

SIX WORDS EVERY RELATIONSHIP NEEDS!

#4 – Forgiveness

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INTRODUCTION

We are continuing tonight with our series *“Six Words Every Relationship Needs.”* So far we have looked at the words **GRACE, ENCOURAGEMENT, AND LOYALTY**. Here is our word tonight and it is one that all of us are familiar. In fact, I believe that this word is basically the oil of our spiritual lives. Without this one, our relationships will most definitely fall apart. **THE WORD FOR TONIGHT IS FORGIVENESS.** Take your Bibles and turn to Matthew 18:15-35

READ Matthew 18:15-35

Christ **gave us to two kinds of teaching** concerning forgiveness. There is **vertical forgiveness**. Vertical forgiveness is God forgiving mankind of their sins by accepting His Son, Jesus Christ. Christ Himself came to this earth to die for our sins. He paid the price. Vertical forgiveness encompasses God's entire plan of salvation.

Christ also taught **horizontal forgiveness**. Just as we have a vertical relationship with God, we also have horizontal relationships with other people. Horizontal forgiveness is about demonstrating God's forgiveness to us as we forgive others. In fact, **Matthew 18 is all about horizontal forgiveness**. Christ teaches us how we are to address and handle issues that arise between us and our friends.

For just a short time tonight, let's look **at 4 Principles** that will help us understand and practice Biblical forgiveness.

FORGIVENESS BEGINS WITH ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM

Most people **who are smart tend to tackle problems right away**. For instance, **our cars need routine maintenance care. If we don't, what happens?** Sooner or later, they will break down leaving us on the side of the road. One of the more routine maintenance items **is having the oil changed**. Suppose someone said *"I don't check my oil because I am afraid it might be low."* Or they said, *"I don't want to change my oil because I fear it be dirty."* **What would be your response?** I suppose you would say **those are exactly the reasons that you should check and change your oil**. Here is the point! **IGNORING THE PROBLEM DOES NOT MAKE IT GO AWAY!**

When it comes to our relationships with others, **you can be sure that there are going to be problems**. If you put two sinful, selfish people in a room, sooner or later, there are going to be problems. We are all sinners. And, we are all bound to bump into each other causing hurt feelings and damaged relationships. Therefore...

WISE PEOPLE TACKLE PROBLEMS RIGHT AWAY!

Here are **two important verses** to remember!

*Be ye angry, and sin not: **let not the sun go down upon your wrath:***

Ephesians 4:26

- It is okay to be angry. However, **take the anger** and instead of sinning like we are prone to do and **use it to solve problems Biblically** right away.

*Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. **Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.***

Matthew 6:34

- No need to worry about tomorrow. Why? **Today has enough of its problems already. So deal with today's problems** and don't worry about tomorrow.

The great thing about Scripture is that not only tells us to do something, **but it give us clear instructions on how to do it.** In every relationship problem there are **two sides.** There is the **person who has sinned** and there is the **person who has been sinned against.** No matter which side you are on, **there is hope from the Bible concerning how to handle your side.**

WHAT IF I HAVE BEEN SINNED AGAINST?

If you are the person who feels that they have been wronged, hurt, or sinned against, **the Bible says you have some responsibilities.**

The typical reaction we often have in such a situation is to claim **that it is not fair.** I was the person who was wronged. I didn't start it. Therefore, **it is the other person who should have to do something and not me.** And, you are right! In fact, we are going to address that side of the situation in a few minutes. However, the fact of the matter, as the ole' saying goes "*It takes two to tango!*" And, ideally, both parties should admit their part and be responsible in restoring the relationship. However, for you have been sinned against, **the Bible is clear about the steps you should take in restoration. Here is the first step...**

SPEAK TO THE PERSON PRIVATELY AND TENTATIVELY

- *Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.* Matthew 18:15
- **Oftentimes things are simply just misunderstood.** Perhaps, what you thought or felt that the other person was not what they intended. By going to them first and explaining your perspective on things may make everything clear and open.
- Just going to a person and talking to them **can** and, many times, **will restore the relationship way before any root of bitterness** towards that person sprouts up in your heart and mind.

The next step, if there is no reconciliation, is...

