

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 4

“29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, & evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”

'Importance of Forgiveness'

In the conclusion of chapter four, we find the Apostle Paul presenting two choices for Christians:

- We can put on the new man and walk with Christ...
- Or we can continue to walk as if we were still in the old man grieving the Spirit of God.

We studied things we are to do and things we are to avoid and our final task is to discuss at greater length how we are to forgive one another!

Last week I made the case that there is no such thing as justified malice, and this week I hope to show you that there are no exceptions in the call to forgive!

- What we will consider is the simple but very profound truth that we are to forgive others as Christ Jesus has forgiven us!
 - First we will quickly review how our sins are forgiven in Christ, then consider how we are to forgive others and finally how important this obedience really is for our new life in Christ Jesus if we want the abundant life that He promised!

As the Advent season approaches, we will once again study that grand proclamation from the Angel that Jesus would save His people from their sins. Romans provides the most detail about how this happens including how God was just and the justifier as He sent His own Son to propitiate His wrath against our sin...

- The Cross of Christ is central to our salvation and there is NO other way for our sins to be forgiven because we were under God's just judgment.

From this pulpit I have often reviewed other places in the Scriptures where we are given grand pictures to help us fully understand this incredible truth of God's Grace...

In Psalm 103 we read: “10 He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. 11 For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. 12 As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”

- The Psalmist is careful to say that our sins are as far from us as the east is from the west and not the north from the south! Do you remember why that is? You see IF it said as far as the north is from the south then we could imagine how far it is between the north and south poles: Large but measurable.
- But how far is the east from the west?
- Do you see the point?

God does not want us to try and figure out just how far that could be, but to ponder the great work that the Blood of Jesus has accomplished !

The prophet Micah gives us another image to consider when pondering the riches of God's Grace: Micah 7:19 "[God] will again have compassion on us, And will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins Into the depths of the sea."

Our sins are taken away, cast away with a distance we cannot measure and a depth we cannot imagine! And finally we can turn to the Book of Hebrews for even more comfort when it come to dealing with our sins... Hebrews 10:16 "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them," 17 then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more."

- Ponder that for a moment and then listen as the writer gives us further encouragement.

18 Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin. 19 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."

- We can never fully comprehend the wonder of what God has done, but these images are there to help us.
- And this brings us to the question about just how we are to forgive others as Christ Jesus has forgiven us!

The Apostle Paul says that as part of putting on the New Man we are to be forgiving others as Christ Jesus has forgiven us! Since we just reviewed how the forgiveness of sins, ours or anyone else's can only be accomplished at the cross, we can be certain that Paul does not want us to go around saying that we can forgive other people's sins. Even when a minister does so during the absolution after our time of confession we are saying we are forgiven because of the work of Christ.

So what does forgiving others mean? There have been hundreds of books written, but maybe we should keep it simple?

Jesus provides further insight, or should I say the same challenge, in the Lord's prayer which we pray each week in our worship service:

Matthew 6:11 "Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, [or trespasses] As we forgive our debtors, or those who trespass against us]."

- And in Matthew's recounting of the sermon on the mount Jesus leaves no doubt about just what that prayer should mean...

14 "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

- Does this mean we can lose our salvation if we fail to forgive another person that has sinned against us?

Certainly NOT! But we should see that forgiveness is an important part of how we walk in the good works we were created in Christ Jesus to walk in. We see this again as Jesus gives some of His final instructions after entering Jerusalem to give His life for us...

Mark 11: "24 Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them. [boy, we really like those kind of promises!] 25 "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. 26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

Now, we saw how our sins are forgiven in Christ, so just how does this forgiving others work?

- I want to suggest this morning that it is much simpler than we often make it out to be and it does revolve around our remembering how Jesus has forgiven us!

So start with something simple: Parents often observe an offense by one child over another: Johnny punches Joey and mom then says to Johnny tell him you are sorry. She then says to Joey tell Johnny you forgive him.

- What we have there is the simple resolution of a conflict!

If one or both refuse to do their part, a correction ensues and soon everyone is happy and obedient and the conflict is finally resolved. Now of course when we grow older and move into adult situations things can get much more complicated and that is where we often forget the simple instructions that Jesus has given us. There can still be simple examples, and getting these right can often help us with the more complicated situations:

- I walk by Igor and step on his toe:
I turn and say I am sorry and Igor says no problem in forgiveness.

But, now what happens if one or both of us do not do what is right? Do we need our parents back? We know that is not possible, but as always we see that the early childhood training should reflect on the rest of life. So I step on that toe, and when Igor complains I simply say 'get over it' and walk on.

Now I have unrepented sin in my life and we should know that our loving Father does not leave us without chastisement: Will it be immediate? Probably not, though it could be my lovely bride who calls me to task before I can leave the room? Sadly it could be a habit that could grow into a major problem for myself or others.

