

Gospel of Peace | Eph 6:15

Well, if you don't know me, I am a pastor here. I was afraid if I missed another week, y'all would take my key away. It's good to be back here. I can say that there is no other place I'd rather preach and be than right here with you. I was in Alabama a couple of weeks ago and it was a wonderful church. I love the people. I love the pastors. I enjoyed being there but I woke up Sunday and I missed you guys. It was kind of a sad, weird feeling not to be coming here. And it's good to be back. Let's pray. It's a scary thing to speak on the behalf of God, to speak as a mouthpiece of God is a very scary thing to do. It makes me nervous every time I try to do it and, to be truthful, I'm scared to death. But I'm always scared. And you actually should be scared to death to listen, to be truthful. And to be honest about it, we all should be very aware that we're in the presence of God. This is not a joke, this is not entertainment, this is not just getting your weekly worship service fix for the month or for the week. This is God's appointed way to speak to us. God's appointed way to minister to your life, to challenge you, to encourage you, to correct you.

You need God's word. I need God's word. And we should take it as it is: God speaking to us. God is here to give us a word and I know that because there is a man that represents God, and who speaks on God's behalf, I know you can look at the man and go, "It's just a man." And when he fumbles and loses his thoughts in his notes and mispronounces this or that and makes his human errors, that can remind you, "Oh, it's just a man." And you can daydream if you want. You can focus on other things. But if you don't understand that this is the means that God has chosen to speak to us, through the foolishness of preaching – through fallible, imperfect instruments – this is the way He's chosen to speak to us – through ambassadors – that God will hold you accountable as if God Himself was speaking, you would listen more intently. And if I understood that – that's why I'm scared – if I understood that I speak on behalf of God, then I must be careful that I don't speak Jeff Johnson's words or just try to entertain you or to impress you or something of that nature. I would be scared to death if I'm going to be held to a greater account because I represent Him.

So, let's pray. Let's all be afraid and have a decent fear of God as we enter into His word. Let's pray.

God, speak to us. Challenge us. Encourage us. Rebuke us. Whatever we need, dear God. We want to know that we've heard from You. That's all we want to know, is that we've heard from You today. This we pray in Your Son's name, Amen.

Now, we're going through the various parts of the armor of God and we're thinking about fighting and we're warring against not flesh and blood, but we're warring against a demonic power that doesn't play fair. Satan is crafty and he's going to use your wife or your husband, your children. He's going to use coworkers. He's going to use church members. He's going to use people on social media. He's going to use everybody and anybody to get under your skin and get you to sin. He's going to razzle you. He's going to get you frustrated. He's going to get you where you're depressed. He's going to get you all worked up where you're in a place that you don't

have self-control and you're going to spout out. You're going to say something you shouldn't have said. You're going to lose it. You're going to get angry. You're going to do something. You're going to sin because Satan's got you in a position where you're frustrated. And the enemy doesn't play fair. The enemy is cruel. The enemy wants to distract you and get you in a place where you're going to do something you'll regret, and he's going to do it in a way where it's not fair.

He's going to mock you. He's going to make fun of you. He's going to use people that will exploit you and take advantage of you; people that curse you and hurt your feelings. He's going to get you where you're angry with someone because someone's going to offend you. In fact, you're going to have a whole lot of people offend you. You're going to be offended by people in this church. You're going to be offended by me, maybe. You're going to be offended by your spouse. You're going to be offended. There are offenses everywhere and how are you to respond? How are you to respond to such offenses when people do you wrong? Well, the Bible tells us that we don't play like they play. If they are mean, we cannot be mean back. If they're ugly, we can't be ugly back. If they're spiteful, we're not to be spiteful. If they say cruel and hurtful things, we're to hold our tongue. If they revile, we're not to revile back. We're to bless those who persecute us. We're to pray for those who wrong us. We're not to repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but we're to bless those who curse us.

When we are vilified, we are to bless. When we are persecuted, we are to endure it patiently, Paul says. The Lord Jesus says, "I tell you to love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Bless those," Jesus said, "who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you." So, you're going to be mistreated. You're going to be abused. You're going to have your feelings hurt. You're going to be exploited and it's going to be purposeful and you're going to be in a place that you don't know how to respond, but God tells you you're going to bless those, and pray to those, and be good to those who do these types of things to you. And you're not going to want to do it, are you? Let's be real about it. We can be super-saints if we want to and we can act like we just love to forgive people, but in all honesty, you're just like me, you hate to forgive. You're just like me.

