

Sermon to the saints of God at Topeka, KS – Sunday May 28, 2017

Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. – Ps. 51:6

As followers of Christ, beloved, we hang everything – our whole existences – on the lively hope that we are His children, and are therefore forgiven of all our sins, past present and future. That the blood of the Lamb was spilt for us – me personally – you personally – and we therefore escape, by the boundless love and mercy of God toward His own, that unspeakably horrible eternal fate of destruction, misery, pain, torment, agony and shame that is the long home for most men ever to draw breath. How awful to contemplate – and how thrilling, how gracious, how utterly wonderful is the unmerited forgiveness of our sins at the hand of the God of Eternity – the efficacious blood of the Lamb cleansing us of our vile sins – Him clothing us in His righteousness. The spiritually-exercised mind neither could nor should ever move away from such a prospect, but be guided in all our thoughts, words and deeds by it.

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee. Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness. O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar. – Ps. 51:1-19

And:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; - Eph. 1:3-7

While we know that only God can pardon a man from an eternal sentence in hell, those who have been granted forgiveness of sins by the power of God are commanded and therefore obliged to likewise forgive – emulating the spirit of God’s forgiveness toward us. It is a great sin not to forgive one another. It is a sin that is a poison to the individual soul and will eat a local, called out body of believers up from the inside out - destroying it like a growing cancer. It is a sin that corrupts and will make it impossible for to live a sincere Christian life.

Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; - Heb. 12:15

The Greek there is *pikria* (pik-ree'-ah), and it means: bitter gall, extreme wickedness, a bitter root, and so producing a bitter fruit, poison. Unforgiveness taints our worship of God; it hinders our prayers unto God; it keeps us from preferring one another in honor. In fact, a lack of sincere forgiveness toward a brother or sister, in the inward parts, makes everything we attempt to do of a spiritual nature, in service unto God, ineffectual (more on the inward parts later – it’s important). The more we know of: a) the attributes of God’s forgiveness toward us; b) the flesh’s absolute resistance to such a notion as forgiveness; and c) practical, doctrinal helps as to how it looks and what it means to forgive one another, the more fully we may have our spiritual senses exercised, by reason of use, in the practice of godly forgiveness. We must forgive because we have been forgiven. We must forgive as we have been forgiven. We must not devise our own definition of forgiveness, but should emulate Christ in all possible, scriptural ways; to the non-exercised sensibilities, forgiveness always seems so easy when we are in need of it, and so hard when we need to give it. What follows is an examination of our duty, privilege and honor of godly forgiveness amongst the brethren.

God’s forgiveness

The forgiveness of God is continual, not sporadic, cyclical, or qualified:

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you ALL TRESPASSES; - Col. 2:13

God forgives fully, not partially:

He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. - Micah 7:19

God forgives where no merit is earned, nor can be:

For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. – Rom. 9:15-16

God forgives us eternally – our sins will never be raked up and stacked in front of us – they do not taint God’s mind against us, though He knows all.

He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them. – Nu. 23:21

God forgets our sins – He blots them from remembrance.

For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. – Heb. 8:12

In no way does God associate the sins of His elect with His elect. They are clothed in the imputed righteousness of Christ. That’s how God desires and wills to look upon His own.

As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. – Ps. 103:12

God knows that we have no adjudicatory power over sin or its eternal consequence – and yet he commands us to forgive one another as he has forgiven us:

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you. – Eph. 4:32

Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. – Col. 3:13

That doesn’t only mean to forgive one another *because* we have been forgiven – it also means in the *same manner* as we have been forgiven (as many attributes of that forgiveness as we can, in principle, spiritually perform).

The flesh and true Christian forgiveness

Beloved, the flesh despises forgiveness. In our Christian walk, it is perhaps one of the most difficult, yet most pressing matters of that walk, if we are to walk humbly and in sincerity toward our God.

For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. – Gal. 5:17

We often look to the following bedrock concept in scripture as a dire warning, and apply it, rightly so, to a variety of contexts and circumstances:

Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices. – 2Co. 2:11

Note here, the full context in which that warning is given:

Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him. For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things. To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices. – 2Co. 2:6-11

Warning against Satan getting an advantage of them (and us) is specifically given here in the context of proper forgiveness – *forgave I it in the person of Christ*. In other words, if we properly forgive, that is, ‘in the person of Christ,’ then Satan does not get an advantage of them (or us). But if we do not properly forgive, that is, ‘in the person of Christ,’ then Satan should get an advantage of them (and us). Satan gets an advantage of our minds and hearts for the *whole time* that we do not properly forgive – or forgive ‘in the person of Christ.’ That means that if there is no proper, scriptural forgiveness ‘in the person of Christ’ over either an offense or even a created or perceived offence for 5 days, then that advantage is had for that *whole time*. If there is no proper, scriptural forgiveness ‘in the person of Christ’ over either an offence or even a created or perceived offence for 32 years, then Satan has an advantage over us that *whole time*. That’s a heavy, self-inflicted impediment to overcome. So what does ‘in the person of Christ’ mean here? (I thought you’d never ask 😊)

The Greek word rendered ‘person’ here is *prosopon*, which means the front of the human head, or the face so far forth as it is the organ of sight, and by it various movements and changes (as the index of the inward thoughts and feelings), and it comes from an amalgamation of *pros* –

meaning: at, near, towards, with regard to, and *optomai* (op-tom-ahee) – meaning: to behold, to allow one’s self to be seen, to appear. ‘In the person of Christ, here, means roughly, ‘in the sight of Christ’ or ‘with regard to Christ’s sight of the matter’ (forgiveness).