- People who are cruel to others do not start out being cruel in major ways, but rather in a series of unrepented little ways.

It could go the other way as well with my turning to say I am sorry to Igor and his throwing a temper tantrum saying that I did it on purpose and refusing to accept my apology.

Again, Paula may not let that stand if she observed it, but sadly it could be the beginning of a root of bitterness that would be destructive to both Igor and those he interacts with.

- Now assuming such bad behavior takes place, how does our admonition to forgive others apply?

If I walk on in rebellion, whether Igor says he will forgive me or not does not change the problem of sin in my life. The same is true if Igor refuses to accept my apology: If I think well I still forgive Igor, it does not change the problem of sin in his life.

- What forgiveness does impact is our own lives because Jesus said we were to forgive others as He forgave us!

Someone might object and say that I cannot forgive someone who has offended me if they have not asked for such forgiveness. Certainly the situation cannot be fully resolved unless both parties are being obedient by asking for and extending forgiveness...

- BUT as I just pointed out in our simple illustration, disobedience by one party can lead to damage in both lives if forgiveness is not given.
- I would also remind such an objector that we certainly do not want our forgiveness that we have in Christ to be for ONLY those sins that we have remembered to confess.

Now this begins to sound like a very hard teaching, not unlike when Jesus said that it was impossible for a rich man to enter the Kingdom. When He gave the illustration of a camel having to pass through the eye of a needle the disciples despaired thinking who could possibly be saved then...

But Jesus told them that while it was impossible for man it was not for God!

This is why we are told to forgive as Christ Jesus has forgiven us!

Put another way, the more that I reflect on how undeserving I was and am of Christ's forgiveness, it makes it more likely and much easier for me to forgive others!

- The alternative is to allow sin by others to plant seeds of bitterness in our own life!
- And so we have front & center our final consideration of why such forgiveness is so important in our abundant Christians lives.

Now all examples and illustrations break down at some point, but allow me to extend my mishap with Igor just a bit more to show us why this is so important. You can apply this to whatever situations you may have faced or be facing in life to see how the principles apply...

- We learned that as new men and women there were many things we were to do and many to avoid.

I believe that the reason Paul ends with this call for forgiveness is because failing to forgive can not only hinder our doing the good things but also can cause many of the things we are to avoid that we read in verse 31...

- Bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil speaking and all malice.

Again, I want to focus on the offended party here, not the person with unrepented sin... We know God will deal with that in His own time.

- So, Igor has a sore toe and I have brushed him off acting like it did not happen, so what does he do.

If he forgives me as Christ Jesus has forgiven him, he has closure and would likely pray for me in the coming days.

If on the other hand, he goes home and begins to tell others what happened, it might begin with 'I cannot believe what Pastor did' and over time it could easily become 'I cannot believe what a jerk Pastor was' and I will leave it to your imagination as to what would happen to our relationship.

The same is true the other way around:

I apologize and Igor does not accept my apology. Again, I could forgive him for that and find closure and would pray for him in the coming days.

On the other hand, if I go home and say, 'I tried to apologize and Igor just would not hear of it' you can see how it could soon be something more like, 'everyone could see it was an accident and I cannot believe Igor thought I did it on purpose.' Again I have assured a broken relationship.

And in both cases what will we see:

Certainly Bitterness, because we are warned about his directly in the Book of Hebrews: "14 Pursue peace with all people, *[which must include forgiveness]*

Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: 15 looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; 16 lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright."

Interesting that the writer looked back at Esau where a simple rash move caused so much trouble for him!

- **Not unlike a simple foot stumping!**

This is why we speak of the root of bitterness, because left unchecked, or unforgiven, such things grow and grow into greater and greater sin.

Even with this simple illustration with Igor & myself, we can you see how such unrepented and unforgiven sin could end up with wrath and anger in our relationship?

Paul says we are to avoid clamor and yet here you could see one of us saying something like, ‘you would not believe what that other person did!’”

- **And that of course that is the evil speaking that is to be put away.**

And in the end we could end up showing malice to one another, where a simple act of forgiveness could have restored peace.

And yes, we know all the excuses: “You just don’t understand what he or she did to me!”

“What they did was clearly sin and they are not even sorry, how can I have anything further to do with them”

And sadly, we often find people simply saying, “I will forgive them when they come and ask for forgiveness.”

- **We must see that all of that is forgiveness on my terms and not forgiveness as Christ Jesus has forgiven us.**
- **At bottom, we as new men are to be forgiving others as Christ Jesus has forgiven us, and not be those who hold grudges!**

Communion Meditation: Psalm 32

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered.

2 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit.”