You don't like forgiven people. You want to hold on to the grudge and keep the grudge. "Jeff, you don't understand what they did to me. You don't understand how they hurt me so badly. I've a right to be bitter until I die. I'm going to be bitter. I am bitter. I'm mad. I'm not going to give up on this fight. I'm going to win this fight. I'm going to sue. I'm going to get revenge. I deserve it. You can't treat me that way." It's hard, isn't it, to respond humbly and graciously? I mean, this is not pretend. This war is not easy. This is the front-lines. This is very difficult. Some of you are still mad at your wife right now, you're mad at your husband about something. You're mad at your children or children, you're mad at your parents. There are all types of division in this world. There are wars and fighting and feuding. Husbands and wives are on the verge of divorce.

We don't like our bosses. We don't like that they don't pay us enough. We don't like the fact that they don't let us off on vacation. In fact, they knew we needed that time off. This text, verse 15 of chapter six of Ephesians, tells us how to be ready to fight such a war. It's the solution. It's

hard. I'm not going to pretend like it's easy. This is not a Sunday school lesson. This is real-life. It's really hard but here's the solution to fight the way God tells us to fight: we fight by blessing. We don't retaliate; we do good. We don't delight when we hear bad things happen to our enemies.

Starting in verse 10, it says, *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fasted on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness – and here's our text for today – and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.*

What do these shoes mean? Well, putting shoes with the word 'readiness', or it could be translated 'being prepared, being equipped or prepared to go', the idea is that you're sleeping with your boots on. You're in combat and you can't take your armor off. You can't even take your shoes off. Now, I know when you take a nap, the first thing you want to take off before anything else is your shoes. You take your shoes off, prop your feet off, and you can relax because you don't have to be going anywhere. But in this case, you can't take your shoes off because you've got to be prepared. You've got to be ready because you don't know when you're going to be attacked. You're in constant warfare and you have to be prepared at all times. You have to sleep with your shoes on. You've got to be ready. This is the context.

Thus, you need to be equipped and prepared. And what are these shoes? What are the shoes that prepare you, equip you to fight in an instant? So often, you get in a quick, little argument. You know, a soft answer turns away wrath but you didn't give a soft answer. You answered with a harsher word and when you do that, when you respond in the flesh, it's because you didn't have your shoes on. You weren't ready. You were caught off guard. You were thinking, "Well, I didn't think I was going to be in a fight today." No, you weren't ready. So, we're talking about being ready to fight. And for us to understand what this means, we need to understand why the gospel is the shoes. We can understand why righteousness is a breastplate. We can understand why faith is a shield. And you've got the sword of the Spirit. That makes sense. But why is the gospel our shoes?

You can think about Romans. About how faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. It comes by those who are sent and blessed are the feet, if you would, of those who share the gospel. So, you've got this idea of those who are running to and fro sharing the gospel. And there's maybe some reason for that but we want to understand why the gospel is our shoes. It's because the gospel is a gospel of peace and the enemy is seeking to divide. He's sowing seeds of discord. He's seeking to separate us. He's seeking to cause us to argue, to fight, to feud with one another. And for us to understand why the gospel is a gospel of peace, we need to understand, first of all, why sin is division. It is sin that brings hostility. Hostility, division, divorce, fights, discord; all these things are the consequence of sin. All your argumentation is a result of

sin. You who sow seeds of discord in your thoughts towards a brother or sister, it's because of sin. You who don't talk to others, you won't even talk to someone, you won't even look at them. It's because of sin. Sin divides and God hates it.

We're to do all that we can, we're to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We're to seek to live peacefully with all people. We're to seek to be reconciled with one another. We're not to have any animosity in our hearts towards a brother or sister, especially those we are Christians. And so, if you're here today and you have any ounce of division in your heart towards anybody in this room, you're in sin. Where does it come from? James tells us in chapter four, *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?* Where does it come from, he's asking. He answers: *Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?* Okay, it's not just that you're fighting with other people, you've got internal war. You're at war with yourself. Your passions are warring within you. How is it warring within you?