UTILIZE ADDITIONAL HELP BY BRINGING ONE OR TWO OTHERS

- *But if he will not hear thee, **then take with thee one or two more**, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.* Matthew 18:16
- This next step is **within the context of the local church**. Outside of the local church, if the person refuses to repent, **then you may not have much recourse beyond confronting them**.
- However, in the context of the local church, **there are other resources to help facilitate reconciliation**.
- The majority of time, when reconciliation reaches this point, things are often resolved and forgiveness is granted. However, in some rare cases, you may need to proceed to the next step.

INVOLVE THE ENTIRE CHURCH FAMILY

- ***And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church:** but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.* Matthew 18:17
- The fact that Christ would admonish us to bring this before the entire church **emphasizes how important it is to God**. He eagerly wants us to address and solve any problems that come up between His people.
- Telling it to the church is **not about gossip**. It is about **bringing all possible resources to the table** in order to bring about repentance and forgiveness.

So what if you are on the other side of the coin? What if you are the one who sinned or wronged another person? Again, the Bible is clear.

WHAT IF I HAVE SINNED AGAINST SOMEONE ELSE?

*Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, **and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee**; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.*

Matthew 5:23-24

The answer is simple! **Stop what you are doing and go ask for his/her forgiveness**. Reconciliation is important to God.

TWO IMPORTANT CAUTIONS!

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR ONLY YOUR SIDE OF THE SITUATION

- *If it be possible, **as much as lieth in you**, live peaceably with all men.* Romans 12:18
- There are some people who **will refuse to speak to you or even grant forgiveness** no matter how much you might try. What then?
- **Outside of the church**, go to them and sincerely seek to reconcile the relationship. However, if they refuse, then there is not much more you can do. At that point, **you are responsible only for you and your actions**. You cannot change another person. So, pray for them, do good for them, and bless them. This is what lies within you and you can live peaceably with them.

THERE ARE TIMES WHEN YOU MUST LET LOVE COVER WHAT SOMEONE ELSE DID TO YOU

- Both the **Old and New Testament's** speak to this.
 - *Hatred stirreth up strifes: but **love covereth all sins**.* Proverbs 10:12
 - *And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: **for charity shall cover the multitude of sins**.* 1 Peter 4:8
- Here is where you must use sound wisdom and judgment! **THEORETICALLY**, if we confronted each other all the time with each other's sin that is all we would be doing. There would be no time for anything else. **HOWEVER, AT THE SAME TIME**, we can't just ignore all sin and problems claiming "*love covers it all.*"
- Perhaps, a good way to know when to speak and when not to speak up is **if you observe a particular sin that is habitual or becoming habitual** in another Christian's life.
- **The bigger picture though** is that forgiveness always starts when one person has the courage and spiritual maturity to address the problem by handling it God's way.

You are probably thinking "*Man, this forgiveness thing is hard!*" And, you are right. For that reason, we **must be continually in God's word and in prayer** to Him which brings us to the 2nd Principle on Forgiveness.

FORGIVENESS IS CAPABLE BECAUSE OF GOD HIMSELF

The key verse for this principle is Ephesians 4:31-32.

Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Ephesians 4:31-32

THE OPPOSITE OF FORGIVENESS

- *Let all **bitterness**, and **wrath**, and **anger**, and **clamour**, and **evil speaking**, be put away from you, with all **malice**:*
- **All of these characterize an unreconciled relationship.** Think about those relationships in your life where there was unresolved forgiveness and repentance! Was there bitterness? Wrath? Anger? Clamor? Evil speaking? Malice? Of course there was! All of these things hung on to the relationship **like a huge ball and chain**. Nothing but forgiveness can release the bondage of an unreconciled relationship.

SOME COUSINS TO FORGIVENESS

- *And be ye **kind** one to another, **tenderhearted**,*
- Not sure about you, but I would much rather have relationships where there is kindness and tenderheartedness. Wouldn't you? How refreshing are those types of relationships. No bitterness, wrath, or corrupt communication involved. It is a pure relationship of love, encouragement, loyalty, and forgiveness.

The key phrase though of this entire verse is...

YOU MUST FIRST EXPERIENCE GOD'S FORGIVENESS BEFORE YOU CAN FORGIVE OTHERS

- *forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.*
- True forgiveness and reconciliation **only happens** when you know and understand the forgiveness and reconciliation that God has provided through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Of course, there are those who **take the stand that forgiveness is based upon repentance**. In other words, since God's forgiveness is based on our repentance, then my forgiveness should only be extended when a person truly repents of the wrong that they have committed against me. **So the question becomes is forgiveness conditional or unconditional?** The best way to answer that is...

