

June 26, 2016 by Steve Brandon



Forgiving One Another

Ephesians 4:32

- 1. We Have Been Forgiven.**
- 2. We Are Called to Forgive.**
- 3. Forgiven People Forgive People.**

This summer, we have been looking some of the "One Another" commands in the New Testament. My aim with these messages is to paint a picture of what the church is called to be. My aim is that Rock Valley Bible Church might know the blessings of walking together as a community. That we would encourage one another in this discouraging world. That we would pray for one another for God's strength to glorify him. That we would serve one another to ease each other's burden. That we would love one another because God loved us first. That we would show hospitality to one another and thereby show the love of Christ. That we would honor one another as fellow citizens of God's kingdom.

This morning, we come to the issue of forgiveness. The New Testament commands us to "forgive one another." One place that this occurs is in Ephesians, chapter 4 and verse 32. If you haven't done so already, I invite you to open your Bible to Ephesians, chapter 4. We are going to begin this morning by reading verse 32, which spells out the heart of Christian living.

Ephesians 4:32

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

And if our church will ever truly practice the "One Anothers," that I have been laying out this summer, there will be plenty of need for forgiveness. See, the closer that you live with one another in community, the greater the need for extending forgiveness. Because, the closer that you live with one another, seeking to build up one another, and to pray for one another, and to serve one another, and to honor one another, there will be conflict. There will be conflict when you fail to do these things. There will be conflict when these things are one-sided. There will be conflict when actions are mis-understood.

Take, for instance, marriage. When two sinners join together to be one, there will be clashes. For that unity to hold together, there must be a strong spirit of forgiveness between each other. As Ruth Graham (Billy Graham's wife) said, "A happy marriage is the union of two good forgivers."

And what is true of a marriage, must also be true of a community. "A happy church is the fellowship of good forgivers." If ever a church is going to live in deep community with each other, there must be a spirit of forgiveness. Because living close to one another is a recipe for damaged relationships. And damaged relationships hurt.

That's why people who are often hurt in church relationships have a very difficult time returning once again into the life of a church. I have heard of many who used to go to church, but were hurt in some way, and never have returned again. And those that do return will often do so slowly, requiring a time of healing. Because, damaged relationships hurt. And people are slow to open themselves up for such hurt again.

Some work through this well, and others don't. But, listen, church family: to love one another means that you will be vulnerable to one another. The closer that you live together with one another, and the more that you are seeking to live out the "One Anothers," the more opportunities there are for hurt. And forgiveness is the only way to resolve the hurt.

Dave Harvey, in his wonderful book on marriage entitled, "When Sinners Say, 'I Do,'" puts it this way, ...

"Forgiveness and repentance is the powerful tool that repairs the damage done to sin-torn marriage relationships. And where forgiveness is employed, and repentance is lived out, it transforms. Forgiveness humbly sought, and humbly given, profoundly expresses the glory of God. Why? Because forgiveness is at the heart of the gospel--the true demonstration of God's love for those who deserved his wrath." [\[1\]](#)

And that's exactly the point of Ephesians 4:32.

Ephesians 4:32

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

As God has forgiven us in Christ Jesus, so also are we to extend this forgiveness to others. This is the logic of this verse. Look at the way that you have been forgiven, and forgive others in the same way. This will form the first two points of my outline this morning.

- 1. We Have Been Forgiven.**

2. We Are Called to Forgive.

Let's take my first point, ...

1. We Have Been Forgiven.

Now, of course, I'm talking here about those of us who have believed in Jesus. I'm talking about Christians. I'm talking about those who have turned from their sin, and have confessed their sin, and have experienced God's grace to them in granting forgiveness. I'm talking about those who have experienced 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

I'm here this morning to declare the wonderful grace of God upon our lives. This is a bit of what Paul tried to capture in chapter 1 of Ephesians. It's a chapter that's all about the grace of God, overflowing mightily upon us. Look back there.

Ephesians 1:3-6

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

God, in his grace, has granted to us "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (1:3). In other words, everything that we have in the heavenly places is a gift of God. He has not held back. He has been abundant in his kindness to us.

He chose us long before we chose him (verse 4) - before the foundation of the world. He determined by his will that we would be adopted as sons into his kingdom (verse 5). And all of this is to the praise and glory of his marvelous grace.