You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? This love of the world makes you God's enemy. Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Your problem is that you're an enemy of God. The reason you war with others is because you're not right with God and the reason you're not right with God is because you have a love for this world. You want stuff that you cannot get. You're discontent within. You've got warring passions, so it separates you from God and that's the first step. Sin brings us into hostility with God.

Our hostility with one another is a sign of our hostility with God Himself. You cannot say, "Well, I'm right with God but I'm not right with my brothers and sisters in the Lord." You cannot say that. You see, God's designed us to be satisfied, and only satisfied, with infinite glory. You all want something huge. "Oh, I want a billion dollars." No, that won't satisfy you. You want infinite glory. And that's not a bad thing. God put that in you. The Bible says God's put eternity in your heart. We're made in His image. We're made to want something truly glorious, truly weighty. Something truly meaningful. We're made to need God. That's the only thing that's going to satisfy me. "You're not asking for much, are you?" Well, I can't help it. I've got to have God. You do too.

But sin is being dissatisfied with God. That's one definition of sin. Sin is coming short of the glory of God. Now, imagine the folly of sin. You've got God! We're not talking about having a Lamborghini that's going to be here one day and burn in the fire the next day. We're not talking about the riches of this world. We're not talking about treasures that perish. We're not talking about cheap junk. We're talking about the living God who's full of glory and truth! Now, that is something to possess. That is glory, real glory. Do you understand? And sin is saying, "That's just not enough. I've got to have something else. I need that forbidden fruit to be happy. I'm not satisfied with what I have. I need one more thing." Sin begins with, according to Romans 1, knowing that there's a God but you're just not thankful. You know, you've got God but that's just not enough. I'm not thankful. I'm discontent. And where does that take you?

Imagine if you turn from God, what do you have? Nothing. No wonder you're miserable. No wonder we're all miserable, right? We turn our backs on glory. What do we have? An apple? A moment of pleasure? Remember the story of David's son? He wanted to marry his sister. He finally got his sister and then after he got her he says, "I hate you." You got what you wanted. No, that's the problem. You find out what you wanted did not bring what you're looking for and it leads you to be miserable. If you reject God, all you have is misery left. You have this world and the world can't satisfy that unquenchable, insatiable desire for glory, so you become discontent and unsatisfied. It leads us away from God and it makes us hate God and love this world and it makes God hate us. We become the children of wrath. Do you not know the Bible says that you become adulterous? And do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God and whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself God's enemy?

So, the first problem with war and sin is that it divides us from God. It separates us from God. There is a divorce. This is what sin does. But it doesn't just lead us into animosity with the living God. It brings us into animosity and hostility with self. Once we have rejected finding our joy in God's glory, what is left for us? The Bible says that we have insatiable desires. Ecclesiastes 1:8 says, *The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.* Ecclesiastes 5:10 says, *He who loves money will not be satisfied with money.* How much wood can a fire burn? The more wood you put on the fire, the more it wants to consume. How much of this world do you actually need? You're surfing the web looking for this or that, you're trying to buy something. You've got to go shopping, and shopping, and shopping and when you get it, you open it up and it gives you ten minutes of, "Oh, that's great," and then it's off to shop for some more because you're just not satisfied.

And that's a symptom of sin and discontent. It's a symptom of being at odds with the living God. The Bible says this makes you miserable. James says this is your passions warring within you. In other words, you have no peace within. You don't have peace with God and you don't have peace with yourself. You're at war. You're miserable. Now, think about taking a grumpy person who's miserable and that grumpy, miserable person is going to fight. I mean, that's what they do. You get a kid that's upset, disappointed about something, and the next thing you know the kid's yelling at his brother and sister. It's like, "What's wrong with you?" It's not the brother and sister that are irritating. There's something deeper that's wrong with you. The reason you fight is that there's something deeply wrong with you. The Bible says you desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and you cannot obtain. This is where fights and feuds and wars and divisions come from. They come from your insatiable desires to want glory but you can't find it because you don't have God.

