Reasons to Forgive, Part 2
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 90-394

Now, last Sunday night we talked a little bit about forgiveness. This is a big subject, but it's a subject that we need to get our arms around in a practical way. Forgiveness is very, very important to us. Forgiveness is essential to life as a Christian. And I'm giving you a list of principles that demonstrate the importance of forgiveness.

Last week we looked at the first one which really leads the parade. Forgiveness is the most godlike act a person can do. You're never more like God than when you forgive. Obviously we celebrate the forgiveness of God. We understand the forgiveness of God. It is God overlooking our sin. It is God overlooking our guilt. It is God giving us a promise that we are forgiven of all our sins, past, present and future. We enter into an undeserved, unearned condition of complete and total forgiveness by the sheer grace of God. That is the model for our forgiveness. We forgive out of grace, not because somebody earned it.

We offer forgiveness freely, unconditionally, without restraint, without restriction. And with that offer of forgiveness, we abandon all animosity, all anger, all hatred, all desire for retaliation, all desire for vengeance, all bitterness. And this will guarantee for us a life free from the root of bitterness that it talks about in the book of Hebrews, free from carking anger and hostility that eats away at the joy of the soul. Forgiveness is the most godlike thing you can do. And He is the model. You forgive and you forgive again, and you forgive again, and you forgive again. As we learn from our Lord's words to Peter, "You forgive seventy times seven, seventy times a day." As often as you're offended, that's how often you forgive.

This is the same kind of thing that our Lord Jesus talked about in the Sermon on the Mount when He said, "Love your enemies." How do you love your enemies? Well, the first thing you need to do is to get past their sin, get past their offense. They're your enemies which assumes that they have done something to violate you, to wound you, to injure you, to affect you negatively. If you're going to love your enemies, bound up in that love is forgiveness. It doesn't guarantee that you're going to have a relationship with them that would be a model relationship. But then again, when God forgives us, that doesn't necessarily mean that the relationship we have with God is everything it should be. We continue to sin against Him. He continues to forgive us. The relationship will only be what it should be in the glory of heaven when full and complete perfection has come, absolute holiness and righteousness has taken over our lives and then a complete reconciliation is effective.

The second thing we said about forgiveness, not only is the most godlike thing you'll ever do, but you must remember that it's not murder which is forbidden by the sixth commandment. It's not murder only which is forbidden by the sixth commandment. The sixth commandment says, "You shall not murder." But our Lord said, "You've heard it said that you shall not murder or you'll be guilty of the court," Matthew 5:21 and 22, "But I say to you, if you hate someone in your heart, you're guilty of murder."

First John, we remember, 1 John 3:15, "Everybody who hates his brother is a murderer." Our Lord went for the depth of the meaning of the commandments, the Decalogue. We must understand that while we perhaps wouldn't even imagine murdering somebody, wouldn't think about murdering somebody, if our hearts are full of hate to the degree in the words of Jesus that we denounce them with epithets like "Raca" or "You fool," you are equally guilty.

You are to love your enemies and you are to love your neighbors as you love yourself. You are to seek to see the image of God in them. You're to be gracious to them. Anything less than that, any anger or bitterness constitutes, in effect, a defacto heart murder. Your lack of forgiveness is a kind of desire for their harm.

Thirdly, we said last time, that you need to remember, and this should motivate all of us to forgive, that whoever has offended you, has offended God greater. Whoever has offended you has offended God greater. And if God who is the most holy has forgiven the greatest offense, cannot we who are the least holy forgive the least offense? It seems to me to be a very obvious principle.

We understand it because we looked at Psalm 51:4, "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight." David understands that His sin is against God. "He cries out to God to be forgiven, wash me, purge me. Give me back the joy of Thy salvation. Then I will show transgressors Your ways. Then I will be useful to You." And, of course, that forgiveness came to David and David even said it this way, "Blessed is the man whose sins are forgiven, whose iniquities are covered." And so the issue is that if God who is most offended can be totally forgiving, cannot we who are least offended be forgiving? If God who is infinitely holy can forgive, cannot we who are anything but holy forgive?