Ephesians 1:6

to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

And nowhere is this grace seen more clearly than in our forgiveness, which he addresses in verse 7.

Ephesians 1:7-8

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, ...

When Paul describes the forgiveness of our sins, he uses the marketplace metaphor. He uses the word, "Redemption." That is, he describes a purchase that God has made on our behalf. He has purchased our forgiveness through the cost of his blood. And of course, we know how that has happened. When Jesus died upon the cross, he wasn't dying for his own sin. He was sinless. He didn't deserve to die. Instead, he was dying for our sins! It was his death in the place of ours. By his death, he purchased our forgiveness. That's what redemption means. He purchased our forgiveness.

It was all, ...

Ephesians 1:7-8

... according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, ...

And this is such wonderful news, that Paul prays for those in Ephesus, that they might grasp how wonderful the work of Christ is!

Ephesians 1:16-19

I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, ...

It is unbelievable what God has done for our souls. Chapter 2 tells the story. It tells of how we were dead in our trespasses and sins (2:1), how we were children of wrath (2:3)--that is, under the curse of God.

Ephesians 2:4-5

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved--

Indeed, it is ...

Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

So, think about this a moment or two with respect to forgiveness. You forgive others in the same way that you have been forgiven--by grace. In other words, forgiveness isn't a deal that you make, "I'll forgive you if, you do this or that ..." Forgiveness doesn't demand that the offending party "make it up for you" in some way. Forgiveness doesn't require a payment. You have been forgiven by grace. And so, forgive others by grace. That's the message of Ephesians 4:32.

Ephesians 4:32

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

In other words, we have been called to live consistently with the gospel. We Have Been Forgiven. And, ...

2. We Are Called to Forgive.

And this isn't easy. Consider the hinge of the book of Ephesians, where the book takes its turn.

Ephesians 4:1-3

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Now, these words nowhere mention "forgiveness," but the spirit of forgiveness is all around them. Humility requires a spirit of forgiveness, for humility will put itself under the proud. Gentleness requires a spirit of forgiveness as you respond to those who are rough with you. Patience requires a spirit of forgiveness as you wait for those who have failed you. Bearing with one another in love requires a spirit of forgiveness as you endure the sin of others. Being eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace requires a spirit of forgiveness as you prefer unity to your rights.

Here we see three Attitudes: humility, gentleness, and patience. And we see two efforts: bearing with one another and preserving the unity. And it all flows from the gospel. We have been forgiven; we must forgive.

Perhaps no other place in Scripture demonstrates this connection better than in Matthew 18, where we find the parable of the unforgiving servant. It comes in the context of the strategy that Jesus outlined for dealing with those who have sinned against you.

If someone sins against you, you are to go to him individually. If he listens to you, you have won your brother. If he doesn't listen, then go to him again, and bring one or two others with you. If he confesses his sin, you have won your brother.

If he still doesn't repent, then you should tell it to the church. If he admits his sin, you have won your brother.

But, if his heart remains hard after many have spoken with him, then you should cast him out of the church, considering him as an outsider--a tax-gatherer and a gentile.

In this entire process, the assumption is that you are ready to restore this individual. You don't go to confront sin only to condemn the person, bash him or beat him, or make him feel two inches high. You go to confront sin so that you might bring your straying brother back. You are ready and willing to receive such a straying one back. This is what God does. God is like the shepherd who leaves his ninety-nine sheep on the mountain and pursues the one straying sheep, with the goal of bringing it back into the fold.

Throughout this process, the implication is that you are standing ready to forgive. In our text this morning, Peter picked up on this in verse 21 with the question to Jesus.

Matthew 18:21

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?"

Certainly, Peter pictures himself dealing with another brother who has sinned against him. His question for Jesus is about the actual process of restoring a straying brother. The assumption is that Peter would go to him, confront him, and seek reconciliation. He forgives and they are restored.

The question becomes, "How often shall I do this?" I'm sure that in Peter's mind, he thought that he was being very gracious in suggesting that he would do this seven times. For, it was the teaching of the Rabbis that you were to forgive a sin three times, but on the fourth time, there is no need to extend forgiveness. The Rabbis said that this is like God. In the book of Amos, on eight separate occasions, God said, "for three transgressions ... and for four I will not revoke its punishment." [\[2\]](#)

Therefore, they said that the limit was three times. Listen to their teaching:

"A man that commits a sin, the 'first' time they pardon him; the 'second' time they pardon him; the 'third' time they pardon him: the 'fourth' time

they do not pardon, according to Am 2:6." [\[3\]](#)

But Jesus demonstrates by His response to Peter, that though Peter may appear to be gracious, he wasn't being gracious enough. Jesus said to Him (in verse 22), ...