And that leads, thirdly, to sin bringing us into hostility with everyone. *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel.* Most of the time you're fighting because there's something wrong with you. And it's not your spouse, it's not your children, it's not your coworker, it's not some other church member. Unfulfilled longings, discontentment, is a cause of our coveting. This discontentment and

coveting is the cause of our frustration. We look for our spouse to fulfill God's role. "You know, if I just get married, I'll be happy." No, no. You're going to be mad at your spouse because you don't have God and your spouse is not going to fulfill God's role. "Well, if I can just have children. I can't be happy without children." No, no. Your children cannot take God's place. "Well, if I can just have money and a good job..." No, that's not going to do it either.

See, we look for our children to complete us. We look for something to complete us. Some of us look for cheap, worthless things to satisfy us. I know some of you don't believe this, but if you're not happy with your '89 Toyota Camry that's scratched up and the dash is all sticky – that's my car, by the way – if you're not satisfied with what you have, you could have a brand-new Lamborghini dropped in your lap and it won't be but two or three days, maybe two or three months, or two or three years, and that won't satisfy you either. So, we fight and quarrel and war with everyone. This is why people fight with us. This is why we hold grudges. It's because we're miserable. And it's not the one we're miserable with, it's something deeper that's got us upset.

But we're to return good for evil. When people revile us, mistreat us, abuse us, make fun of us, hurt us, and exploit us purposefully...when they do that, it's hard to be the better person. To be humble and gentle. Romans 12 tells us, *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Repay no evil for evil...If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves...If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink...Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

1 Peter 3: *Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but with blessing.* 1 Corinthians 4:12, *When are vilified, we bless. When we are persecuted, we endure it.* Matthew 5:44, *But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.* Luke 6:38, *Bless those that curse you.* Now that's hard to do. I'll be honest with you, a couple of months ago, someone hurt me so badly that I told my wife I don't want to forgive. I was being truthful. In fact, I'm confident that I can't forgive. I knew, "I'm going to have to have grace. I'm going to have to have grace to do this." How are we to seek to live peacefully with all men and forgive those who hurt us? How are we to love not our friends? How are we to love our enemies? I mean really love? Think of the person you like least and think, "How can I love that person? Can I take them cookies? Can I pray for them? That's hard to do but that's what we're called to do: to pray, to bless. Ask God's blessing upon them. If something bad happens to them, go, "Oh, I hate to hear that. I want good for them."

This is how you fight this battle and it's hard to fight this battle this way. Satan's trying to get you to play his way. To curse for those who curse you and he's trying to get you to not forgive. Satan wants to send you to hell by an unforgiving spirit. Jesus said, "If you do not forgive others, neither will I forgive you." So, hold that bitter grudge and don't forgive. Satan's trying to take you down. He's not playing fair. How do you forgive?

We wage war by preaching peace. We fight hostilities through kindness. Waging war through peace, seeking to do what we can to live peacefully with all men. How are we going to have this ability? How are we going to be equipped and ready and prepared to fight? We have to have the

shoes on our feet. It's the shoes of the gospel. Not just the gospel but it says the gospel of peace. Sin, division, gospel, reconciliation. Gospel brings two back together in harmony. The gospel leads to peace. So, let's look at how the gospel brings peace. We've seen how sin brings division, now let's see how the gospel brings peace.

First, the gospel establishes peace with God. We cannot have peace with our neighbor until we have peace with God. It comes with getting right with God. God comes to us with the message of peace. It's peace on earth and good-will towards men. That God's wrath has been appeased in the person of Jesus Christ. God offers us total, 100% forgiveness. And I don't know if you understand what forgiveness is but it's beautiful if you see it. It's not, "I forgive but I won't forget." It's not, "I forgive but I'm watching you." Boy, I'd hate for God to forgive us that way. I need a full forgiveness. I need where all my sins are cast into the sea and they're forgotten and remembered no more. I need nothing between me and God. When God sees me, He needs to see the Man Jesus Christ and none of my failures, sins, and wickedness. I need real peace and the Bible offers peace through Jesus Christ.

It says, *Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* Colossians 1:20, *We have been reconciled to God through His blood.* Romans 5:20, *When we were His enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.* This is amazing. To know that God's at peace with us and to be at peace with God. To be in communion with God. Some of you, God has justified and sees you as perfectly sinless and He has no animosity towards you, but your conscience is still dirty and you want the joy of your salvation restored. You want to be renewed and to be in perfect peace with God. You want your conscience to be at peace. The only solution is the gospel. The gospel is the solution. It's the message of peace. And you can have peace with God through what Jesus Christ has done for you. Now, that takes the burden off of you. But it doesn't just give you peace with God, it gives you the mechanism and the ability to have peace with your neighbors.

