

# Forgiving One Another

*One Another Duties*

By Pastor George McDearmon

sermonaudio.com

**Bible Text:** Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13  
**Preached on:** Sunday, December 9, 2012

## **Ballston Lake Baptist Church**

1 Edward Street  
Ballston Lake, NY 12019

**Website:** [blbc.org](http://blbc.org)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/blbcsa](http://www.sermonaudio.com/blbcsa)

Brethren, you may recall a Wall Street Journal article that I referred to some time ago, that some time ago was in February, 2011, in connection with the fruit of the Spirit is patience. That article was and is entitled "Get out of my way, you jerk!" I'm going to excerpt a few portions of "Get out of my way, you jerk!" again.

The article begins, "You don't need a car to get road rage. For many people, few things are more infuriating than slow walkers – those seemingly inconsiderate people who clog up sidewalks, grocery aisles and airport hallways while others fume behind them. Researchers say the concept of sidewalk rage is real. One scientist has even developed a pedestrian aggressiveness syndrome scale to map out how people express their fury. At the most extreme, sidewalk rage can signal a psychiatric condition known as intermittent explosive disorder. On Facebook, there's a group called 'I secretly want to punch slow walking people in the back of the head,' that boasts nearly 15,000 members. Signs of sidewalk rage include muttering or bumping into others, uncaringly hogging a walking lane and acting in a hostile manner by staring and giving a mean face. Why then are some people, even those who greet other obstacles with equanimity, why are they so infuriated by unhurried fellow pedestrians?"

Well, then the writer answers his own question and I excerpt in part, "Ragers tend to have a strong sense of how other people should behave." Now interpret "other people should behave" in a way that suits me; that pleases me; their world should revolve around me and when I'm not pleased, I get mad. Ragers tend to think people should do things their way and when they don't, in the case of sidewalk rage, they mutter and they clog up the lanes and they give a mean face or whatever else they do.

"Some ragers say that thinking insulting thoughts about other pedestrians serves as mental ventilation and makes them feel better. Psychologists say that the best thing for a rager to do is to calm down. Those at the extreme end of the rage continuum have a condition characterized by an inability to inhibit aggressive impulses that lead to assault or destruction." Well, included in the article are traits of those who have pedestrian aggressiveness syndrome: acting in a hostile manner, feeling stress and impatience, walking much faster than the rest of the people, not yielding when it's the polite thing to do, muttering, bumping into others, not apologizing, making insulting gestures. And then

the article includes this: developing strategies to quell the rage may be wise. Kind of profound.

Brethren, while amusing maybe, sidewalk rage can remind us of just how petty the "me generation" has become. Sidewalk rage can remind us of how emotionally infantile, how selfish, how angry the generation of "me" has become. Sidewalk rage reminds us of our potential to become irritated and retaliatory over the slightest things that don't suit us. Our deeply embedded assumption is that others in all things should be alert and careful to do as I want them to do even right down to the pace of their walking. And as to developing strategies to quell the rage, we might start with this one: Ephesians 4:2, "with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love." That's a good strategy for sidewalk rage. Or Philippians 4:5, "Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men." Perhaps with this matter of developing strategies to quell the rage we could begin by remembering that Christ puts up with our slow walking, others must put up with our slow walking and all that that represents. And we should remember that much is at stake in this issue, the peace and unity of Christ's church as well as the credibility and efficacy of the profession of our calling.

Last Lord's Day, our concern was the "one another" duty of forbearing one another, of graciously putting up with a fellow pedestrian who does not walk at the pace that pleases me. This morning, our concern is a related "one another" duty and is the duty of forgiving one another about which Thomas Watson writes, "A man may as well go to hell for not forgiving as for not believing."

Concerning forgiveness, I remind you by way of introduction it is the only part of the Lord's prayer to which Jesus returned to elaborate. There is the petition in Matthew 6:12, "and forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors," and our Lord returns to amplify that in these words, "For 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." And brethren, that means what it says. Granted, there are other truths that can be brought to bear upon that stark reminder but the plain truth just quoted stands, if you do not forgive men, your heavenly Father will not forgive you. It means what it says.

And concerning forgiveness, the summary lesson set forth by Jesus from the richly instructive account of the unmerciful slave, the summary lesson was this, "so shall my heavenly Father also do to you," and the doing there has to do with banishment, banishment from his presence. "So shall my heavenly Father also do to you if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart." The language means what it says. As another writes, "The unforgiving spirit as a pride form is the number one killer of spiritual life." In the language of another, "We are most like beasts when we kill. We are most like men when we judge. We are most like God when we forgive."