Matthew 18:22

Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times."

If you calculate that out, you would come up with 490 times. But, the point isn't mathematics. The point is mercy. You aren't supposed to be counting, " ... 488, ... 489, ... 490. OK, next time, there is no forgiveness."

The point of Jesus is that your forgiveness ought to be limitless. Whenever there is repentance, you ought to extend forgiveness. In Luke 17:4, Jesus said, "if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him." And if that happens tomorrow, you are called to do the same. And if that happens the next day, you are called to do the same. If it takes place for the next three months, you are to do the same.

Forgiveness isn't quantitative. Forgiveness is qualitative. When Jesus says, "seventy times seven," Jesus is indicating that your forgiveness should show no bounds. There never ought to be a time in which you come to the point where you say, "Enough is enough. You have sinned against me too many times. I'm not going to forgive you."

Forgiveness doesn't mean forgetting, or sweeping it under the carpet, or putting yourself in the same situation to be harmed once again. Forgiveness does mean releasing the sinning brother from the debt that he owed you because he wronged you. He doesn't need to make it up by doing a good deed. He doesn't need to do something else for you. Forgiveness is extending compassion and overlooking a transgression. Proverbs 19:11 says that it is to a man's glory that he overlook a transgression.

It's not denying the sin or ignoring the sin. It is acknowledging the sin and willingly looking past it. If you are a follower of Christ, there is no room for you to hold back forgiveness from anyone.

That's the principle: Forgiveness is limitless. (verse 22). Here's the parable: (verses 23-35).

Matthew 18:23-24

"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."

Here is the king of land, calling his slaves to account for themselves. One man owed the king 10,000 talents. Now, the exact size of this debt is difficult to determine. We simply know that it was a lot of money. The margin of the New American Standard would place this at more than \$10 million. Others have suggested that it could be in the billions of dollars. [\[4\]](#) Even others suggest it was far beyond this, perhaps into the trillions and beyond.

How could someone amass such a debt? Josephus, a Jewish historian who lived just after the times of Christ, gives us a clue. He told the story of the king who was accepting bids for people to have the right to tax in places like Phoenicia, Judea and Samaria. This is how taxes worked back then. Rather than having an exact accounting from every household of what they made, the king would often sell taxation privileges. The tax collector could collect as much tax as he wanted. He simply needed to pay the king for the opportunities to tax the people. On this particular occasion, the bid for the right to collect these taxes was at 8,000 talents. One man said that "the value of the taxes [was] at too low a rate; and he promised that he would himself give twice as much for them." [\[5\]](#) Here was this man, willing to pay 16,000 talents for the opportunities to tax these regions.

That story ought to give you some sort of indication of how large a sum of money 10,000 talents was. It is equivalent to the yearly taxes given from the entire land of Palestine and beyond. In other words, it's enough to operate the government for a year!

This story ought also to give you some sort of an indication of how this slave came to owe so much money. This slave was probably some high ranking tax official, who had purchased the ability to tax a geographic region of the population. When you think about it, a king doesn't deal much with the typical slave. His dealings are with those who administer his rule.

Jesus continues his story in verse 25, ...

Matthew 18:25

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.

By selling this man and his family into slavery, the king wasn't going to make up the debt that was owed. There was no way. In fact, Josephus tells another story of how a man named Ptolemy Philadelphus redeemed 120,000 Jewish slaves from Egypt for 460 talents. [\[6\]](#) If you do the math, you figure that the king would get about 1/400th of one talent for this slave. But the king had no other option. Our society does the same things. Those involved in the Enron scandal are looking at huge fines and life in prison. There is no way that they can actually pay these fines.

In verse 26, we find this slave in desperation, ...

Matthew 18:26

So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.'

At this point, the king may well have laughed, "Yeah, right! You can't repay it. What an empty promise! Not only have you taken millions [or billions or trillions] of dollars from me. But, now, you have lied to me. Guards, away with him! Away with his wife! Away with his children! Foreclose on his house! Sell his horses and mules!"

