

Finale of Forgiveness

One Another Duties

By Pastor George McDearmon

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Ephesians 4:30-32; 1 Kings 21:25-29
Preached on: Sunday, December 23, 2012

Ballston Lake Baptist Church

1 Edward Street
Ballston Lake, NY 12019

Website: blbc.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/blbcsa

Most of you recognize the name Corrie Ten Boom whose life is set forth both in the book and film entitled "The Hiding Place." Corrie Ten Boom lived her first 50 years with her sister Betsie and her father above their watch shop in Holland. During World War II these brethren risked everything to provide hiding places for Jews during the Nazi occupation of Holland. Betrayed by a Dutch informant, they were found out and the three of them were sent to a Nazi death camp where Corrie's dad died 10 days later, and where Corrie's sister Betsie would eventually die. In the providence of God, Corrie survived.

In the book, that is the sequel to "The Hiding Place," the book entitled "Tramp for the Lord," Corrie writes as she comes into her 80s, she writes of some of the lessons that God taught her during her time in the Nazi death camp, and I want to quote her words this morning at some length.

"The school of life offers some difficult courses but it is in the difficult class that one learns the most, especially when your teacher is the Lord Jesus himself. The hardest lessons for me were in a cell with four walls, a cell in the prison of Scheveningen, Holland," that was her first stop on the way to the death camp outside Berlin. That cell, "was six paces in length, two paces in breadth, with a door that could only be opened from the outside. Later there were four barbed-wire fences, charged with electricity, enclosing a concentration camp in Germany. The gates were manned by guards with loaded machine guns. It was there in Ravensbruck," the death camp outside Berlin, "that ninety-six thousand women died." That's where Corrie was.

"After that time in prison, the entire world became my classroom." She goes on to write of her travels following the war, travels that took her to more than 60 countries. Picking up her words, "Always in my travels, even now that I am in my ninth decade of life, I have carried in my hand and in my heart the Bible—the very Word of Life."

"'God so loved the world,' John 3:16, Jesus said. And that is why I keep going, even into my eightieth years, because we've a story to tell to the nations.

"God has plans—not problems—for our lives. Before she died in the concentration camp in Ravensbruck, my sister Betsie said to me, 'Corrie, your whole life has been a training for the work you are doing here in prison—and for the work you will do afterward.'

Corrie writes, "The life of a Christian is an education for higher service." She then quotes Romans 8:18-23 wherein Paul talks about the glory to be revealed to us, where Paul talks about our full adoption as sons, even the redemption of the body. She says then, "Looking back across the years of my life, I can see the working of a divine pattern which is the way of God with his children. When I was in a prison camp in Holland during the war, I often prayed, 'Lord, never let the enemy put me in a German concentration camp.' God answered no to that prayer. Yet in the German camp, with all its horror, I found many prisoners who had never heard of Jesus Christ. If God had not used my sister Betsie and me to bring them to him, they would never have heard of him. many died, or were killed, but many died with the Name of Jesus on their lips. They were well worth all our suffering. Faith is like radar which sees through the fog—the reality of things at a distance that the human eye cannot see.

"Although the threads of my life have often seemed knotted, I know, by faith, that on the other side of the embroidery there is a crown. As I have walked the world—a tramp for the Lord—I have learned a few lessons in God's great classroom." Now one of those lessons was about forgiveness and Corrie relates the lesson she learned in chapter 7 entitled "Love Your Enemy," and this is a gripping narrative that I hope I can communicate effectively. I've read few things like it. It brings together the strands of truth, some of them, perhaps all of them, which we have been considering.

"It was in a church in Munich that I saw him—a balding, heavy-set man in a gray overcoat, a brown felt hat clutched between his hands. People were filing out of the basement room where I had just spoken, moving along the rows of wooden chairs to the door at the rear. It was 1947, and I had come from Holland to defeated Germany with the message that God forgives.

"It was the truth they needed most to hear in that bitter, bombed-out land, and I gave them my favorite mental picture. Maybe because the sea is never far from a Hollander's mind, I liked to think that that's where forgiven sins were thrown. 'When we confess our sins,' I said, 'God casts them into the deepest ocean, gone forever.'" Well, that's the imagery that the prophet Micah uses. Corrie's right, Micah 7:19, "He will have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, Thou will cast all their sins Into the depths of the sea."