So we forgive because we are never more godlike than when we forgive. We forgive because God forbids anger and hate and attitudes of vengeance. And we forgive because God who is most offended forgives, and sets the standard for us to forgive.

And number four, and this is where we wrapped it up and we'll make a comment about this and then move on. It is only reasonable, and it's connected to the last point, it is only reasonable that those forgiven the greater sins forgive the lesser ones.

No matter what a person does against me, or does against you, it does not rise to the level of an offense against God. The degree of the offense is directly related to the degree of holiness of the one offended. God is the one who is most offended, as we just pointed out. God is the one against whom the greater sins have been done. And when He completely forgives all of these sins that we have committed, are committing or will commit completely, this ought to set a standard by which we are willing to forgive others. We have been forgiven an unpayable, inconceivable, incalculable debt, should we not forgive the small offenses that come against us? And in order to make that point, we went to Matthew 18, let's go back to that because we're going to see a couple of more points there, and that is the area where Peter is talking to our Lord about forgiveness.

In verse 21 he asks Him, "How many times shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him, up to seven times?" The rabbi said three, he doubled it, added on, thought the Lord would commend him. "Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.'" And then He went from there to tell a story about why it is so critical to forgive lavishly, to forgive extensively. And the story is familiar to all of us. It's a story about a king who is emblematic of the Kingdom of Heaven and he had some men who had been given responsibility and he gathered these men, these would have been high-ranking officials who were given the responsibility to collect taxes and to turn what they had collected in to the monarch. They had been given a piece of the responsibility for the income of the king from the kingdom.

And when it was time for the accounts to be settled, there was one, according to verse 24, who owed him ten thousand talents, that is a massive amount of money...massive amount of money. Should have been able to give him what he owed him, but he didn't have any money at all to repay, verse 25 says, so he had taken all the money, he had collected it ostensibly and then he had spent it on himself. And the Lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children, and all that he had and repayment to be made. The king said, "Sell them all into slavery and I'll get what I can. I can't get what I'm owed, but I'll get what I can out of them."

Well the man falls down on the ground, says, "Have patience with me and I'll repay you everything." He is frightened, he is uncovered, he is exposed. You just give me an opportunity and I'll pay it all back.

Verse 27, "The lord of that slave felt compassion, released him, forgave him the debt." Just really a stunning story. There was usually a surprise element in the prolonged stories that Jesus told. This is that. The shock of being forgiven a ten-thousand-talent debt.

And then verse 28 says, "That slave went out, found one of his fellow slaves that owed him a hundred denarii," that's...a denarii is a day's wage for an average worker, a Roman soldier or average workman. So that's maybe three or four months work. "Seized the man who owed him that, began to

choke him and said, ‘Pay back what you owe.’ He fell on the ground and gave the same speech, ‘Have patience with me and I’ll repay you.’ But he was unwilling, went and threw him in prison till he should pay back what he was owed.”

This is scandalous. The man has been forgiven an incalculable debt, just because he asked. So anybody listening to the story, namely the disciples who really are the audience in this portion of Matthew’s gospel, the eighteenth chapter, is directed at the disciples, may well have been in the house of Peter and our Lord may have been holding one of the little children from Peter’s own family there in Capernaum when He gave all of this. Now they would have been outraged at the kind of behavior where a man is forgiven something that’s incalculable and then goes and strangles somebody and throws him in the debtor’s prison for a minor debt that could be paid back. And our Lord is teaching us a principle here, you can’t accept the full forgiveness of God and then yourself be an unforgiving person. You can’t accept the fullness of God’s total forgiveness of all your sins of all your life and then choke somebody mercilessly because that person has offended you. There’s nothing uglier, nothing worse, nothing more regrettable and nothing more inconsistent than a Christian running around with no forgiveness for someone who has offended them....just totally inconsistent.

