

This sermon is from the series BEING AN AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN IN A NON-CHRISTIAN WORLD. It was preached on March 26, 2017 at Cornerstone Baptist Church in Cherry Log, Georgia by Pastor Paul Mims. You can view this sermon at www.csbccl.org

THE FORGIVEN FORGIVER

Matthew 18:21-35

C.S. Lewis said, "Forgiveness is a lovely idea, until there is something to forgive" (Mere Christianity, p.115).

A little boy visiting his grandparents was given his first slingshot. He practiced in the woods, but he could never hit his target. As he came back to Grandma's back yard, he spied her pet duck. On an impulse he took aim and let fly. The stone hit, and the duck fell dead.

The boy panicked. Desperately he hid the dead duck in the woodpile, only to look up and see his sister watching. Sally had seen it all, but she said nothing. After lunch that day, Grandma said, "Sally, let's wash the dishes." But Sally said, "Johnny told me he wanted to help in the kitchen today. Didn't you, Johnny?" And she whispered to him, "Remember the duck! So Johnny did the dishes.

Later Grandpa asked if the children wanted to go fishing. Grandma said, "I'm sorry, but I need Sally to help make supper." Sally smiled and said, "That's all taken care of. Johnny wants to do it." Again she whispered, "Remember the duck." Johnny stayed while Sally went fishing. After several days of Johnny doing both his chores and Sally's, finally he couldn't stand it. He confessed to Grandma that he'd killed the duck. "I know, Johnny," she said, giving him a hug. "I was standing at the window and saw the whole thing. Because I love you, I forgave you. I

wondered how long you would let Sally make a slave of you. (Richard Hoefler, Will Daylight Come?)

We learn early, don't we, that life can easily get entangled in a web of misunderstanding. It happens in childhood and teen relationships – it happens in young adult lives – it happens when we are mature and when we are old. It happens in family life, church life, in our work relationships, and in every place where human beings have feelings and are offended.

Sometimes situations are easily explained and dealt with. At other times the wound is so deep in the soul of a person that reconciliation is not allowed. A person can carry a wound that enslaves and binds the mind for years. A grudge can alter the course of life and rob a person of peace.

We are observing in our Scripture passage this morning how Jesus is teaching his disciples that offenses will arise among them, but should never be permitted to grow into divisions. If they will carry his spirit into every situation, Satan will not be allowed to get the advantage.

THE FORGIVEN FORGIVER WILL FORGIVE OFFENSES.

Jesus told his men, "Salt is good; but if the salt becomes un-salty, with what will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." (Mark 9:50).

In the company of believers, the believer who has been offended should take the initiative and go to the offending believer and reveal the offense. If a refusal to reconciliation is made, the person who is been offended should go to the offender again with one or two others. If reconciliation is again refused, the matter is to be put before "the church." If the person refuses to listen to the church, the offending person should be looked upon as a nonbeliever because this is not the spirit of a person who has been forgiven by God. These principles are outlined by Jesus in

Matthew 18:15-20. Jesus reiterates what he has told the disciples before: "Truly I say to you whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Jesus was saying that broken fellowship among believers is serious business and has eternal consequences.

Simon Peter posed the question to Jesus: "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" The Pharisees taught that a person should be forgiven twice or perhaps three times at the most. Peter thinks that he is doing something very gracious and going more than twice beyond what the Pharisees were teaching and he suggested seven times. But Jesus goes far beyond Peter's suggestion and says "seventy times seven." This would mean unlimited forgiveness.

Jungle Aviation and Radio Service (JAARS), the flying department of Wycliffe Bible Translators--had flown thousands of hours over a 25 year span without one fatal accident before April 7, 1972. On that day, a Piper Aztec lost its right engine and crashed in Papua New Guinea, killing all seven persons aboard. The Aztec had just rolled out of the Wycliffe maintenance hangar the day before following a 100 hour inspection. The chief mechanic was stunned when he heard the news of the crash. Reviewing in his mind each step he had performed in inspecting that right engine, he suddenly recoiled in horror. He remembered that he had been interrupted while tightening a fuel line and had never returned to finish the job! That faulty connection had allowed raw fuel to spray out and catch fire while the Aztec was in flight. The mechanic's guilt at being responsible for the deaths of his companions crushed him. For days he did not know what to do. The other mechanics tried to help him, as did his own family. But when the family of Doug Hunt, the pilot who was killed in the accident, was preparing to return to their home in New Zealand, the mechanic knew he had to see them, talk with them and beg their forgiveness. He could barely get out the words as he sobbed

in their presence. "That hand there," he said, looking at his right hand, "took Doug's life." Glennis Hunt, Doug's widow, embraced him. "Glennis sat by me and held the hand that took her husband's life," he later wrote, "and another JAARS pilot sat on my other side with a demonstration of love, comfort, and forgiveness. That was the most significant first step in the healing process." (From Christian Illustrations).

This is what we would call "extreme forgiveness." But if some Christians can forgive the offender whose negligence has taken the lives of loved ones, surely there is enough grace in believers to forgive minor offenses.