But, the king didn't respond this way. Rather than dealing justly, the king was dealing mercifully. We read in verse 27, ...

Matthew 18:27

And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.

This is an amazing story. This man was facing the realities of losing his family, perhaps never to see them again. This man was facing a miserable life of labor. And yet, the king let him go and forgave his debt. This man, who was facing a life of misery, was now free! His debt had been cancelled. He would keep his family. His plan was to leave that place and work really hard to pay back what he owed the king. But, the compassion of the king would have it otherwise. With one word, his debt was cancelled. He was restored. He was free.

The parable has an interpretation. The king is God. The slave represents us. The debt is our sin. This is a great picture of what salvation is all about. The Bible is very clear. We are saved from the massive debt of our sin by the mere compassion and mercy of God. As we like to repeat around here. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. We deserve to be sold. We deserve to lose our families. We have a huge debt of sin to pay back to God. You can work and work and work to be good and righteous. But you will never be able to pay back that debt. But God paid the debt and released us from its obligation.

The poet said it this way, ...

He paid a debt He did not owe.
I owed a debt I could not pay.
I needed someone, to wash my sins away.
And now I sing a brand new song,
Amazing grace, all day long.
Christ Jesus paid a debt that I could never pay.

The truth again and again in scripture is that you simply need to humble yourself, confess your sin, and call upon His name to receive this forgiveness that God freely offers. Romans 10:13 says it like this, "Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved." This is what Peter told those in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). When we come as the broken tax-gatherer, beating our breast on account of our wretched sin, pleading mercy from God, we will get mercy!

At Rock Valley Bible Church, we are not perfect people. But, we ought to be humble, sin-confessing people. The kingdom of God has no place for arrogant, self-righteous people who think that they stand on their own. The only reason why we stand is because of Jesus and His work on the cross, removing our sin from us. No longer do we await the condemnation of hell! We await the glories of heaven, because of the work of Christ on our behalf, dying in our place.

When you come to embrace and believe the gospel, it makes a huge difference in your life. I love the way in which 2 Corinthians 5:15 puts it. Paul writes, "He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf" (2 Cor. 5:15). The life of a Christian is totally different than the life of a non-Christian. We live for Him, and not for ourselves!

If you weren't familiar with the ending to this parable, you might expect that the forgiven servant would leave the King's presence rejoicing and ready to do great and charitable things. You might expect him to make known to the people what a good king they have. You might expect that he would immediately seek advice from the king on what he should do next. But, this picture that Jesus paints in His parable demonstrates the opposite. It is a parable of contrast. Rather than modeling what ought to be done, Jesus presents this servant who does the unthinkable. On the one hand, you have a gracious lord, who freely forgave. On the other hand, you have the one who was freed, who doesn't forgive. Look at verse 28, ...

Matthew 18:28

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.'

A hundred denarii was no trivial amount. A denarius was the wage paid to a common laborer. In our day, this translates to somewhere in the neighborhood of a hundred dollars (or two or three hundred). You do a bit of math, and you are talking a debt of somewhere in the neighborhood of \$10,000. It's a big debt. But, in contrast to the debt that had been forgiven this slave, it was miniscule. And rather than simply asking for the money in a civilized way, this slave begins to put his hands around this fellow slave's neck. I can just imagine that he begins to shake the guy back and forth, in an uncontrolled rage. Somehow, the other slave got free from his choke hold, and pleaded for mercy. Look at verse 29, ...

Matthew 18:29

So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.'

These words should sound familiar. They are almost the exact same words that this slave himself had told the king in verse 26. The thought process is the same. "I don't have the money now. I can't pay it now. I need mercy."

But the difference between the two debts in this story is that the one who owed the slave money could probably have repaid if he made it a priority. When the bank starts putting the pressure on, you will often find ways to pay. If this man was going to go for his jugular, it would become a priority. It ought to be obvious to us what this man's reaction should have been. Verse 30 should read as verse 27,

Matthew 18:27

And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.

But, it doesn't read this way. Rather, it reads, ...

Matthew 18:30

He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt.