The gospel, secondly, establishes peace within ourselves. Romans 14 tells us, in verse 17, *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.* One of the things about being saved is there's a joy unspeakable and full of glory. There's something that satisfies your soul. In fact, it's something, and only something, that can satisfy you: God Himself. Jesus put it in this way in John 4, *Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.* He says in John 6, *I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall not thirst.*

You know, the world is always on to the next thing. You need the next thing. You want the next thing. But when you find God, you finally find everything. When you find God, you don't have anymore hunger or thirst. You've found the source. You've found glory itself. And you have God, you have all things. Jesus said to the woman at the well, *Everyone who drinks of the water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water.* It will well up and sustain him forever, for all eternity. You see, once we are reunited with God, we find true peace and

satisfaction. Proverbs 19 tells us, *The fear of the LORD leads to life and whoever has it rests and is satisfied.* Psalm 16:11: *In your presence, there is fullness of joy.* It doesn't matter if you're rich or poor. If you have God, you have everything.

Isaiah 58:11 says, *And the LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.* You may be living in the desert. You may be living in a hut. You may only have a pot and a pan to cook with and you have nothing else but dirt floors. You may not have much of this world but though you live in a dark desert, scorched land, you'll be like a well-watered garden. If you have God, you have everything. You're truly satisfied. There's true joy and peace in your heart. Your passions within you are not warring and fighting saying, "I just don't have enough." You have enough. You have God. And only this brings true satisfaction and peace within.

Think about this. If you won a billion dollars, that would be awesome. You say, "Oh Jeff, I'm too spiritual to think that way." No, it would be really cool to have a billion dollars. I mean, I would do a lot of mission work with it and pay off my house and all kinds of great stuff. Think about the day you won that billion dollars. That would be a great day. I mean, you get the letter or phone call, "Hey, I won a billion dollars." That would be a cool day. Now, imagine you got the message that you've got a billion dollars being deposited into your bank account. That day, you're driving home. I'm going to go tell my wife, Letha. "Letha, guess what..." I'm driving home and someone bumps into me, into that '89 scratched-up Camry. Do you think I care? Honestly, do you think I care about another scratch to my car? No, I'm about to dump that one. I'm about to leave that one behind. I don't care about that car.

You know, if someone bumps into your car, you get all mad, don't you? You get all mad because that car means so much to you. That car is your world or whatever it is. "You can't bump into my car." You fight and feud and get made about this or that. But if you understood that you had a billion dollars, you wouldn't care about these things anymore. The reason you're so upset because someone hurt you, is because you don't realize what you have. Listen, you don't have a billion dollars. That would be nothing compared to what you *do* have. Let me tell you some good news: you have God! You have God! And now you're upset about your car? Give me a break. You have God! And you're mad at sister so-and-so for hurting your feelings. You have God and you're mad or upset. You're not happy. You have God, brothers and sisters. What can man take from you?

All they can do to you is take your physical life. That's the worst they can do to you. But you have eternal life forever and ever and ever and ever. Every day should be a day like, "I'm the richest man in the world. Everyday I have life. I have Christ. I am the luckiest person in the world. I'm saved. I'm among the elect. I am happy today!" We should feel that way. But we're not that way because we lose focus of what we have and think about what we don't have.

Here's what I have in my notes. That was just off my head. All your sins are forgiven. That's a good one. Thank the Lord. You've been given, freely, eternal life. Oh, that would be one of my

three wishes. Live forever. You have been given God. God is yours. Let me read you the words of Jesus. *Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times. Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything." And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, "Pay what you owe." So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you." He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you? And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."*

Brothers and sisters, you're not free to hold a grudge. If you're holding a grudge, Satan is defeating you. You have no grounds to be unforgiving. You've been forgiven a great debt. A huge debt. How much should you be able to forgive the little debt that is owed you? And this leads to my third and final point.

