

Fundamentals of Forgiveness

One Another Duties

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Bible Text: Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13
Preached on: Sunday, December 27, 2015

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Tonight we're going to take up where we left off this morning after just a couple of comments of review.

Returning now to our outline, we are taking up the "one another" duty of forgiving one another though the outline is titled "Forgiving each other," and an explanation was made this morning as to why that is. Then we took up with the first of four headings: the face of forgiveness, that is, what does forgiveness look like, what is the meaning of forgiveness, what are its features, what is its shape. To answer those kind of questions, I sought to examine the approximately six or approximately six terms that convey forgiveness in the New Testament, trying to identify the distinctive nuance of each, and having done that, we conclude that forgiveness is not a single thread kind of thing, it is not a single attitude of the heart, it is a complex, it is the complex of dispositions in the heart that we call summarily forgiveness. This complex or multifaceted attitude of the heart includes showing one's self gracious, ready, willing to freely forgive an offender promptly, graciously, opening the heart to one who has offended us. The idea or concept or grace of forgiveness further involves letting go, letting go of the offense, dismissing it, sending it away. It further involves passing over, passing over punishment, sending away revenge and get-even desires in all its form subtle and overt. Forgiveness includes covering the offender from needless exposure and condemnation. It includes forgiving and forgetting, that is, blotting out the entry made upon the ledge of our mind and heart, that entry of deficit wrought by the offense that otherwise is always there, always reminding us, "He did this, she did that." No, love does not take a wrong suffered into account. The ledger is erased. The debt is canceled out. We considered then this multifaceted grace conveyed by a half dozen New Testament terms, each with their distinct nuances, and putting them together giving us the whole picture of what forgiveness is. In the language that concludes the parable of the unmerciful servant, it is forgiveness from the heart, the forgiveness rendered of a whole soul, not perfunctory, not word only, not some external form, it is forgiveness out of the heart. That is how God has forgiven us and if we have received such categorically, we will give such, and if we do not, we're none of his.

Now tonight we take up with the second of the four headings, the fundamentals of forgiveness, and the first of the two fundamentals that shall be identified tonight is patience. Now this is evident when we turn back to Colossians 3:12-13. We have there in

verse 12 the imperative put on and among other Christ-like virtues, put on patience, and then there follows bearing with one another, verse 13, and forgiving each other. As forbearance was explaining patience, expressing the outworking of patience, as patience was foundation to bearing with one another, so both are the case with forgiving each other.

The first fundamental of patience, not so much in priority but in order of the language, the first fundamental of forgiveness is patience. Now I thought this week to express this in a different way, how the Proverbs express it, you may recall. To express the fundamental that patience is to forgiveness in the language of the Proverbs, one must have what, Ron? We talked about it this afternoon. A what? No, a long nose. A long nose. In the language of the Proverbs, if you have a forgiving spirit, the foundational virtue is that you have a long nose. You have every right to ask, "Where did that come from?" Well, I'll answer. In Proverbs 14:29 we read, "He who is slow to anger." That's how our English reads. How does the Hebrew read? "He who is long of nostrils." Now interestingly the Septuagint translators translate "long of nostrils" with the same term that we find here in Colossians 3:12, patience of which forgiveness is the outworking. Proverbs 14:29 again, "He who is slow to anger," long of nostrils, "has great understanding."

Likewise in Proverbs 15:18, "A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, But the slow to anger," again, long in nostrils, "the slow to anger pacifies contention," and the contrary temper, the temper that stirs up strife and conflict and hostility amongst brethren, Proverbs 14:15, "A quick-tempered man," literally in the Hebrew, short of nostrils. What is all this about nostrils? Short of nostrils designates the impatient, angry, short-tempered person in view of what they look like and sound like when they're mad. Noisy audible breathing through contracted flared nostrils, huffing and puffing, as it were, short and shallow loud breaths when angry. The Hebrew uses that. It's a picture of the emotionally volatile, erupting in rage, snorting, as it were, as they inhale and exhale demonstratively for having blown up over some provocation. Now if you're short of nostrils, do you have a short nose? You're not patient and thus you surely will not forgive. Long of nostrils conveys, again, in terms a picture, quiet calm breathing, a man composed and longsuffering in the presence of provocation.

