

Forgive One Another
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GFC – 11/1/2020

We are in a sermon series called Stronger Together. We've been preaching on the one-another commands of the Bible. We started out by teaching how we are members of one another. The Amplified Version of Romans 12:5 says:

We are parts one of another (mutually dependent on one another).

Remember, you must be in relationship with others to do the one anothers!

Love is the motivation to obey the one-another commands. That's why the command to "love one another" which is mentioned way more than the other one-another commands. The other one another commands are ways of expressing our love. They are the way we grow stronger together.

We learned that the starting place for the one anothers is to obey the command that is mentioned second most in the New Testament. That command is to greet one another and be affectionate to one another.

The one-another command that is mentioned the third most times is the command to carry one another's burdens.

Along the way – we've also taught on the commands to have compassion for one another, give preference to one another and comfort one another.

Today I am preaching a message entitled Forgive One Another. The command to forgive one another is mentioned 2 times in the New Testament. Ephesians 4:32 says:

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as in Christ God forgave you.

As you go through life, people will wrong you, hurt you. But we must forgive them. This is hard to do, and from my counseling experience over the years, I believe that unforgiveness is one of the biggest tools of Satan to hold Christians back from the abundant life God has for them.

You see, there is supernatural power in forgiveness and there is supernatural power in unforgiveness.

Forgiveness releases supernatural power in your life. Power to set you free. That power is divine. It is of God.

But unforgiveness also releases supernatural power in your life.

Power to bind you up. That power is demonic. It is of Satan. So you release supernatural power in your life either way. It's either divine or demonic.

If you forgive those who wrong you are hurt you, you release the supernatural power of God in your life to set you free and keep you free. But if you don't forgive, you release the supernatural power of the Devil to bind you. This is serious! In 2 Corinthians 2:10-11, the apostle Paul said:

Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.

Unforgiveness is a device of Satan – it's one of his tools – one of his schemes – one of his strategies to hold us back in life. And if we choose not to forgive – IT GIVES SATAN AN ADVANTAGE OVER US!

Life is hard enough as it is.

I don't want to live it with my enemy having an advantage over me.

I don't want to live it with an open door to the enemy.

I want the power of God in my life and that means I must do things God's way. That includes forgiveness.

Now I'm speaking to everyone today. We've all been wronged. We've all been hurt. That's why all of us need to forgive.

If we don't forgive our family, Satan has an open door into our homes.

If we don't forgive our co-workers, Satan has an open door at our work.

If we don't forgive each other, Satan has an open door into our church.

That's why I want to share with you the keys to forgiveness today. I don't want Satan to have an open door into any areas of our lives.

First – I want to define forgiveness for you. Forgiveness means to erase, to give up resentment, to wipe the slate clean, to release from a debt, to cancel punishment.

In other words, forgiveness means we do not hold anything against others.

Forgiveness is the highest expression of love.

Forgiveness is giving up my right to hurt you for hurting me.

Forgiveness is giving up the right to make you pay for what you did to me.

Now, this does not come natural to us. It takes the supernatural power of God. That's why in order to forgive, we need to do two things.

First, we need to experience forgiveness from God. That's because each and every one of us have wronged God and other people. For that we need forgiveness.

Many of the problems people face today would disappear if they received God's forgiveness. People are full of guilt, condemnation, low self-esteem, feelings of rejection. They would be set free if they received the cleansing and healing that comes when we receive God's forgiveness.

That forgiveness and cleansing come when we confess our sins to God. 1 John 1:9 says:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

But here's the thing: being forgiven by God takes more than confessing sin to Him. The Bible says we are forgiven by God based on the way we forgive others.

When we pray the Lord's Prayer we pray "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." What it literally says in Matthew 6:12 is:

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

When we wrong someone we are indebted to them. We owe them whatever it takes to make it right. Likewise, when someone wrongs us, they are indebted to us.

God is saying that we will be forgiven by Him based on the way we forgive others. We will be forgiven AS – just like – in the same way – to the same degree – that we forgive others.

If we forgive a little, we will be forgiven a little.

If we forgive a lot, we will be forgiven a lot.

If we forgive completely, we will be forgiven completely.

If we don't forgive at all, we will not be forgiven by God at all.

If you have a hard time believing that, listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 6:14

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

That's pretty clear! If we will not forgive those who wrong us, God will not forgive us. Again I say, this is serious! You can't go through life holding grudges and getting even.

In Matthew 18:21-35 Jesus showed the terrifying results of unforgiveness:

Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven."

Jesus then told the story of a man who was over his head in debt and was about to be thrown in prison by his king. He begged for mercy and was forgiven. That same man turned around and found a man who owed him a few bucks. The man who owed him begged for mercy, but he was refused and thrown into prison. When the king heard about this, he was very angry.

Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

Then comes one of the scariest verses in the Bible:

This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.

God is saying this story is about us.

He forgave the debts that we had accumulated through our sin.

We were all over our heads in debt and unable to pay.

We were all spiritually bankrupt.

We were all at God's mercy and He forgave us.

Yet we sometimes deal with people according to their sin rather than according to mercy. We sometimes punish people to make them pay rather than show them grace – unmerited favor. We sometimes want to hang onto wrongs rather than remove them. But God is saying:

Since I forgave you, you must forgive others.

Since I released your debt, you must release others.