The gospel establishes peace with our enemies. Hebrews tells us, *Strive for peace with everyone.* Romans 12 tells us, *If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceful with all.* Matthew 5:9, *Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the sons of God.* James 3:18, *And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.* 2 Corinthians 13:11, *Finally brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration. Comfort one another. Grieve with one another. Live in peace and the God of love and peace will be with you.*

So, we're to live in peace with everyone. From the heart. It's not like, "Hey, I get along with someone and I look them in the face and I don't kick them." No, it's from our heart. If we don't have a genuine love for everyone, something's not right with our heart. But you understand that it's the gospel that gives us the power, liberty, and freedom to forgive. Now, I know what you're thinking. "Well, they're not repentant." The devil's going to get you to keep on saying that. "They're not repentant. They're not repentant. They're not repentant." You know, we're to forgive seventy times seven *if* they're repentant, right? And that keeps us holding a grudge. We're free to hold a grudge because we don't think the other person's repentant enough. Though we can't know their hearts, we assume they're not repentant enough. They may have said they're sorry but we don't trust them, we don't believe them. We're not going to forgive because they're not repentant, so we hold this grudge. But here's the liberty that we have: I believe the death of Jesus Christ gives us the ability to forgive. Because we know justice is going to take place. We

don't have to worry about justice because there is a sense of justice. "It's just not fair for someone to treat me this way and get off scot-free with nothing." And there's that sense of justice demanding payment.

It's hard to forgive when we want justice and retribution. You have it in Jesus Christ. The brother and sister that offended you, those sins have been paid for by Jesus Christ. Amen? You don't have to worry about justice. God takes care of that. Now, I want you to see the heart that God has. God doesn't forgive the unrepentant. He sends them to hell but I firmly believe that God has a heart, a disposition to forgive everyone. He does not delight in the death of the wicked. He would rather forgive everyone. He would love for everyone to be repentant. And He's kind of like the father of the prodigal son. He's on the back porch or the front porch in his rocking chair looking for his son to come. And his son is finally coming afar off and the father doesn't wait for the son to get here; he's rushing to go get his prodigal son and to bestow his blessing upon him.

You see, that's the disposition you must have. The Lord Jesus Christ had this disposition. As they were killing Jesus Christ, He is saying, "Father, forgive them. They do not know what they're doing." He's not going to take revenge on them. "Father, forgive them." Is that your heart? Lord, I love them. I forgive them. I forgive them from my heart. And I know you can't trust people who are unrepentant. I'm not telling you to trust people who are abusing you. But just because you don't trust people who are abusing you, doesn't mean you hold a grudge in your heart towards those people. The Bible says, *If you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you your trespasses.* If you have a grudge, you're not right with God.

The Bible says, *Do not let the sun go down on your anger.* Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding manner so that your prayers are not hindered. Because you're just not right with someone, your prayers are hindered. The Lord put it this way: when you come to worship and you have your gift – you have your offering to fit in the offering box – you have your gift and you want to worship God with your possessions, with your heart. And you don't have anything in your mind at ought with God. You love God but this brother or sister over here, you're not quite right with. God says, "Before you put your money in that offering box, before you come and worship Me, stop and lay that to the side... Yeah, you can give that to Me but not now. Go get right with your brother or sister and once you're right with them, your heart is right and you've forgiven them, then come and worship Me."

Some of you may be miserable because you're not living with peace in your heart. You see, we're to be ambassadors of Christ and we've been given the message of reconciliation, not of division.

We're not to sow seeds of discord. We're to endeavor, with all that is within us, to seek to live peacefully with all people.

In conclusion, the gospel is the power that does that. How can we live up to such a wonderful standard? How can we be like Jesus Christ who sends the rain upon the just and the unjust, who's kind to those who abuse Him? How can we be that way? The gospel. Being right with

God. You see, sin is what divides and the gospel is what unites. May we be rooted in the gospel. May we put these shoes on our feet and wear them every day.

Let's pray.

Lord, don't just forgive us for our sin of unforgiveness. Give us the power to forgive in our hearts. Lord, release us, dear Lord, help us to be released from all animosity and bitterness. Help us, dear God, not to keep on and on and on with things that would ruin our joy. Thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus Christ, to reconcile us to Yourself and to one another. This we pray in Your Son's name, Amen.