go with the two or three witnesses, you need to tell the church, and all the way down. And if he doesn't repent, you put him out. I believe it's an indication that there was an official, formal nature to what they did.

Furthermore, the word "the majority" there indicates that it reached the church and that the church had gotten involved in it and they had put upon the man a just penalty that would be excommunication or disfellowshipping. He would then have to absent himself from the fellowship of the saints and from the Lord's table. They had followed due process formally and officially placed that man under penalty. This is not vengeance. This is not a vindictive attitude, this is an official, proper response done formally by the church with regard to his sin.

This, of course, Paul spoke about, this kind of thing, in 2 Thessalonians 3 verse 6 when somebody doesn't hold to the tradition which you received from us, that is the revelation of God, keep aloof from him. If he leads an unruly life, down in verse 14, don't associate with him so that he may be put to shame, but don't regard him as an enemy but admonish him as a brother. They were going right through that kind of pattern, putting him out of the fellowship. They were doing what the rabbis called "the binding." Sin was bound to him and they were saying your sins are bound to you. You are bound in sin, you will not repent. And you remember that Jesus had said in that passage in Matthew 18, "Whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven." When a man will not repent and you say you're bound...your sins are bound to you, heaven is affirming that. And Paul is affirming that that's the right thing to do. Go after the man, you've got to deal with that man, he's got to confront, be confronted about his sin and that's exactly what they had done.

Paul had even given them in the first letter some instruction on how to do this with another case. Look at 1 Corinthians chapter 5, some would say this is the same man, I think not. I think this is a completely different issue here. But there was a man who was engaged in sexual sin, he was engaged in a sexual relationship with his father's wife which perhaps is the way to indicate it's his stepmother. It was an incestuous relationship. The church was not dealing with it. The church was arrogant, was not mourning over this. And so he tells them they've got to deal with it, they've got to bring it to the church, verse 4, when you are assembled and I'm there in spirit and the Lord is there, the Lord Jesus in power, you've got to turn that one over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

In other words, publicly in due process in the life of the church when you come together, you have to deal with that sinner which means the man has gone through the first step, a private confrontation, second step, two or three witnesses. And now needs to be brought publicly to the church. They knew how to do that. Paul went on to say you've got to get the leaven out or the leaven will leaven the whole lump.

So go back to verse 6 here, "Sufficient is such a one is this penalty, this due process, which was inflicted by the majority, which was enacted by the majority. The congregation then had officially acted and the many had come together and they had affirmed that this man needed to be put out of the church for his sin.

Now remember, I told you there was perhaps the Paul party who were saying we want more, we want more, we want more, this isn't enough. But listen carefully, Paul said the binding work has to be done, but when it accomplished its purpose, he was eager that the loosing be done as well. And whatever man repents is loosed from his sin and whatever heaven looses a man from, you on earth have to loose him from it also. If he's confessed and repented, he's been loosed from his sin and you must loose him as well. Do the binding work, do the loosing work, it's time for mercy...that's what he's

saying. It's time for mercy, enough is enough. You who live by mercy, give mercy. Galatians 6:1 gives us this principle in a simple and straightforward way. "If a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, each one looking to yourself lest you too be tempted, bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ." The law of Christ is the law of love, the law of love says you go to the brother who's in the trespass and when he comes to repentance, you restore him in a spirit of gentleness, realizing you too could be in the same situation. You're not harsh, you're not unloving, you don't browbeat him, you don't put him under seven years of penance, or a lifetime of penance, you don't make him do something to himself to flagellate himself to somehow expiate his sin, you accept his repentance. That's enough, it's the end of the issue.

In Ephesians chapter 4 you have a very clear illustration. It says, "Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving each other." And how do we do it? "Just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." Let me ask you a question, how were you forgiven in Christ? Did you come to God and say, "I want forgiveness." And did God say to you, "All right, do seven years of penance and I'll give it to you?...Well, I'd like to forgive you but you haven't had enough pain yet...I'm going to make you suffer for a while and then I'll forgive you?" No, when you came with a contrite and a broken heart, repentant over your sin, God gave you instantaneous, complete and total forgiveness on the spot, right? And that's precisely how we're to forgive one another when repentance is genuine. There are no residual responsibilities.

Colossians chapter 3 and verse 13, again emphasizes the same thing, "Bearing with one another and forgiving each other just as the Lord forgave you." In the same complete way. Hebrews chapter 12 verse 11 says, "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful." This is true. "But to those who have been trained properly by the discipline, it yields a peaceful fruit of righteousness." When discipline brings righteousness, he says in the next verse, "Strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble and make straight paths for your feet. Get back on track, bring the man back in. Give him strength. Give him acceptance. Take the limb which is out of joint, put it back in joint, heal it, pursue peace, and don't ever let a root of bitterness develop.

How Godlike, how Christlike to forgive. When the man came in and pleaded and pleaded and said, "I'll repay everything I owe you," in the parable of Matthew 18, "and the king out of mercy said to him, 'I forgive you, I forgive you,'" you had a picture of God's forgiveness. The man owed the king an unpayable debt. He couldn't pay it in a thousand lifetimes. Then he went out and found a man who owed him a little bit of money and strangled him and threw him in prison. The king confronts him and turns him over the discipliners until he learns how to forgive. You've received mercy, learn to give it.

The wonderful thing about forgiveness that we see in those first two verses is it deflects self-pity, pride and it shows mercy. That's very Godlike. That should be characteristic of every one of us.

Five to go, next time.

Father, we do acknowledge that You have forgiven us all our sins, all our trespasses...that You loved us while we were yet sinners and enemies. And You set out to forgive us before we ever asked. O Lord, thank You for that grace that initiated reconciliation. Lord, help us to be like You, to be as the Apostle Paul said true sons of the Father, as John said, if we say we abide in Christ to walk as He walked. You are a forgiving God. Christ is a forgiving Lord. Fill our hearts with forgiveness. May we be impossible to offend personally. May we carry no self-pity, no grudge, no bitterness. Lord, that needs to happen in some marriages today, some forgiveness from the heart needs to be given and some repentance needs to take place. It needs to happen in some families between parents and children where bitterness exists because pride has been wounded and pride is wallowing in its misery. It needs to happen in some extended families where grudges are kept and held. It needs to happen between some sisters in Christ and some brothers in Christ and it's wounding the church and it's grieving You and it's harming testimony. Lord, deliver us from the bondage of an unforgiving heart, deliver us from wounded pride and from being unkind and without mercy who so desperately need mercy and receive it so freely. May we be known as a church of forgiving people. We will offend. The man who doesn't offend is a perfect man, and none of us is perfect. But an offense forgiven is covered, repented of is removed.

Father, I just ask that You make us forgiving as You have forgiven us, that we might know joy and not sorrow, that our joy might be the bliss of our own experience and the proof of our transformation to those who watch. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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