Now brethren, this morning we began with forgiving each other. Our primary text as indicated on the outline distributed, Ephesians 4:32,

32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

And the parallel statement in Colossians 3:13,

13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

Now please look at the outline and note that at the top it does not read forgiving one another, it reads forgiving each other. Interpretively, it could read forgiving one another but literally it should be as printed.

I want to give a foreword with regard to the outline and that foreword is this: in the text read, we do not literally have "one another," we have literally "each other," we have technically speaking, a reflexive pronoun with reciprocal pronoun force. That was explained a few months ago in connection with Ephesians 5:19, "speaking to one another." And again for any who want to pursue it or our listeners, I refer you to page 690 of A. T. Robertson's grammar. He actually cites Colossians 3:13 as an example, noting that sometimes it, the reflexive, occurs side by side with the reciprocal as if by way of variety. But the point is there are instances and those cases are before us, where the reflexive pronoun, "each other," or in the plural, "yourselves," has reciprocal force, the force more plainly put of mutual duties, thus interpretively it could read forgiving one another, and that is how it reads as in the King James. Quoting from Ephesians 4:32, "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." The King James translates in a similar way in Colossians 3:13, "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."

But with that foreword or footnote, note the headings and I'll introduce them and then we'll get to work. We're using the same headings as we did last week with forbearance. The face of forgiveness. We want to answer the question here, "What does forgiveness look like? What are its features, its contours, its shape?" Secondly, the fundamentals of forgiveness, the basics, the essentials, the constituent elements of which forgiveness consists. Then I will identify, God willing, tonight two of the fundamentals: patience and a saving, personal, actual experience in your own soul of Christ forgiveness. Thirdly, the focus of forgiveness, that is, that at which forgiveness is aimed, that upon which it converges, and that is indicated in Colossians 3:13 and the word "complaint." Then the finale of forgiveness, where it all leads, the climax of it, and really these are intertwined. The finale of forgiveness involves an ungrieved Holy Spirit in the church, church unity and peace, and your assurance of your salvation.

Now with the outline mapped out, we take up now this morning the face of forgiveness and, God willing, we'll finish the first, this first heading. And to understand what forgiveness looks like, what its features are, its shape is, we're gonna take up now the actual language of forgiveness, the various terms that are translated, though they're

different in the original, they are translated forgiveness often in the English. And I begin with Ephesians 4 at verse 32, forgiving each other, and Colossians 3:13, forgiving each other. In both of these texts, we have a term, *charizomai*, the root of which is grace and the sense of the term used in Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:13, the sense of the term rendered "forgiving," the root of which is simply grace, the sense is this: it is to show one's self gracious by forgiving freely, to show one's self gracious, large-hearted, liberal and generous of soul by readily freely forgiving.

The term is used in the context of forgiveness in Luke 7:42, "when they," and the antecedent are two debtors, one who owed a little bit and one who owed a lot, "when they were unable to pay," and now here's our term and note how it's rendered, "he," Jesus, Jesus representing the creditor, "graciously forgave," there's the term in Ephesians 4:32, capturing the nuance of grace. "He graciously forgave them both."

The term is found in 2 Corinthians 2:7 and 10. It is found in Colossians 2:13. He made you alive together with him, having forgiven us, having graciously, freely is the sense, forgiven us all our transgressions. The emphasis, the distinctive nuance of the term from which we're working in our primary text, Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:13, its particular nuance is to show yourself gracious, to show yourself benevolent by freely, readily, generously granting forgiveness to an offender over against being slow and begrudged, over against making an offender, as it were, beg and plead and grovel and crawl in humiliation so, as it were, to earn your pardon. This term is precisely the opposite.

Christ in the language of Luke 7:42, graciously forgave, and by way of the apostle using that very term here in our primary text, the lesson is this: we're to do the same. Generous, large-hearted, gracious in dealing with those who sin against us.

Now that's one term. Here's a second term and this is the most common in the New Testament, *aphiemi*, which means simply to let something go, to be done with it. It's the most commonly used term translated "forgiveness" in the New Testament, to let it go, to send away, to dismiss, to cancel, to remit, sometimes in the New Testament used of releasing a debt and a debtor, canceling a criminal charge, acquitting of guilt. Fundamentally, the term *aphiemi* simply means to let an offense go, to send it away.