Now, I want to take you to a fifth point. This comes right out of this in the same context. The one who does not forgive will not enjoy the love of other Christians. The one who does not forgive will not enjoy the love of other Christians. There is a price to pay for being a bitter, unforgiving person. And we see it here in verse 31 of this parable, “When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened.”

They’re outraged at the conduct of this man who has been totally forgiven and who will not forgive. They want to be distanced from him. An unforgiving person is an unwelcome member of the fellowship. An unforgiving person is leaven, bad influence, bad influence on young believers, bad influence on older believers, alienation from others in the life of the church. This is a person that people don’t want to be with because this is a person being unable to forgive is equally unable to stop talking about the person they will not forgive and the offense committed against them. This is typical of an unforgiving person. And so, friends turn away from the unforgiving person.

We might be seeing here almost a form of church discipline because these other fellow slaves go directly to the king to complain about this behavior. They in a very real sense turn the case over to the Lord. Church discipline should fall on the unforgiving person. If you know an unforgiving person, if you are an unforgiving person, somebody should come to you or you should go to the one you know to be an unforgiving person and say, “By the way, you’re in sin and you need to repent of that sin.” And if the person repents, you’ve gained your brother, according to Matthew 18 earlier in the chapter. And if the person doesn’t repent, then the next step is to take two or three witnesses and point the sin out again, be there to observe whether or not there is repentance. And if the person still doesn’t repent,

tell the church, the church goes after the person. If the person still doesn't repent, then put them out of the church because they're an evil influence and they're behaving like a non-Christian because it's so inconsistent for a Christian who has been forgiven to be unforgiving, you treat them like a non-believer.

There's a serious downside within the fellowship of the body of Christ for an unforgiving attitude. It also makes people want to keep their distance from you because they're afraid of what will happen to them if somehow you cross the line that offends them and you become one of those people in their category of those with whom they would like to gain vengeance.

Number six, and it's still in the same story here, failure to forgive results in divine chastening...failure to forgive results in divine chastening. We should forgive the moment the offense is rendered against us, instantaneously, never cultivating vengeance, retaliation, hostility, hatred, anger, bitterness. But if we fail to forgive, if we do not forgive, watch what happens. "Then summoning Him...the Lord, the king, the master...said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleased with me, shall you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave in the same way that I had mercy on you?' And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him." Torturers...what would that be? Stress, hardship, illness, difficulty. Like James 2:13, "Judgment will be merciless to the one who shows no mercy." This is not the judgment of hell. This is not final judgment. This is the judgment of divine chastening. Matthew 5:7 gives us the opposite, "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain...what?...mercy." What you give, you get. You give mercy, God grants you mercy. You're unforgiving and you will come under divine chastening.

That leads to a further expansion of that. Number seven in my list, the one who doesn't forgive will not be forgiven, so that this chastening which comes on the sin of unforgiveness is extended until forgiveness is rendered and forgiveness will be rendered when forgiveness is offered by the individual.

Go back in Matthew to chapter 6 where this is the point and a very familiar one to us. Matthew chapter 6 verse 12, this is the disciples' prayer, "Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors." How brash would it be to ask you to forgive us our debts while we're not willing to forgive our debtors, right? It's the same basic point we've just made.

And then down in verse 14, "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forget your transgressions. And now the chastening that comes on you because of lack of forgiveness becomes a sustained chastening. If we forgive, we will be forgiven." God deals with us as we deal with others. "If we don't forgive, we won't be forgiven."

Now we're not talking about eternal forgiveness. We're not talking about justification. We're not talking about whether or not we have a standing before God through the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, that's settled already. Future blessing is settled, right?, at salvation. We're not talking about eternal forgiveness here, we're talking about temporal forgiveness. This is not eternal forgiveness related to our justification. This is temporal forgiveness related to our sanctification. This has nothing to do with the issue of eternal blessing, future blessing. It has everything to do with the blessing now.