THE FORGIVEN FORGIVER WILL FOLLOW THE PATTERN OF HIS HAVING BEEN FORGIVEN.

Jesus gives a parable of a king who desired to settle the accounts of two of his servants. One servant owed the King what would amount to in our currency over \$1 million. When the account was called in, the servant was totally unable to pay the debt. It was common in those days that such a situation would require that the servant and his family would be sold as slaves until repayment could be made. "The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.' And the Lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave the debt. But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a small amount in comparison to the debt he owed. He became violent and began to choke the one who was indebted to him and demanded to be paid immediately. So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him saying, "Have patience with me and I will repay you." Jesus said, "He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed." The fellow slaves saw what happened and reported it to the king and the king summoned the wicked servant and said, "You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. Should you

not have had mercy on your fellow slave even as I have mercy on you?" The king then handed him over to be tortured until he could repay all that was owed him – which was never.

Jesus concludes the parable with a shocking statement: "So shall my Heavenly Father also do to you, if each one of you does not forgive his brother from your heart." Jesus indicates that it is a serious offense for a person who has been forgiven of his sins by God to not offer the same forgiveness for offenses made against him.

When we have truly tasted of God's grace, we will be givers of grace to others. However, those who take divine grace lightly, will not consider it important to forgive others.

THE FORGIVEN FORGIVER WILL TREASURE HIS PERSONAL FORGIVENESS.

Have you ever said, "I will never forgive that person?" Some people say that and mean it and they become mean about it. But the person who has truly experienced God's forgiveness could never say that. We have looked at the theology of forgiveness. Now let's look at the practicality of putting it into practice. Sometimes it is not easy even for a Christian.

Former soldiers were visiting the Vietnam War Memorial, when one veteran asks another, "Have you forgiven those who held you as a prisoner of war? He replied, "I will never forgive them!" The other veteran responded, "Then it seems they still have you in prison, don't they?" Years later he was still holding deep-seated resentment for what his captors had put him through.

Emmett Aldrich of Christian Mediation Services wrote a very fine article on "Ten Keys to Forgiveness" and we will have look at them briefly:

1. Let go of the anger. Anger is destructive and causes an emotional drain on us even if we don't realize it.

2. Don't be stubborn. This keeps us from moving beyond hurt feelings.
3. Stop thinking of yourself as a victim. "Victim mentality" gets us nowhere.
4. Focus on the future. Continually bringing up sore points or issues of the past will only make the rift larger.
5. Re-learn to trust. Complete forgiveness means that we must re-learn to trust the individual that caused the hurt in the first place.
6. Be reasonable in your expectations of others. Our judgment is usually clouded when we are angry.
7. Expect that it will take time to forgive. You have to move beyond the hurt.
8. Examine your heart. You may be contributing to situations for which you will need forgiveness.
9. Let forgiveness be an everyday practice. Make forgiveness an essential part of your life.
10. Ask God for guidance. Remember how you asked Him for forgiveness and he granted it to you.

There was a time when up to about 40 years of age, I had a low grade anger toward my father. It all started when I was three years old. My father was a heavy drinker and would go into a rage against my mother at times. He was the son of a minister and my mother was the daughter of a deacon in the church. They met at church and fell in love. He had started drinking as a teenager when he would slip and drink the communion wine which my grandfather made for the church. My mother knew nothing of his drinking until they were on their honeymoon and he stopped at a liquor store in Valdosta. One night years later, he became very drunk and came at my mother with a knife in his hand and threatened to kill her and me also. She pushed him aside, picked me up, and ran to a neighbor's house where the sheriff was called. We were living at the time in Green Cove Springs, Florida. The sheriff took her and me to the bus station and we traveled

back to Brooks County, Georgia to her parent's farm. My grandparents placed an injunction against my father and he was not allowed near us anymore. I only saw him once when I was about eight years old. So you can see that I had strong feelings toward him.

When I was 14, I made my public profession of faith in Christ and was baptized into the First Baptist Church of Quitman, Georgia. I grew rapidly as a new believer and was called to the ministry. I went to college and seminary to prepare. It was while I was pastor at First Baptist Church in Norfolk, Virginia that we were visiting my mother at her home in Quitman. She said to me, "I have heard that your father has died and is buried in a cemetery in Waycross Georgia." We had to go through Waycross on our return to our home in Norfolk. I said to Janice and the kids, I would like to stop at the cemetery in Waycross and find his grave. I went into the office and was directed to the plot of his burial. I stood there and looked at the mound of dirt over him and the realization of all of the years flooded over me. The anger and resentments that I had harbored felt like a poison in my soul. I thought, "I've got to get free of this." So I looked down at the grave and said, "Okay Dad, I forgive you for being a drunk and destroying our family. I forgive you for betraying my mother and for threatening our lives. I forgive you totally!"

I felt like a new person after that. There was a freedom in my spirit. With Janice and Joe and Jenny by my side, we drove up the coast to Norfolk. More than ever I was determined to build the kind of family that I never had growing up. God's forgiveness in my life changed everything for me and my forgiveness of my father changed everything for our future.

The power of a forgiven person to forgive is awesome!

Praise be to His Name!