Gill on ‘in the person of Christ’: *in his sight and presence, who knows that what I do this way, I do it sincerely, and with my whole heart and soul*; Barnes: *Here it probably means, in the presence of Christ; with his eye upon me, and conscious that I am acting before him, and must give account to him. It implies, undoubtedly, that Paul acted by his authority, and felt that he was doing that which Christ would approve.*

It means, beloved, in all godly sincerity – in the *inward parts*. The part that is hidden from other men, but is never hidden from Christ.

Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. – Ps. 51:6

Sincerity, as opposed to feigned forgiveness. The word ‘sincere’ is a very interesting word, and it deals specifically with the inward parts of a man. It comes from the Greek *sin* (without) and *cera* – sar-uh (wax). The word sincere originally meant literally ‘without wax.’ Honey has been on the menu for a long time:

I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey... - Ex. 3:8

When you buy honey, you don’t want any wax in it – you want pure honey. Pure. Without wax. Sincere heart=pure heart. The inner man – truth in the inward parts. So the Holy Spirit of God, through the Apostle, is implying that either no forgiveness, or insincere forgiveness NOT ‘in the person of Christ,’ would give Satan an advantage. Beloved, we give Satan an advantage whenever our flesh prevents proper forgiveness of one another.

Godly forgiveness is impossible to the men of the world, and oft exhorted to and admonished against amongst God’s elect for good reason: it is SO contrary to the pride and ego of men that even godly men and women become hardened by the deceitfulness of convincing themselves that they both fully know what godly forgiveness is and that they apply that forgiveness to their brothers and sisters out of a pure (sincere) heart – in the inward parts (in the person of Christ). We convince ourselves all the time that we are forgiving and yet we harbor ideas against each other in our inward parts. We define forgiveness for ourselves out of our own understanding and in our flesh, and not in emulation of our blessed Saviour and Creator. Anger, bitterness, and resentment bind the soul of the one who keeps an account of past wrongs. When a Christian

does not release those who have hurt them, we forget the great forgiveness we have received, and the Holy Spirit, who resides in us, is grieved:

And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. 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. – Eph. 4:30-32

Our worship is hindered by a lack of tenderheartedness, both in offending and in forgiving both real and created offences (a bit more on that later):

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. – Mt. 5:23-24

Our prayers are hindered by a lack of forgiveness. The Lord Jesus Christ commanded us to forgive one another as a central component of prayer:

And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. – Mk. 11:25

JFB - *to remind them that if this was necessary to the acceptableness of all prayer, much more when great things were to be asked and confidently expected.*

Calvin: *If we are not harder than iron, this exhortation ought to soften us, and render us disposed to forgive offenses. Unless God pardon us every day many sins, we know that we are ruined in innumerable ways: and on no other condition does he admit us to pardon, but that we pardon our brethren whatever offenses they have committed against us. Those who refuse to forget the injuries which have been done to them, devote themselves willingly and deliberately to destruction.*

The flesh wants a limit to offences, and that a very low number and a very low threshold of offence:

Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. – Mt. 18:21-22

For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. – Mt. 6:14-15

Gill: *Wherefore Christ presses it upon them closely to "forgive men their trespasses"; all sorts of injuries done them, or offences given them, whether by word or deed; and that fully, freely, from the heart; forgetting, as well as forgiving; not upbraiding them with former offences (even secretly, in one's heart); and even without asking pardon, and though there might be no appearance of repentance.*

Clarke: *A man can have little regard for his salvation, who refuses to have it on such advantageous terms.*

Godly forgiveness of the brethren

We can often hide a hardened, unforgiving heart from one other for a time – there is much business that can veil the matter. In the inward parts, however, and in the sight of Christ, there is no veil, and heart of unforgiveness will destroy a man. Ask yourself if any of these common characteristics occur in your walk:

1. Do you avoid or stay away from communion and regular talk with a person?
2. Do you always keep the conversation light and terse when circumstances force an interaction?
3. How do you think (unfiltered) about the person? Deep down, in the inward parts?

Here are some practical, doctrinal helps in godly forgiveness:

1. If you know that a man does not like a certain thing, don't do it around him. To act otherwise is to provoke to offence.
2. Don't create offences. Don't imagine offences where they are not intended. Sometimes a lack of forgiveness is the breeding ground for imagining or creating further offences. If we already have ought against a brother or sister, we are more bound to see their next stumble or miscue as more offensive than it is, or their intent imagined to be malicious or self-serving. The next thing you know, we are sweeping all of those created or imagined offences into a pile. And then we sit right there, in our inward parts, and stare at that pile. And that pile gets bigger and bigger in our heart. And outwardly we say 'there is no pile.' There is no godly sincerity to that position, and it is cancer and ruin to both the individual soul, as well as the local body of believers.