Well, this meeting in Munich has concluded, people are filing out. She describes them as they go out silently. "And that's when I saw him, working his way forward against the others." You can imagine it in your mind's eye, everyone is moving to the exit and there's one moving against the grain and against the flow. "One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat; the next," I saw, "a blue uniform and a visored cap with its skull and crossbones. It came back with a rush." She was having what we call a flashback. She goes on to describe it, "the huge room with its harsh overhead lights; the

pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor; the shame of walking naked past this man. I could see my sister's frail form ahead of me, ribs sharp beneath the parchment skin.

"The place was Ravensbruck, and the man who was making his way forward had been a guard—one of the most cruel.

"Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out: 'A fine message, Mrs.! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!'

"And I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand. He would not remember me, of course—how could he remember one prisoner among those thousands of women?

"But I remembered him and the leather crop," that is, the leather strap or whip used upon those women, "I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. I was face to face with one of my captors, and my blood seemed to freeze.

"'You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk,' he was saying. 'I was a guard there. But since that time,' he went on, 'I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Mrs,'—again the hand came out—'will you forgive me?'

Now brethren, think about that. You women, think about that. You've been marched naked in front of this man, possibly whipped with the leather strap from his belt. Your sister has died in that prison and here's one responsible asking, "Will you forgive me?"

Corrie writes, "And I stood there—I whose sins had again and again to be forgiven—and could not forgive. Betsie had died in that place—could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?"

"It could not have been many seconds that he stood there—hand held out—but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do.

"For I had to do it—I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us." And then she quotes Matthew 6:15, "'If you do not forgive men their trespasses,' Jesus says, 'neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.'"

"I knew it not only as a commandment of God, but," I knew it, "as daily experience." And here's what she meant. "Since the end of the war, I had had a home in Holland for victims of Nazi brutality. Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able also to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter what their physical scars. Those who nursed their bitterness remained invalids. It was as simple and as horrible as that.

"And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. Jesus, help me! I prayed silently. I can lift my hand. I can do that much." And then the narrative goes on to describe the struggle in prayer and then its culmination. "I forgive you, brother!" I cried. 'With all my heart.'

"For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then. But even so, I realized it was not my love. I had tried, and did not have the power. It was the power of the Holy Spirit as recorded in Romans 5:5: '. . . the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given unto us.'"

Brethren, do we have the grace and the love to forgive and to communicate plainly and unequivocally our forgiveness? Not to a death camp guard who humiliated and beat you with a whip, but to a brother or sister in Christ who may have offended you or perhaps it was merely imagined that he or she did, who may have offended you with a word or an unkindness or a thoughtless slight or a deed, can you speak the words of the death camp penitent, "Will you forgive me?" And can you extend your hand and your heart, can say to the penitent brother or sister what Corrie said to a death camp Nazi guard, "I forgive you, brother, with all my heart"?

We must be a church of "one anothers" with the forgiving heart of a Corrie Ten Boom, aware that she stood before her penitent offender as one whose sins had again and again in her words to be forgiven, that's our posture, pleading for the strength to do what our pride hates, pleading for the strength to mortify the anger and the resentment and the bitterness that fallen men and women somehow in their insanity take to their soul and nurse. A church of "one anothers," in some cases standing where the Nazi guard stood seeking forgiveness, and in other cases where Corrie stood, "I forgive you, brother, with all my heart." Do we have the grace and the love to follow in the way of a death camp guard and in the way of the woman he humiliated when the offenses committed here and incurred here don't even register compared to what stood between those two? Are we so petty and so full of ourselves that we cannot repent on the one hand, and extend full and free forgiveness on the other for things that are comparative trifles?

Brethren, we are returning this morning to forgiving each other just as God in Christ also has forgiven us and by way of review, we have considered the face of forgiveness, that is, what it looks like, its features. It is a gracious willingness and a readiness to freely forgive. It is a letting go of the offense, a passing over of punishment and revenge, a covering of the offender from needless exposure, a blotting out of the offense entry on the ledger of the soul, no more replaying it over and over again. It is the acceptance of the offender back into a relationship, into fellowship, receiving, accepting and restoring the penitent. The face of forgiveness looks like the prodigal's compassionate father. That's what it looks like. We have considered the fundamentals of forgiveness. Patience. An actual experience of forgiveness received that provides both the reason and the pattern to freely, fully and forever forgive our offenders. And we have considered the repentance of the offender, the prodigal, a picture of that repentance.