Since I set you free, you must set others free.

Matthew 10:8 says: *Freely you have received, freely give!*

And if we withhold forgiveness, it gives an open door to the enemy – and it impacts our whole family.

When I think of unforgiveness, I think of my father's family. They were a family known for holding grudges.

My mother and father divorced when I was very young. I rarely saw my father ever in my entire life. I also rarely saw my grandparents. When Joe and I were getting ready to get married, we went to visit my grandparents. It was the first time I had seen them in many years and the first time Joe ever met them.

We had a good visit with them. A few weeks later, we were at my brother's house and my grandparents came by. We greeted them and we thought we were very cordial to them.

But later we found out that they were upset because we didn't make a bigger deal over seeing them. They refused to talk to us to work it out and they refused to come to our wedding.

Their son – my father - came to visit us when our children were young. He was trying to work things out with his family, but he was so full of anger and bitterness that he ended up storming out on everyone and refusing to work things out.

We tried to talk to him about the power of forgiveness. We told him he was eaten up with bitterness and that forgiving others would set him free. He just got angry and said, "I'll never forgive them. They don't deserve my forgiveness."

Because of his bitterness, he ended up cut off from everyone in his family. And when he died, he was all alone. His unforgiveness hurt himself and his entire family.

Unforgiveness will impact you and your entire family. That's why God wants us to forgive. He's our example concerning forgiveness. Psalm 103:8-12 says:

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy... He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.

In Hebrews 10:17 God says, *Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.*

Thank God, He chooses to forgive and forget.
That means once He's forgiven, He does not bring it up again.
Once He's forgiven, He does not make us pay.
Once He's forgiven, He sets us free.

Yet, so many times we choose not to forgive others.
We choose to hold it against them.
We choose to make them pay.
What we fail to realize is that we are hurting ourselves more than anyone else.

Unforgiveness puts us in a prison.
Unforgiveness keeps you bound to the one who wronged you.
Unforgiveness gives the one who wronged you power over you.
Unforgiveness allows a root of bitterness to spring up that defiles everyone around us.

One reason people don't want to forgive is that they want the person who wronged them to pay for it. They say, "If I don't make them pay, who will make them pay?" Well – God will. Romans 12:19 & 21 say:

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It

is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Good always overcomes evil.

Right always overcomes wrong.

Forgiveness always overcomes the wrong someone did to you.

Some people don't forgive because they misunderstand forgiveness.

Forgiveness is not-

- Weakness – you are never so strong as when you forgive.
- Saying that what the person did was right, but that we will not hold it against them anymore. We will leave vengeance to the Lord.
- Excusing a wrong. It never approves or justifies sinful behavior.
- Treating a wrong as if it didn't matter or denying that you've been hurt. We can only forgive those who hurt us.
- Canceling the consequences for destructive behavior. There is still a place for justice.
- "Forgetting it," as if we hit the delete key and our brains go blank.
- Given because the offender deserves it. Christ forgave His executioners despite their lack of repentance or deserving.
- Trust. Forgiveness is given, but trust is earned. Reconciliation requires repentance and real change before a truly loving relationship is possible.
- Maintaining the same boundaries. You can forgive someone without continuing to have the same boundaries as before in the relationship. For example - A wife who forgives her husband for abuse shouldn't automatically be expected to return to him. She needs to set new boundaries until he proves to be trustworthy.

However, we must forgive even when reconciliation is not possible. Romans 12:18 says:

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Whose responsibility is it to make sure you are right with other people?

Yours.

If you have wronged someone, it's your responsibility to work it out.

If someone has wronged you, it's your responsibility to work it out.

Don't wait on someone else to initiate. Do all you can to work things out.
Be quick to forgive when you've been wronged and quick to ask for forgiveness
when you wrong others.

So, how do we forgive?

First, we must remember how much God has forgiven us.

Jesus said those who are forgiven much, love much.

And those who are forgiven little, love little.

Jesus has forgiven us such huge debts, so how can we hold small things against
each other? Ephesians 4:32 tells us:

*Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ
God forgave you.*

How has Christ forgiven us? Freely you have received forgiveness – so freely
forgive. You've been forgiven repeatedly, so forgive repeatedly.

I realize that forgiveness is not easy.

Forgiveness is a process that only God's grace can accomplish in us.

Forgiveness requires dying to self.

But we must forgive others if we want to experience forgiveness.

Some of you have had terrible wrongs done to you. Someone may have betrayed
you – hurt you – cheated on you – abandoned you – divorced you – abused you –
ignored you – rejected you – lied to you. Those things hurt – but you've got a choice
today.

You can hang on to the offense and choose to not forgive.

But if you do, you will be choosing to stay in pain.

You will be choosing to give the power to the person who hurt you.

You will also give the advantage to Satan.

Or – you can choose to forgive and release the supernatural power of God in your
life. Forgiveness does not change the past, but it will change the future and it will
change you!

People make messes. Forgive them.

People make mistakes. Forgive them.

People will disappoint you. Forgive them.

People will hurt you. Forgive them.

Isn't that what we all want?

Then that is what we should all give.

If you are withholding forgiveness, remember: you reap what you sow.

If you can't forgive, be willing to be made willing.

Let God help you forgive those who've wronged you.

Growing stronger together only happens when we forgive one another!