SOME ASPECTS OF FORGIVENESS ARE CONDITIONAL AND OTHERS ARE NOT

All this time we have been talking about forgiveness, but we have not defined it according to God's Word.

FORGIVENESS DEFINED

- Basically, forgiveness **is a 3 fold promise** to the repentant person.
 - It is a promise **to not speak about their sin** to their face again.
 - It is a promise **to not speak about their sin** behind their back.
 - It is a promise **to not dwell on their sin** in your heart.
- **Forgiveness is not based on feelings**. God did not base His forgiveness on His feelings. And, I think we are thankful that He did not.
- **Forgiveness is not forgetting**. God is incapable of forgetting.
- Instead, **God simply chooses not to remember**
- *As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.* Psalms 103:12
- What then is "complete forgiveness?"

COMPLETE FORGIVENESS

- *Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.* Luke 17:3-4
- Here then is the complete process – someone **sins against you, you confront them, they repent**, and then **you forgive them**.
- Clearly, forgiveness at this point **is conditional** based on their repentance.

- But, herein lies the crux of the problem, **what do we do between the time the person sins against me and the time they are willing to repent?**
- Might I point you to the cross of Calvary! It is at that time, we must possess a...

FORGIVING SPIRIT

- *Then said Jesus, **Father, forgive them**; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots. Luke 23:34*
- We know and understand that Christ when uttering those words upon the cross **was demonstrating a forgiving spirit**. His prayer was for their eventual repentance and was focused on the forgiveness that was theirs if they would simply repent.

There is lot more that can and could be said about these principles of forgiveness. But, **let's go back to Matthew 18 and notice that Peter zeroed in on the heart of the issue**. It seems that Peter recognized immediately **how hard it was going to be to forgive those who have repented**. Notice his question to the Lord!

Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

Matthew 18:21

You must understand, at that time, **the Pharisees were teaching that you only had to forgive a person three times**. So Peter adds four more times in there just as part of his challenge. What was Jesus reply?

Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

Matthew 18:22

(490 times)

OUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE? BEING A FORGIVING PERSON!

The real work begins when you are practicing forgiveness and you must extend forgiveness over and over. **The real work is not so much as saying “I forgive you” as much as it is to make and keep your promise.** Keeping the promise of not bringing it back up, to not say anything behind another’s back, and to not dwell on it in your own mind is the real work. What that in mind, Christ told Peter a story...

THE FIRST SERVANT’S DILEMMA

- *And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which **owed him ten thousand talents.** But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, **Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.** Matthew 18:24-26*
- Ten thousand talents is equivalent to one million dollars. It was ridiculous sum that could not possibly be repaid. In fact, that was the point. **It was debt that could not be repaid.**

THE KING’S RESPONSE

- *Then the lord of that servant was **moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.** Matthew 18:27*
- Now, at this point, you would think that this man would be overcome with joy and willing to forgive any person that came across his way. But, of course, that is not way happened.

THE SECOND SERVANT’S DILEMMA

- *But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, **Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not:** but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his*

fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? Matthew 18:28-33

- Christ wanted Peter to see himself as the first servant. And, **we too must also see ourselves as the first servant.**
- The POINT – **YOUR WILLINGNESS TO FORGIVE OTHERS DEMONSTRATES THE AMOUNT OF APPRECIATION YOU HAVE FOR HOW MUCH GOD HAS FORGIVEN YOU!**

CONCLUSION

Why a message like this? Why teach and preach about grace, encouragement, loyalty, and forgiveness? It is because **all of us need to work on our relationships with others.** I am sure that there are some that right now in a relationship with a friend, a co-worker, a neighbor, or even a family member in which things are strained. Perhaps, what that relationship needs is **a little or a whole lot of forgiveness.**

- Is there someone you know that you need to confront?
- Is there someone you know that you need to extend a forgiving spirit to even though they have not been willing to repent just yet?
- Is there someone who has come to you for forgiveness and you have not truly forgiven them?

Why not come tonight, lay on the altar before God, repent, and vow to make those things right with that person?