In my preparations and in the connection with repentance, I was reminded of a narrative that I'll just briefly note, it concerns wicked King Ahab. I'll not review his history but it's infamous for its evil. And in 1 Kings 21 at verse 25 we read,

25 Surely there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the sight of the LORD, because Jezebel his wife incited him. 26 He acted very abominably in following idols, according to all that the Amorites had done, whom the LORD cast out before the sons of Israel. 27 It came about when Ahab heard these words [the words of Elijah], that he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and fasted, and he lay in sackcloth and went about despondently.

The details there, the outward signs of at least a surface repentance. But listen to what follows.

28 Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 29 "Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days,

In the language of Matthew Henry concerning the nature of God and his gracious response to a wicked man, who at the least intimated something superficially like repentance, Matthew Henry writes, "This discovers the great goodness of God and his readiness to show mercy which here rejoices over judgment." We're to do the same thing. Not having our offenders grovel but like the Lord before Ahab, responding in grace and mercy at the slightest risings of something like repentance.

Brethren, we must always have a forgiving heart, always have a Psalm 86:5 heart, always have the heart of a compassionate father, that heart mortifying resentment and anger and malice. And as we saw last week, the actual conferral of what's in the heart, yes, it awaits repentance by the offender, and I say again, let's have no disconnect, no disconnect caused from either side, no disconnect among us. From the absence of a forgiving heart or the absence of prodigal-like repentance, we must have both to be a credible church.

Further by way of review, we have considered the focus of forgiveness. Colossians 3:13, "whoever has a complaint against anyone," a grievance, a difference, an unresolved offense, that is a probable future condition, you can count on it's gonna happen. I imagine in your marriages it happened this past week. You could probably see a display of hands and confer that in many cases this past week, there were offenses, there were complaints that one mate had against the other. What did you do, go get divorced? No, God willing, the offender repented and the offended graciously forgave. That's gotta happen in Christ's church too.

And again I ask this morning, are there any unresolved complaints among us? Is there any present need to repent, any present need to graciously, convincingly confer forgiveness upon the penitent? Prodigal son repentance and compassionate father forgiveness, brethren, they are critically important to the life of our church and to the next

"one another" duty we'll be taking up. The outline was distributed this morning. Living at peace with one another. We will never do that without getting this right. Never.

Pastor Savastio in his preaching on this matter of forgiving one another says it this way and it sums up well what we've considered so far, we must forgive one another introspectively, that is, considering the forgiveness we ourselves have received, forgiving just as God in Christ has forgiven us. We must forgive imitatively, that is, like God forgives us. And Pastor Savastio adds that doesn't mean that our offender has to present a notarized letter detailing out in exact detail every offense. That doesn't mean we demand that he crawl and beg and grovel and humiliate himself. No, it means we respond like the prodigal's compassionate father. We forgive introspectively. We forgive imitatively. We forgive graciously. We forgive forgetfully. We forgive completely. We forgive relationally, that is, we restore the penitent to our affections and we forgive not coldly, nor formally, but from the heart joyfully and gladly. That's the forgiveness befitting the people of God who are conscious that every day of their lives they need forgiveness.

Charles Spurgeon said in his memorable way, "Forgive and forget. When you bury a mad dog, don't leave his tail above the ground. Brethren, bury the mad dog of offenses, tail and all."

Now fourthly this morning, we return to the matter of the finale of forgiveness. We are considering finally in this hour and into the evening hour tonight, the end, the close, the climax of forgiving one another. We're considering where it leads to and what I want to set before you most emphatically this morning and into tonight is that forgiving each other leads to an ungrieved Holy Spirit in a unified peaceful church. That's where it leads. That's the finale, an ungrieved Holy Spirit who is fully and efficaciously operating in a unified peaceful church. That's where this goes in a corporate sense.

Now thank you Joe and Kelly. Think back to Friday night at the Dutcher's. Maybe 40 or 50 people, I'm not sure, gathered in their home. Those gathered partook of an abundance and variety of refreshments generously prepared, provided, attractively displayed. People were engaged in any number of conversations with one another. Insofar as I observed, the Dutcher's guests were freely and happily interacting. There was mutual and social delight.