We don't know why this man was unwilling to forgive the debt. He certainly didn't need the money to pay back the king, for that debt had been forgiven. There was no need to pay it back. Perhaps he still thought that he owed the king all of this money, and was going to make some kind of effort to pay it all off, though the debt was already cancelled. But we do know that he was unwilling to forgive the debt. And that is exactly the point of this parable.

It gets back to verse 22, ...

Matthew 18:22

"I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times."

Jesus is giving us a picture of the incredible mercy of God in forgiving sinners. It's like a debt of 10,000 talents. Our debt is HUGE! And then, Jesus puts us here to deal with this our fellow man.

How ridiculous it is for us not to forgive others. Everything within us stirs against this slave and wants to smack his head and say, "Listen, guy, you have been shown incredible mercy. Will you not also show a little bit of mercy?"

The slaves recognized how terrible this was. Look in verse 31,

Matthew 18:31-33

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?'

Verse 33 is the point of the parable: "Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?" And the point is this: when you understand the incredible mercy of God in your life to forgive you, the only action that makes sense is to be merciful and freely forgive those who trespass against you. It matters not whether it is seven times or whether it is seventy times seven. All of it is small in comparison to 10,000 talents.

This is Christian living! Remember Ephesians 4:32?

Ephesians 4:32

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Colossians 3:13 says the same thing,

Colossians 3:13

...as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

This is the value of coming back again and again to reflect upon the cross of Christ. As a pastor, I know that as I focus my preaching upon the cross of Christ, it will address the congregation in matters in your life of which I know nothing. Thinking of the cross will humble you (Philippians 2). It will enable you to suffer for righteousness (1 Peter). It will guard you against a works-based righteousness (Galatians & Colossians). It will be an example for you of incredible love (John 13). It will help you in times of temptations (Hebrews 2). It will lead you to a life of self-sacrifice.

In this case, reflections upon the cross will lead you to be forgiving to others. At the cross, we see His incredible mercy in extending forgiveness to us. We are called to extend the same mercy and forgiveness to others. And to do so, means that we need to forgive others

seventy times seventy times seventy times seventy times seventy times seventy times seven. This is not exaggeration. This is reality. We are to forgive, "just as God in Christ also has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32). As much as God has forgiven, you need to forgive.

I want to spend a few moments upon how sinful sin really is. Have you ever failed to be thankful to God? Every time you have failed to be thankful, it is sin. Have you ever failed to be patient with others? Parents? Every time you have failed in your patience, it is sin. Have you ever spoken against somebody? It's sin. Have you ever thought of sin in your heart? It's sin. Have you always found yourself rejoicing in the Lord? The Bible says, "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil. 4:4). Every failure to do that is an expression of your discontent with God's circumstances for your life.

Have you always loved the Lord with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength? Have you ever expressed only half-hearted love to God? That is sin. Have you ever expressed only half-hearted love to your brother or sister? That is sin. Has your faith ever been weak? That is sin, distrusting God's word.

Have you ever been grumpy? Have you ever sought revenge of any kind? God says, "Vengeance is Mine! I will repay" (Romans 12:19). For you to seek revenge is overstepping your bounds.

Have you always been kind, tender-hearted, and compassionate toward others? Any failure in these areas is sin. Have you ever put your own interests in front of others?

It gets worse when you realize that even a seemingly little thing like being unthankful to God is a very serious offense. It's serious because of who it is against. When you sin against an infinitely holy God, your sin is an infinite offense. For instance, I remember when a 15 year old boy in Prosser, Washington, who was questioned by the US Secret Service after he had drawn a picture of president Bush's head on a stick. Why the concern? Because against the President of the United States, it is illegal to "knowingly and willfully [make] any threat to take the life of, to kidnap, or to inflict bodily harm upon the President of the United States" [\[7\]](#) Any little offense is a great offense when directed towards the President. And with God, it is magnified even more than that.

Have you ever stolen anything? I'm not talking about stealing a car. I'm talking about stealing a paper-clip. Proverbs 11:1 says, "a false balance is an abomination to the LORD." Solomon is talking about a sliver off of the weight. He's talking a paper-clip!

I'm crushed by this list. The number of times that I have done these things and sinned against the Lord is astronomical. Your sins have laid up for yourself a massive debt--on the order of 10,000 talents. And the wonderful news is that by faith in Christ, all of these things can be totally forgiven you, when you repent of your sins and trust in Christ. Whatever people may do to you in sinning against you will never add up to your offenses before God. If you could take all of the sins that have ever been committed against you on one side of the scale, and the sins that you have committed against God on the other side, it would be like a feather on one side and a lead weight on the other.