Through the years as a pastor, I certainly have found the emptiness, the dryness, the insipid dullness, the lack of joy, lack of power, trouble in marriages and families and in life that is very often due to the attitude within the heart of a person, a believing person of vengeance and bitterness and anger and hostility and hatred. And because that person will not forgive, they never come under the blessing of temporal forgiveness from God. People like this may seek Christian counseling, hopefully they seek it here. The first thing that all of our people who have ever been trained in biblical counseling confront is sin and a dominant sin that you are going to be exposed to when you counsel people is the bitterness and the anger and the hatred that dwells in their heart that essentially has cut them off from blessing. Life's hard enough, you make it much harder if you don't forgive.

So we really circle through all of these aspects. We are to forgive because it is godlike to forgive; because forgiveness is inherent in the second commandment because to hate is equal to murder; because the most holy is the most offended and He forgives and sets the model for us who are the least holy and the least offended; because He has forgiven us the greater sins, how can we not forgive others the lesser sins?; and because we forfeit the joys of fellowship, we forgive; and because we place ourselves under the chastening of God and He will not forgive us to bless us until we forgive others.

A few more compelling reasons to forgive. Number eight, the absence of forgiveness renders us unfit for worship...unfit for worship.

It's not just as simple as rolling in on a Sunday morning in a casual attitude and thinking that just no matter what's going on in your life God is just waiting for you to show up and offer Him worship. For example, Matthew 5, backing up in Matthew again to Matthew 5, "Therefore...verse 23 says...if you're presenting your offering at the altar, you're coming to worship." This is pre-cross so we're still talking about the temple and that was the form of worship. But if you're going to go to the temple and offer your offering ostensibly to worship God, to give honor to God and glory to God and there you remember that your brother has something against you, you remember that there's something wrong in a relationship. There's a lack of forgiveness. There's an unresolved conflict. "Leave your offering there in front of the altar, go first, be reconciled to your brother, then come and present your offering."

Now this goes to the very extent of pursuing reconciliation, but I think that's essentially what you always have in mind when you forgive someone and when you ask for their forgiveness.

I had as conversation like that just a couple of days ago. It was brought to my attention that I had seriously offended someone, someone that I care greatly about and have for a long time. And I called this gentleman and I asked his forgiveness cause I don't want to...I don't want to be in violation of this command from our Lord and be unfit to worship. And so I asked if he would forgive me those offenses. And in return he asked if I would forgive him for his offenses. You step out of that situation with a reconciliation. And it isn't first and foremost because you want to have a good relationship with that person, it's first and foremost because you want to have a right relationship with God.

No one should draw near to God with the intention to worship Him if there's an unsettled bitterness or grudge with someone else, regardless of whose fault it is. If there's anger or unforgiveness, it needs to be resolved, as much as is within your heart and there are times when you go to someone and say, "I want to make it right," and they don't want to do that. They want to harbor and hold on to their bitterness. But as much is as possible, you seek to express your own heart and seek forgiveness and seek to give forgiveness.

Number nine, this too very practical...not to forgive is to usurp the authority of God...not to forgive is to usurp the authority of God. I guess you have to ask yourself if you're unwilling to forgive, who made you the judge of all the earth? Are you better than God? This is the ultimate ego trip, you know, I think. Anybody that won't forgive has a serious misconception of who they are. You're presuming to take the sword of divine judgment out of God's hand and flail around that same sword as if you had the right to wield it. What audacity.

Romans 12...Romans 12 verse 14, "Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse." Then verse 17, "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone." Verse 18, "As far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." Verse 19, "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord." You don't need to get your pound of flesh out of everybody.

There are people who have this illusion that they are supposed to be the judge. God is too slow. God appears indifferent. God appears weak. He appears uninterested in this situation that has so profoundly offended me. That is really a kind of blasphemy.