Now imagine what I do not think happened. I'm not aware that it did but imagine it. Imagine that amidst that social atmosphere of freedom and communication and joy, someone made a mean-spirited, rude, sarcastic remark, maybe about the host or maybe about the food and drink. They didn't like it and they were letting others know. A demeaning and rude remark about somebody on the other side of the room. Now had that happened, what would have happened next? What would have happened next would have been the cloud, as it were, of tension and grief and painful embarrassment would have come over those present. That's what would have happened next, the atmosphere in the Dutcher's home would have quickly and markedly changed from one of a free and natural interaction to an atmosphere characterized by guarded language, by restraint, and kind of backing away. The joy, the open communication, the freedom would have contracted, would have been checked by the bitter perhaps complaining remark that others heard.

Full and free social expressions would have been held back in reaction to the angry rude comment, the social dynamic would have changed. You've probably been in a setting where that very thing has occurred.

Well, here's the point: a scenario analogous to that can and does occur in the church. What should occur in the church is analogous to what thankfully did occur at the Dutcher's Friday night, full and free and unrestrained and joyous interactions and dealings with one another. The scenario I set forth was purely imaginary. I underscore that and hope not to be corrected. What should occur in the church is the unrestrained actings and workings of the Holy Spirit, the free and the powerful, the vital and the sanctifying operations of the Holy Spirit among us. The Holy Spirit should be unfettered, unrestrained to move, to affect, to work, to communicate through the word as he would, and where such is the case, there is in that church progress, there is peace, there is unity, there is joy, there is freedom. God's presence in such a place animates the worship, attends the ministry of the word, makes the fellowship of one another a delight and, brethren, that is exactly what we must have in this church, the free and full operations of the Holy Spirit.

I might intensify that necessity by reminding you of what's obvious in our little obscure operation. We have no Plan B and that's by design. We have no methods. We have no techniques that are gonna prop us up if the Spirit leaves. It's all or nothing. If the Spirit of Christ does not animate us and sustain us, we have no Plan B, no techniques, no marketing and attractive methods that will appeal to people and get them in and keep them here. That, God willing, will not happen in this place. We must have the powerful effectual operations of a present Holy Spirit or we will die, and we ought to die. We're not gonna pretend, we're not gonna prop ourselves up and patch ourselves up with a bunch of superficial man-made methods.

Well, that's where Ephesians 4:30 comes in, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." And in the context, verse 31 tells you how you grieve him, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice." How do you grieve the Holy Spirit? In Ephesians 4 you grieve the Holy Spirit by possessing and manifesting these rotten attitudes just named that attack the very thing the Holy Spirit is seeking to create in a church. In the beginning of chapter 4, it's called "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." The Holy Spirit is endeavoring to create, to build, to nurture, to sustain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, malice, is a frontal assault on that and grieves the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit does that which is analogous to what we do when we have been grieved, he draws back. The antidote to grieving the Holy Spirit is verse 32, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." Those Christ-like responses are allies to the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. They are antidotes to the bitterness and the wrath and the anger and the clamor and the malice just mentioned.

The Holy Spirit is a divine person, not a thing, not an it. He is a divine personality who reacts to certain things as are represented in verse 31, analogous to our reaction when we

are grieved, and the Holy Spirit is grieved by relational breakdowns in the church that frontally assault what he is endeavoring to create, the unity of the Spirit, and when that unity is assaulted, when it's wounded, he is grieved and draws back. The finale of forgiveness involves centrally an ungrieved Holy Spirit, fully effectual amidst a people unified and peaceably related to one another. We must have that. And we will continue on at this point, God willing, tonight.

Let us pray.

Father, may we think back to that scene of the woman of God standing before one who had humiliated her, that one now seeking her forgiveness. Surely we can identify even though the offenses committed against us are so trifling comparatively, we can identify because we're fallen, with her struggle. Father, may there be the Spirit-wrought grace and love to be able to respond as that noble woman did, "I forgive you, brother, with all my heart." Father, may something like that scene be played out amongst us to the end that an ungrieved Holy Spirit would be free and unbounded and unrestrained amidst a unified church at peace. Father, I plead that these things would come to pass for the honor of Christ by whose death our sins have been put into the depths of the sea, our sins are as far from us as the east is from the west. Amen.