Well, that's all to say this: dispositionally we want to have a long nose because it's fundamental to our present concern, a forgiving spirit. That is, we want to have patience. Patience is the first fundamental of forgiveness. Again, the language of Colossians 3:13, put on patience, bearing with one another and forgiving each other. The participles are amplifying what the underlying grace of patience looks like. Paul is using those participles to say how the truly patient are gonna manifest their long nostrils, their long and unruffled temper, they're going to manifest it in freely and fully forgiving offenders rather than erupting in a rage, erupting in anger. Forgiving each other defines the application of an underlying soul deep patience. Forgiving each other is an expression of that patience in which in this context is befitting those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved. The first fundamental of the forgiving spirit is the Spirit-wrought,

Christ-like grace of patience in the soul. Without it, there's no forgiveness because it is its foundation.

Now secondly, a second fundamental to forgiveness is forgiveness received. A second fundamental to a forgiving heart is the gracious pardon of sin that has been savingly, actually experienced in the soul of one who has owned his sin and guilt but in Christ has had them remitted. The language of our text in Colossians 3, just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. And in Ephesians 4:32, forgiving each other just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. That's all to say that forgiveness received, forgiveness experienced savingly in the soul is fundamental to forgiveness granted to one another.

Now this is taught clearly in the account of the unmerciful slave, and as we look at that account for a few minutes, we can say about this fundamental of forgiveness received that this fundamental involves both motive and model, motive for forgiveness and model for forgiveness extended to others. To say it in another way, this second fundamental of forgiveness received sets forth that both the cause or dynamic that works in me to cause me to forgive an offender, and it sets forth a comparison.

Now concerning the second fundamental of forgiveness received, we can thus say Christians are to forgive one another because God in Christ has forgiven them. Now that's the summary lesson of Matthew 18 in the parable of the unmerciful slave. Follow as I read in Matthew 18 at verse 21, "Then Peter came and said to Him, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he had begun to settle them, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents.'" And I think you may see in the margin of your Bible, depending if you have a New American Standard, at least at the time of publication, that was roughly 10 million dollars or 10 million dollars in silver, I believe was the calculation. Whatever the exact calculation, it was a debt impossible to repay. It might as well have been an infinite number for this slave. "When he had begun to settle them," that is, his accounts, "there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents. But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made." Well, what follows, verse 26, the slave made appeal to his master, "the slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me,'" the same term as we find in Colossians 3:12 that is being amplified in verse 13 by forgiving each other. In a sense here, it's synonymous with a plea for forgiveness. "Have patience with me and I will repay you everything."

Now if you think about how much he owed, that's an impossibility. William Taylor sets out, in effect, that this is suggestive of the delusion of men regarding their sin, the delusion and folly of sinners. He writes, "But it's just the same with the sinner and his God," that is, that's how we think. If we'll just get a chance, we'll repay the debt we owe. "The moment his guilt is brought home to him, he's impelled to do something or to promise something in the way of wiping out his guilt. Commonly the very last thing

which he will admit is that he can do nothing to make atonement for it. He will go about to establish his own righteousness, he will try to make himself better, he will promise future obedience as if that could be satisfaction for sins of the past." That's natural religion. That's how we think outside of Christ. Save yourself religion notwithstanding the impossibility of the debt to be paid.

Well, the master of the overwhelmingly indebted slave graciously responded to the appeal. Verse 27, "And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt." Instructive of the gracious large-hearted willingness of God to freely and fully forgive the sinner's moral debt. But you know what follows. When the forgiven slave went out and encountered a fellow slave who owed him but a trifle, a hundred denarii, verse 28, "he seized him demanding, 'Pay back what you owe.' So his fellow slave down and began to entreat him, saying," he makes the same appeal that the forgiven slave made to his master, "'Have patience with me and I will repay you.'" The recently forgiven slave refused that patience and had his fellow slave imprisoned, verse 30. That was reported to his master and the lesson follows now at verse 32, "Then summoning him," that is, the unmerciful unforgiving slave who would not have patience though it had been extended to him, "Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave even as I had mercy on you?'" And the rhetorical answer is a resounding emphatic, "Yes, he should have." He should have had patience. He should have forgiven because his master had patience and forgave him. "And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him." And now the lesson, "So shall my heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