And so, this morning, I want you to think of the sins committed against you. In some cases, the sin committed against you has been terrible. Perhaps the family in which you grew up in was abusive. Perhaps your family still sins against you. Perhaps you are in a marriage right now, where your spouse betrayed you in a major way. Perhaps you are facing incredible persecution at your work. I'm sensitive to those difficulties that you are facing or have faced. But, let me assure you, as gently as I can, that as large as these sins may appear, they are actually very tiny in comparison to the sin that God forgave when you sought forgiveness at the cross.

Perhaps you have been sinned against in a major way. Perhaps you are struggling to forgive. Perhaps you have tried to justify your bitterness, because of how huge this sin was against you. In the kingdom of God, there is no room for your lack of readiness to extend forgiveness. I simply ask you, "Are you kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

Here's a story that might put things in perspective.

The story begins five days before Christmas in 1974. It was the last day of school before Christmas vacation in Coral Gables, Florida, which is near Miami. A ten year old boy, named Chris Carrier, was kidnapped by a man named David McAllister. McAllister had persuaded this boy to get into his car and they began driving north of Miami toward the Florida Everglades. Along the way, the boy found out that McAllister had a grudge against his father. Apparently, six months before the kidnapping took place, Carrier's father had fired McAllister, because of his drinking problem. Anyway, this boy was taken to an isolated area in the Everglades. They both got out of the car and walked some 20-30 feet from the road. McAllister pulled out a handgun, shot the boy in the head, and left him to die. By God's grace, Chris Carrier didn't die. He laid unconscious for six days, until he woke up, not even aware that he had been shot. He walked back to the road, where a man in a pick-up truck eventually saw him, covered in blood with two black eyes, the day after Christmas. In the hospital, it was revealed that the bullet had passed behind his eyes, exiting his right temple without causing any brain damage. He did lose sight in his left eye, but was otherwise uninjured, returning to school again only a month after the attack.

The police investigation led the family and police to suspect that McAllister had done this, but they didn't have enough evidence to charge him with the crime. Chris Carrier writes, "For the next three years I lived with tremendous anxiety. Most nights I would wake up frightened, imagining I heard someone coming in the back door. I'd find refuge in my parents' room, curling up on the floor at the foot of their bed." Rather than living a life of bitterness, he put it all behind him. Carrier went on to finish high school, college, and received a Master's of Divinity degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1994. Eventually, he moved back to his hometown and was the director of youth ministries at his boyhood church in Coral Gables.

In 1996 (twenty-two years after this incident), Chris Carrier received news that David McAllister had finally confessed to the kidnapping and attempted murder. Carrier was notified and asked if he wanted to go and see him. Carrier said, "I hesitated. Over the years when I gave my testimony, people would ask me what I would do if I could talk to the man who tried to kill me. I always said I would jump at the chance. It was here. ... What do you say to someone who'd tried to kill you?" The next day he went to the nursing home where the 77-year-old man was dying. In their first conversation with each other, McAllister held Carrier's hand and apologized for what he had done. Carrier told McAllister

that he had forgiven him. He visited him often in the next month before he died, bringing his wife and two girls to meet him. Carrier said that he was able to share the gospel with him, and McAllister professed to believe it. Carrier said, "while many people can't understand how I could forgive David McAllister, from my point of view I couldn't not forgive him." [\[8\]](#)

My third point this morning is this, ...

3. Forgiven People Forgive People.

This is a great illustration: "from my point of view I couldn't not forgive him." Your point of view dictates your attitude of forgiveness. This is the message of our text this morning: "If God has forgiven you a great debt, how can you not forgive others a little debt?"

Let's finish our passage with a look at what the king did with this "wicked slave." It brings the parable to us by way of application.

Matthew 18:34-35

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."