Now it's used, well, it's used frequently, I'll just quote a few places, in the interest of time, fewer than I planned. It's used in Matthew 6:12, "And forgive us our debts," send our debts away, dismiss them, release them, let them go, "as we also have forgiven our debtors." Brethren, think about that petition. Could it be that you pray against yourself if you pray that petition, that God would send away your debts, your moral debts you owe him, by the standard you do with other people. That's what you're praying. You're praying to your heavenly Father that he would let go, that he would cancel out, that he would remit your moral debts as we also have canceled out, remitted, let go, sent away the moral debts others owe us.

The term is used in verses 14 and 15 already quotes. The term is used throughout the instructive account of the unmerciful slave. The term is used in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins," to send them away, to remit them, to cancel them out, to let them go, "for forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

The term is used as a noun in other places. Time is gonna constrain that I omit those occurrences and go now to another term. There is another term that at least in one instance, Luke 6:37, is used in the context of forgiving, and "Do not judge and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned," apolyo, to loose from, to release, similar in its sense to the term just considered but it is a different term in the original.

A fourth term is found in Romans 3:25, the antecedent to the beginning of the verse is Christ Jesus "whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed." The idea of passing over that which should be punished. Now our Lord or God passed over because of the propitiatory work of Jesus Christ, that being the ground of the satisfaction of justice. There was a letting go of punishment regarding those for whom Christ died.

Then in 1 Peter 4:8, there's another term, "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins." The idea there of covering with regard to an offense is the idea of throwing a blanket over it, throwing a veil over it. In the language of another, "It refuses to deliberately expose the sins and encounters to the gaze of all. It prefers to refrain from and discourage all needless talk about them. It acts to throw a veil over those sins like the conduct of Shem and Japheth in throwing a covering over their father's shame in contrast to Ham's which exposed it." The sense of 1 Peter 4:8, love covers, is a sense of not needlessly broadcasting, not needlessly publishing, endeavoring to shelter the offender from needless exposure.

Then there is one more term and that is found in 1 Corinthians 13:5, love "does not take into an account a wrong suffered." Now that's an accounting word. The particular verb there rendered "take into account" is the idea of putting something on the side of a ledger. It'll not be forgotten. It's there. When I go back to my ledger, I see it. Love doesn't do that. Love does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not write it down, as it were, on the debit side of a ledger, does not mark it down so as to have an exact memory of every offense so as to have a mental ledger on which is a record of every wrong someone has committed against me, a mental ledger so as to harbor and nurse grudges, a mental ledger so as to feel resentment and anger, a mental ledger so as to bring forward a list of past offenses. "I haven't forgotten them. I've written them down. They're on the ledger. I recall them instantly and precisely." The precision of a monthly credit card statement that doesn't omit charges, they're all there, that's the picture. But love, Paul says, doesn't do that.

Now putting this language together and that's how you come to a definition. You've got some five terms that convey the concept of how we're to respond to offenses. We just surveyed those terms, now you bring together into a summary what forgiveness means. It means more than one thing. If it only meant one thing, the New Testament writers would only use one term but they don't because forgiveness is a kind of a kaleidoscope of response, a complex of responses from the soul to an offender. Put the language together and the face of forgiveness looks like this: showing one's self gracious, ready, willing to freely forgive an offender; promptness, readiness, graciousness when an offense has been committed. It includes letting go of the offense, dismissing the blame, remitting the moral debt, sending away the guilt the offender sustains before you, sending away the sense of deficit that he has in your eyes, canceling the moral debtor's status he has incurred, releasing him from the offense and the sense of obligation with which he stands before you because of it. Forgiveness includes passing over punishment, sending away revenge, sending away get-even desires in all of its forms both subtle and overt. Forgiveness includes covering from needless exposure and condemnation. Forgiveness includes forgiving and forgetting, blotting out the entry made on the ledger of the soul made by the offense suffered, blotting it out so as to be done with it forever, so as to provide no fuel for the slow smoldering fires of grudges, so as to provide no opportunity to replay it in the mind, to rewind over and over and over the same thing so as to remove fuel for the slow burn anger of bitterness. Summarily dealing graciously, liberally, generously with an offender in the way of forgiving his sin.

Now a couple of more particulars before we draw this to a close this morning. Forgiving each other both in Colossians 3:13 and Ephesians 4:32, present tense, continually. What does that tell us? We're gonna always be doing this. There are always going to be offenses and we will continually be forgiving. It is not a matter of forgiving and being done with it, "Well, I'll never have to do that again." Well, as long as you're in the land of the living you will unless your soul is eaten up with the toxin of bitterness, the corrosive of bitterness. That's your alternative and hell afterwards. If you do not forgive your brother from the heart, you're banished.