Christians are to forgive one another because God in Christ has so graciously, so fully forgiven them. Forgiveness from the heart is the fruit of forgiveness received. Forgiveness received is a motive, is a cause, is a dynamic of forgiveness extended and where there's no forgiveness extended, there's no forgiveness received. Ryle writes and I quote, "Forgiven souls are forgiving. There's no ifs, ands and buts about that, that's the way it is. When you've reckoned with the debt you owe to God and come to know in your own heart that the debt has been remitted, a definition, you'll forgive others from your heart, and if you don't it's proof positive that forgiveness has not been received. Forgiven souls are forgiving. They do as they have been done by. They remember how God for Christ's sake forgave them and endeavored to do the same towards their fellow creatures. Has he forgiven them pounds and shall they not forgive a few pence? A spiteful quarrelsome Christian is a scandal to his profession. It is very hard to believe that such a one has ever sat at the foot of the cross, and has ever considered how he's praying against himself every time he uses the Lord's prayer." Now Ryle's reference is to the petition "and forgive our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors." He's saying that the unforgiving are praying against themselves. If God answers as they prayed, they're praying against themselves. "Forgive our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors." Ryles asks, "Is he not saying, as it were, Father, do not forgive my transgressions at all?"

We extend forgiveness because we have received forgiveness. Bound up in that is one additional dimension, bound up in the motive or cause of forgiveness received is also the matter of having been renewed unto the image of Christ by his Spirit; having been made a son of the heavenly Father. Those things being so, we will reflect the image of Father and Son. God in Christ forgives, such is his character. His children reflect the family image, they too forgive because it is their character as God's children. Forgiveness received, the felt sensible recollection of one's own sins and the free and fully pardon of God in Christ, that moves the forgiven to a large-hearted full and free forgiveness of their offenders. They forgive because God in Christ has forgiven them.

Now secondly, relative to the fundamental of forgiveness received, that forgiveness received being the fundamental beyond patience, regarding forgiveness received we forgive because we have received it, that's one part, but Christians are to forgive not only because they are forgiven but Christians are to forgive one another as they have been forgiven and that's more of the emphasis perhaps in Colossians 3:13, just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you; and Ephesians 4:32, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. That adverb we come upon it in previous messages in the fairly recent past with regard to love, we are to love just as Christ loved us. We are to forgive just as God in Christ has forgiven us. The adverb signifies comparison. It directs attention to the nature of something which is a pattern, a model to be imitated. We are to forgive after the pattern or the model of the forgiveness bestowed upon and received by us.

Now one primary characteristic of the forgiveness bestowed by God in Christ and received by us is its gracious, gift-like, generous nature, that is, he forgives freely. Again Luke 7:42, "When they were unable to repay," that is the two debtors there, one owing 500, one 50 denari, "he graciously," freely, "forgave them." God in Christ has done the same to us. No merit involved. No earning involved. He has graciously, freely, benevolently with large and liberal heart forgiven us. No humiliating begging and groveling and crawling in the dust. In Psalm 86:5, "For thou, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, And abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon thee." With God there is a graciousness, a freeness, a readiness, a quickness, a liberality to forgive, as Albert Barnes writes, "Christ forgave us freely. He did not hesitate or delay when we asked him." As the Lord forgave you, how did he forgive you? He forgave you freely. So also should you.

Proverbs 18:19 reads this way, "A brother," and probably there the brother referring to blood kin but certainly I think there's a principle here for all close relationships, "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city, And contentions are like the bars of a castle." Brethren, that's a statement of sad, painful, matter of fact, and while much could be said as to why it is so, it can also be said that a felt sense of gracious forgiveness, gracious free forgiveness bestowed by God in Christ, received by the guilty sinner, can prevent reconciliation from being so daunting and hard and can tear down the bars of the castle of men's hearts. While Proverbs 18:19 is a statement of a painful matter of fact, it ought not to be that way in the church, not where there are people who have grasped the freeness of pardon in Christ.

As to offenses suffered, we could ask the question: am I a strong castle? Are there bars keeping the offender and reconciliation out and the contentions alive? A primary characteristic of the forgiveness bestowed by God in Christ is bestowed freely. A second characteristic of the forgiveness freely extended to sinners is that he forgives fully or entirely. He pardoned, as Barnes writes, all our offenses. In the language of Matthew 18:32, "I forgave you all the debt." Not a portion but all the debt. We read in Psalm 130, one of the penitential Psalms of the psalter, "O Israel, hope in the LORD; For with the LORD there is lovingkindness, And with Him is abundant redemption. And He will redeem Israel From all his iniquities." In 1 John 1:9, the well-worn promise, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." In 2 Corinthians 5:19, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them."