This slave was handed over to torturers. In jail, there was no way that he could ever pay off his debt. He will suffer for the rest of his life. I believe that Jesus is here speaking about eternal judgment in hell. There are some who believe that this is simply earthly discipline (as in Hebrews 12, to bring the slave back). In effect, they say that Jesus is teaching, "If you don't forgive others, God will make your life will be miserable, until you finally forgive from the heart." But, the sense of verse 34 isn't that you are miserable until you repent. However, it appears to be an eternal sort of punishment. He will be there in jail, being tortured until he pays of his debt, which he could not accomplish even in 125 lifetimes, not simply until he repents. Now, certainly, it is true that if you harbor within yourself an unloving, unmerciful, and unforgiving spirit within yourself in regard to others, you will suffer for it. It will keep you awake at night. It will consume your thoughts. It will affect your countenance. It will affect your joy. But, the Bible teaches very clearly that if you aren't forgiving others, God will not forgive you.

Let's look at Matthew 6. This is an often repeated prayer. This is the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray. In many churches, this prayer is repeated every week. Matthew 6:12, "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." This is talking about sins. Jesus teaches us to put before God our standard of forgiveness, and plead that he would forgive us in a similar fashion. The thought is this, "if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (Matt. 6:14, 15). These are the words of Jesus. This is how Jesus interpreted His own prayer that he tells us to pray.

My message all comes down to this: Are you extending forgiveness graciously and freely to all who have transgressed against you? Perhaps there are some people in your life with whom there is unresolved tension which has come about as a result of sin. Are you embittered against this person? Is the problem with you? Is the problem with them? It may be that others have sinned against you and have never demonstrated a repentant spirit so that your relationship could be restored? Are you willing to forgive them and see your relationship restored? Rather than waiting for them to come to you, have you gone to them? Paul tells us, "As far as it depends upon you, are you at peace with all men?" (Romans 12:18).

As I have thought about this in my own life, I have thought of those who have wronged me. I have noticed that I like to take their offense against me and shape it into an arrow and put it into my quiver. It just sits there on my back. I occasionally think about it from time to time. But, when an opportune time comes, I take that arrow and I use it to harm them, by bringing it to remembrance, and telling someone about it. You ought to have an empty quiver on your back. For those who have sinned against you, you aren't to seek revenge. You aren't supposed to seek to hurt them every chance that you get. God will repay the wrongs done against you. And He doesn't need your help in the matter. I ask you, is your quiver of resentment and bitterness empty? Or does it have a few arrows in it? It is of utmost importance that your quiver is empty.

This isn't a trivial matter. Jesus said, "if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (Matt. 6:14, 15). Jesus is saying that forgiven people forgive people. He also affirms the corollary: Those who don't forgive won't be forgiven. This teaching comes several times in the Bible. Consider these verses:

"Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy." (Matt. 5:7) "Judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy." (James 2:13) Are you like the wicked slave, who won't forgive a minor offense? If so, you need to reconcile with your brother today

I know that nothing will destroy Rock Valley Bible Church more than an unforgiving, unmerciful spirit among us all. We will sin against each other. That's a fact. And as the years go by, if you are finding yourself forming the transgressions against you into the form of arrows and placing them into your quiver, then Rock Valley Bible Church is in for some trouble. For, you will use the arrows in your quiver to harm others as you constantly remember the that was done to you. Rock Valley Bible Church will be splintered. And we will stand no chance. We will end up fighting each other, rather than loving one another.

On the other hand, I know of nothing that will keep Rock Valley Bible Church stronger than a forgiving, merciful spirit among us all. We will sin against each other. That's a fact. And as the years go by, if the offenses, which can pile up and cause bitterness among us, have been swept away and torn down, they won't build barriers between us. If we have found ourselves to be unarmed, rather than having a quiver full of arrows of resentment, which we are ready and willing to use at a moment's notice. Then there will be nothing between us that others could use to divide us. When our hearts are filled with love, we will overlook the transgressions against us. And, "Love ... does not take into account a wrong suffered." In this case, nothing will be able to stop such a church from growing strong and mighty in the power of the Lord.

Remember: forgiven people forgive people.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on June 26, 2016 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Dave Harvey, When Sinners Say, "I Do." p. 113

[2] Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6

[3] As quoted by John Gill in his commentary. He gives the original source as T. Bab. Yoma, fol. 36. 2. Mainion. Hilch. Teshuba. C. 3. Sect. 5

[4] D.A. Carson

[5] Antiquities 12.4.4

[6] Antiquities, 12.2.3

[7] Title 18, Part 1, Chapter 41, Section 871

[8] Today's Christian, January/February 1998