In the first place, you're a sinner yourself, right? And there would be lots of people who would have every right to hold a sword over your own head. But the truth of the matter is, vengeance belongs to God. I will promise you that I have found comfort in that. I am more than happy when offended to give complete forgiveness from the heart with all my might and leave the retaliation and the reciprocation to God who perfectly understands the issue. He has the highest standard, mine is lower. His justice is

pure justice, perfect justice, mine is impure and imperfect. His authority is unlimited, I have no authority. He is impartial, He is absolutely impartial, I am not...I am not omniscient. I don't see the end from the beginning. I can't read the motive. I am ignorant. I am short-sighted. I see nothing beyond today. I skew everything that happens to me in my own favor, and the longer I chew on something I didn't like, the bigger it gets and the more unrelated to reality it is. I am not the person to be making the judgment, neither are you. We're not qualified...not at all.

Well there's one final point to make along this line, number ten, and this is something to think about. I remember years ago when I was thinking through these things and I was teaching the book of Philemon which is the great story of forgiveness where the Apostle Paul asks Philemon to forgive the runaway slave Onesimus and take him back. And I had thought about all the things that I put in my little list so far to you, and then one other thing struck me like a bolt and sort of pulled everything together, and it's this: the injuries against you, the offenses against you are the trials that perfect you. If you respond with vengeance, you are literally interrupting the best work that God can do in your life. You need to be offended. Your pride needs it, your self-will needs it, your independence needs it. All the difficulties that you have in life, all the offenses that come against you, you need to learn to embrace those offenses. All the criticisms, all the injustices, all the persecutions, all the mistreatments, all the misunderstandings, all the misrepresentations, all of those which look to you to be wounds and severe attacks are, in fact, the very trials that perfect you. First Peter 5:10, "After you've suffered a while, the Lord make you perfect...perfect." After you've suffered a while, the Lord make you perfect.

James 1 verse 3, "The testing of your faith produces endurance. Let endurance have its perfect result." The testing of your faith produces endurance, that is an enduring, strong faith. You want that, so let it happen. "Blessed is the man who perseveres," verse 12, "under trial for once he's been approved, he'll receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him, therefore consider it all joy, brethren, when you fall into various trials."

The best illustration of this is in 2 Corinthians 12...2 Corinthians 12, we've talked about it through the years. This is by way of reminder. In verse 10, Paul makes an amazing statement. "I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties for Christ's sake for when I am weak, then I am strong." He had learned through his suffering that it was the trials that God used to perfect him. He has just talked about one of them.

In verse 7 he says, "To keep me from exalting myself because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, he had personal visits from the ascended Christ and a visit to heaven which he referred to in the opening of the chapter, too wonderful to even be spoken of. But because of these revelations, he would be tempted to exalt himself. So there was given him a thorn in the flesh. His flesh would rise up and be proud and so literally there's a sphere...the word "thorn" is a stake with a sharpened end. There was a stake rammed through his otherwise proud flesh, a messenger of Satan,

an angelos of Satan, a satanic angel, a demon. I believe this was the demon that was leading the destruction in the church at Corinth which was breaking his heart. Why did the Lord let a demon get into the church in the form of false teachers, embodied in false teachers to disrupt this church to which he had given so much of his life? To keep me from exalting myself. Isn't it an amazing thing to think about, that the Lord would even give a demon, empowered false teachers the right and the opportunity to go into a church and tear into that church if the end result would be the humbling of its pastor?

So, I prayed...he says in verse 8...three times that it might leave me. I prayed on three different occasions...Paul is saying...I asked the Lord to stop this by His great power, shut down this demonic operation that is tearing into this church that I love. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, I'm not going to stop the trial, I am going to ramp up the grace for power is perfected in weakness." You're not weak enough, Paul, you're not weak enough. You've had too many visions, you've had too many revelations, your flesh tends to too much pride, you need to be humbled. And the way to humble you most readily is to humble you at the point of where you see your greatest success, to have the church turn on you.