God has forgiven us all our debt, if it's not the case, we're not saved. One sin is enough to sink us into hell. One affront to the law of God is enough. But God in Christ has forgiven all. The point here is we too are to forgive all. We too are to forgive fully, not retaining some aspect of an offense so as to brood over it, so as to sting the offender with some unexpected mention of the offense, not indulging our anger and resentment over it, to fully forgive, expelling every grudge, all resentment, all desires to strike back.

We're to forgive as God in Christ has forgiven us, that means we forgive freely, we forgive fully, and thirdly, we forgive permanently. There's a third characteristic that I point to tonight of God's forgiveness of us in Christ, it's forgiveness forever. It's irrevocable forgiveness. It's permanent forgiveness, an irrevocable pardon. Micah 7:18, "Who is a God like thee, who pardons iniquity And passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in unchanging love. He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under his feet. Yes, thou will cast all their sins Into the depths of the sea." That's the language, brethren, of irrevocable, permanent, forever pardon. The equivalent is Psalm 103:12, "As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us." What is one of the great blessings of the new covenant? "I will remember their sins no more."

Brethren, we too ought to graciously dismiss, let go, forgive the offense and the offender who committed it permanently. Put it away forever. Not to retrieve it. Not to run it through our system again. Not to rewind it. Not to replay it. The fundamental of forgiveness received, the fundamental of the saving experience of having the enormity of one's sins forgiven, reflect upon that. I think that the one that helps me bring this into perspective, the enormity of sin, is that matter, I think it's in Psalm 71, maybe it's 25, that he's forgiven the sins of my youth. Just think of the sins of your youth. Just those sins. Think of the enormity of the guilt and depravity, not to speak of middle years, not to speak of later years, just the sins of your youth, and they've been expunged, remitted, canceled, sent away, let go. Think of that.

Christians forgive because God in Christ has forgiven them and Christians forgive as God in Christ has forgiven: freely, fully, forever. John Eadie writes, "Christians are to forgive one another because Christ has forgiven them, for his example has all the force of a

formal command. They are also to forgive one another as he has forgiven them, fully and freely, at once and forever, not pardoning seven times but demurring to the seventy times seven, not insulting him who has injured them by the rigid exaction of a humiliating apology, or stinging him by a sharp and unexpected allusion to his fault, not harboring antipathy but forgetting as well as forgiving, not indulging a secret feeling of offense and waiting for a moment of quiet retaliation but expelling every grudge from their hearts by an honest and thorough reconciliation."

The fundamentals of forgiveness, a forgiveness that's not perfunctory and limited and measured and temporary but forgiveness from your heart in Spirit-wrought patience and that sense, that felt sense of the enormity of your sins for which you have received forgiveness. That's a dynamic to freely forgive the relative trifling offenses of others against you, and we forgive those offenses as after the pattern or the model that God in Christ has forgiven us freely, fully, forever.

Now brethren, I have intentionally left some things out today. They haven't been forgotten but I have some things I want to more fully consider and, God willing, we're gonna take this up next week. We'll probably return to take up another fundamental and then move forward with the focus that's bound up in that word "complaint," and then the finale, an ungrieved Holy Spirit in the church. Where there is this Christ-like forgiveness of brothers and sisters, there's an ungrieved Holy Spirit, there's church peace and church unity and there's a credible testimony as we reflect the family image of our heavenly Father who has forgiven us. Let's take what we have considered today and apply it, forgiving each other just as God in Christ has forgiven us.

Let us pray.

Father, our hearts natively are narrow and mean and constricted and stingy and the last thing we want to do left to ourselves is to freely and graciously, fully and entirely and forever let go of the offense, cancel it, and forgive the offender but Father, in Christ we both can and want to. May forgiving each other from the heart convincingly, persuasively, may that be the tenor and temper of our church life, the tenor and the temper of our member to member relations. Father, may we take these things into the week ahead and pray them through and respond accordingly, and we pray in the name of the one who made satisfaction for the enormous sin and guilt that was ours. Amen.