3. Don't take offences where they *are* intended. It is a lovely, pure, humble, godly thing if you will not be easily offended. If it be not considerable, it must be dissembled (in the positive sense, as in to conceal). When you control your spirit so as to be content with that which naturally would excite your wrath, you act in obedience to God. This is formed out of habit – it is not a switch you can just flip without becoming spiritually exercised in it:

But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. – Heb. 5:14

Barnes: *In the adult Christian these senses are said to be exercised, a metaphor taken from professional athletes (Greco-Roman athletic contests), who employed all their powers, skill, and agility in mock fights, running, wrestling, &c., that they might be the better prepared for the actual contests when they took place. So these employ and improve all their powers, and in using grace get more grace; and thus, being able to discern good from evil, they are in little danger of being imposed on by false doctrine, or by the pretensions of hypocrites; or of being deceived by the subtleties of Satan. They feel that their security depends, under God, on this exercise-on the proper use which they make of the grace already given them by God. Can any reader be so dull as not to understand this?*

The strong meat is doctrinal and practical detail of God's revealed will, and only by using, or consistently putting into practice, doctrinal understanding of that revealed will, will one have his spiritual senses exercised that he would be a keener discerner of both good and evil (not just knowing the difference, but having the difference be increasingly important to him in the way that he therefore thinks in the inward parts and carries out his outward conversation).

4. If you must be offended, do not exaggerate the offence. Spurgeon intimates not letting a midge's egg become as huge as ever was laid by an ostrich. If there must be something wrong, let it be as little as possible in your mind and heart. Do not demand that much more was ever intended than what is plain. If you have a telescope, look through the large hole and minimize instead of magnifying, or, better still, do not look at it at all. A blind eye is often the best eye a man can have, and a deaf ear is better by far than one which hears too much.

Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee: for oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others. – Ec. 7:21-22

5. Do not publish offences. If you are a young person and need some wisdom from an older person, then get it – but for the sole purpose of getting good counsel on how to approach the matter (for the less experienced). Many persons have someone with whom they seek good, godly counsel. But for that purpose alone! Otherwise:

...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. - Mt 18:15

Do not stew over the offence if it was real, not exaggerated, and yet rises to the level of approaching your brother with it. Go to him in earnestness and humility. Right away. Don't let the sun go down on your anger. That means today – but intreat. Sincerely speak to each other 'in the person of Christ.' If you misunderstood what you had initially been offended by, then you have discreetly avoided laying your brother or sister to an open shame. If the matter was as you saw it before reaching out to your brother, then you can privately and gently admonish and help him with his thinking. However, all of us should understand that, first, the flesh does not want to hear of the wrong it does, but second – and way more important – telling a brother his fault between he and thee alone is not meant to seek justice for the injury, nor for the injured, but in the spirit of meekness to help, and should be conducted solely in that spirit.

6. Never in any way, directly or indirectly, think to avenge yourselves. Do not take that into your hand which God says belongs to him, but as he for Christ's sake has forgiven you, so also forgive all those who do you wrong.

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. – Ro. 12:19

Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. – Mt. 18:21-22

If you have ever reached 490 times to truly forgive a brother or sister of real, unexaggerated offences, then my guess is that your spiritual senses have been exercised by reason of use, such that you would gladly start that number over again (as is implied by the words of Christ, rather than 490 times being the literal limit for forgiveness).

7. Forgiving means forgetting. We MUST put the offence away in our mind and heart. Some might cynically say that such a feat is impossible. In sowing unto the flesh it is. In sowing unto the Spirit, it is not.

***Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; -
Ro. 12:10***

How can you truly prefer someone in honor, all the while storing a manifest, in your inward parts, of their offences toward you?

8. Do not avoid communion with anyone in the body over either an offence or a perceived or created offence. It is painful to the heart and soul to have one's company avoided. Unforgiveness is itself a sin – if we repent of that sin, we must bring forth fruit meet for repentance of that sin. Let the other know that it is well with your soul and inquire with brotherly kindness, love and godly sincerity (in the inward parts) of the wellness of his.

Finally, for both new offences and those that we try to convince ourselves and others are buried, yet we harbor a lack of forgiveness yet years after, get about the business of godly forgiveness. Today. Not just as a new resolution going forward; we must truly forgive all of those offences that we still harbor as unseen, malignant tumors in the inward parts. To do otherwise is to choke out our ability to be kindly-affectioned toward one another. Many of us have wasted too much time in not tending to matters of true godly forgiveness already. Let us each look one another in the eye and forgive what we haven't. Let us forgive in the person of Christ, and thereby clearly manifest that we hear our Shepherd's voice.

I love you all.