Any of us who are in ministry wonder why most of the criticism that comes against us comes...well it comes often from within the very church from where we are shepherding. But if it's not inside the church, it comes from other churches and other pastors and other Christian leaders, certainly it comes against me from those sources. Rarely does persecution come to me from the world. Rarely do lies and slander and evil speaking come against me from the world. Almost ninety-nine percent of the time it comes from inside the church. And it can be heartbreaking and you sometimes want to rise to defend yourself against these things. But you learn like the Apostle Paul that this is all part of the Lord's humbling you when you have been blessed. So, He says to him, "My grace is sufficient for you for power is perfected in weakness." The less you trust yourself, the more useful you are to Me.

So Paul's response, "Most gladly therefore I will rather boast about my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may dwell in me." Folks, the bottom line, what I'm saying in this, is this...your injuries, the offenses that come against you, the lies that come against you, the misrepresentations that come against you, the accusations, the persecution that comes against you, all of these things constitute the trials that God uses to perfect you. That's what you want, that kind of perfection.

God is at work and He's making you strong through the offenses that can make you angry. But if they make you angry and bitter and hateful and vengeful, you're just getting weaker and weaker and weaker and you're in a position to be cut off from the fellowship of other believers because they won't want to be anywhere around you and you're putting yourself in a position to forfeit the temporal blessing of God that comes with the forgiveness that comes with your forgiveness. God is at work making you strong and making you holy through these very things.

So, be very little concerned about personal injury, okay? Be indifferent to it, even within the family, even within the marriage, even within the circle of friends. Be much more concerned about your own personal holiness and understand that by those wounds and injuries that come more deeply from those that are close to you, being wounded in the house of your friends is the toughest to deal with, but embrace those. Be much concerned about the personal holiness that they produce. So when offenses come against you, which could tempt you to be unforgiving, be immediately forgiving because your far more concerned about the work of holiness that the Lord is doing in your life than you are about the offenses.

I guess summing it up, an anonymous saint wrote long ago, “Revenge indeed seems often sweet to men, but it only is a sugared poison. Its aftertaste is bitter as hell. Forgiving is sweet, it enjoys peace and the consciousness of God’s favor. By forgiving, it gives away and annihilates the injury. It treats the injurer as if he had no injured and therefore feels no more the pain and sting that was inflicted. Forgiveness is a shield from which all the fiery darts of the wicked one harmlessly rebound. Forgiveness brings heaven to earth and heaven’s peace into the troubled heart.” So pursue forgiveness, for God’s sake, for your sake, for the sake of the church. Let’s pray.

Father, we thank You tonight again for a wonderful evening of fellowship together. We thank You for faithful congregation of people who love You, who are not simply caught up in the details of Scripture but have come to love the One who is the theme of Scripture, even Your glorious trinitarian self. We thank You for the love of the truth that marks this congregation. And if it is true, and if it is so that we love the truth, written and incarnate, then we will embrace its demands joyfully. That means we embrace forgiveness. We instantly and unconditionally and freely forgive, waiting in some cases hopefully for the other person to come and seek a full reconciliation. But from our standpoint, we forgive. Help us to learn that last lesson, to embrace the wounds, who embrace the attacks, to embrace the misrepresentations to embrace the things that were said unkindly, unfairly, unjustly, the merciless injuries, to embrace them, offering immediate forgiveness, knowing that these wounds are the very trials that You use to perfect us. And may we, like the Apostle Paul, then rejoice in insults and distresses and suffering and persecution for when we are weakened by those things, that’s how You make us strong.

Lord, again we thank You for Your truth. We thank You for Your Holy Spirit, left to ourselves we wouldn’t have the power to live this way but because the Holy Spirit was poured out on the day of Pentecost and ever since that day every person who is in Christ is a temple of the Spirit of God. We thank You that the Spirit lives in us, enabling us to be obedient and to live lives that are marked by grace, mercy and forgiveness. This too is a clear demonstration to the watching world that Christ is in us, for we forgive even as He forgave us. Use us this week, Lord, even as we think about next weekend, to come across some folks that we can bring to hear the glories of the resurrection. Thank You for a wonderful day and for a time of worship and praise that we’ve been able to offer You, in

Christ’s name. Amen.

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