Years ago, I came in contact, as I mentioned earlier, with Jay Adams, his train, and in one of his works, and I assume though I don't know for sure, the following arises from trying to put together some of these terms. I'm not sure that's the case but it certainly reflects these terms. He wrote of the indicators as to whether or not I've truly forgiven another for their sin against me. He writes something like, I probably expanded here a bit and I think I've added maybe, but he writes something like this. If I've fully and freely forgiven, then number one, I'm no longer gonna be dwelling on the offense. No longer replaying it over and over in my mind. No longer complaining about it, pouting over it, staying angry about it. I'll no longer store it away so as to have it available for a pity party, to have it available so as to continue to blame the offender, to have it available to stoke the fires of resentment. No, I cast it out of my soul and I can know if I've cast it out of my soul by whether or not I've got this rewind in the mind and heart and I keep playing or pushing the rewind button and replaying that which I said I had forgiven. If I've fully and freely forgiven as Christ has forgiven me, I shall not dwell on the offense. No, I've let it go.

Secondly, I'll not talk about the offense to others so as to belittle in the eyes of others, so as to recruit others to take my side in the war that I'd like to make or wage against the offender. I will not parade his or her offenses before others so as to cause others to feel sorry for me and to gang-up on the offender. Not if I've fully and freely forgiven.

If I've fully and freely forgiven, I'll not dwell on the offense I've said I pardoned, I'll not talk about it, about the offense that I said I've covered, I'll not use the offenses against the offender in the future in a moment of present offense. Maybe there is another sin, if I have fully and freely forgiven, I'll not dredge up the past to prove how much of a monster the offender is now. Not if I've forgiven. I'll not compound the present offense by pulling out of a sack that I've been dragging around a long memory of past offenses so as to intensify blame and to demonstrate that the offender is really a miserable wretch and the offender should grovel in the dirt in my presence. Not if I've fully and freely forgiven as Christ has forgiven me.

I'll not dwell on those offenses, I'll not needlessly talk to others about them, I'll not use those offenses that I said I had forgiven against the offender in the future, and I will show myself gracious, benevolent, kind, courteous, open-hearted and generous to the one who has offended me. It's really no surprise why Peter responded to our Lord's instructions about forgiveness with the words "increase our faith." Brethren, this doesn't come natural to our small, angry, petty hearts that want revenge. That's who we are natively. We can understand Peter's response "increase our faith." Forgiveness. Forgiveness is to be sincere, earnest, in the telling words of Jesus, from your heart. There's a sense in which that says it all. Convincing, credible, true, whole-hearted, from your heart.

The question this morning, then: have you and I forgiven those with whom we have complaint, not in some perfunctory way but from the heart? Do our relationships with our offenders demonstrate that we have forgiven from the heart? If someone talks to me and another and we've been in conflict over an offense, would they be able to discern that, yes, forgiveness from the heart has been extended and received? Such forgiveness is indispensable to brotherly relations in the church, indispensable to the unity and peace of the church, indispensable to having a genuine hope of heaven. Without it, you have no hope of heaven. Concerning those two debtors, he, the Lord Jesus, graciously forgave them both. Graciously. Have we done the same? Our relationships testify one way or the other.

Tonight we'll return and begin with the fundamentals of this forgiveness. Brethren, much is at stake. There are few things about the Christian life addressed more starkly. If you forgive men their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. If you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions. It's that, that truth is plain and it means what it says. There are few things about the Christian life expressed as starkly and as in black and white, all or nothing terms than the matter of forgiveness. And again, not perfunctory word only forgiveness but as Jesus adds later, with your hearts. There's a sense in which everything rides on this. O God, help us to press on. Be hard pressed to find anything more vital than grappling from the soul with what the Bible teaches. Heaven and hell are the issues. Nothing less. Heaven and hell.

Let us pray.

*Father, may we not duck the plainness of the words of our Lord and, Father, may we embrace with our hearts the multifaceted grace of fully and freely pardoning our offenders and their offenses. Lord, may the relationships within our church be a testimony, a testimony that such forgiveness from Christ has been received and experienced and is being worked out in the same kind of forgiveness extended to offending brothers and sisters. Father, just as surely as offenses will mark our life together, may this kind of full forgiveness mark our responses. Lead us on further in such a weighty and consequential matter as we have taken up. I pray in the name of Christ. Amen.*