

“FORGIVENESS”

Sermon by Pastor Scott Lowther

Ephesians 4:32

September 4, 2011

Today the topic we will be discussing is from Ephesians Chapter 4. We will be talking about forgiveness. Originally I was planning on just covering one portion of it this week and then moving on with just one verse but by the time I finished studying this week I had 18 pages of notes. Instead of trying to go through all of that, we are going to break it into two. So today's portion is going to be mostly on one aspect of forgiveness and then next week we are going to talk about one verse in particular that seems to contradict everything I am going to tell you today. So we'll have a very thorough in-depth discussion on 1 John 1:9 next week. What the context is, what does it mean, how does it apply. I pray that will be something that would help put all these pieces together so you would get a full picture of what the bible talks about with forgiveness.

With that said there's one other thing that I was just made aware of before I came up. Jen and Steve Brown, who are going to Africa, they are leaving today. The Lord had delayed their flight the last couple of weeks. People go, “*Why is that?*” Well, the Lord providentially – Jen's mom, Flo, had found a cancerous mass. So they gave her some tests this week and they are going to remove the mass and take care of it that way. You know what; you would think that with most people that would derail you from pursuing the Lord and moving so far away when one of your parents is like that. But God bless them, they are leaving today. Our responsibility as the body is to step up around that family so please be in prayer for them. Let's pray for Flo right now so would you join me?

Father, thank you so much that your ear is not deaf that you don't hear us or your arm is not short that you cannot save. That you are wondrous and gracious and you abound in goodness and truth and you keep mercy for thousands. You forgive iniquity, transgression and sin. Lord there is nothing hard for you. So we come to you this morning and just pray that you would intervene in this situation. That you would move in such a way that you would accomplish your purposes overseas and you would just give that family peace as they go, confident resting in the sovereign God that they follow. And Lord for Flo we pray for your mercy, we pray for your healing, we pray you would give doctors wisdom and we pray Lord that you would stir our hearts to minister to that woman while the family is away. And for that we are very careful to thank you and we ask these things in Jesus' name. And everybody said. Amen.

Let's go to Ephesians Chapter 4. We are going to cover one verse today. We are going to be talking about forgiveness on a horizontal level, person-to-person, biblically, am I required to be forgiving and if

so how does that fit with the constraints of scripture. Does God have guidelines for how we are to be forgiving? The answer is absolutely, yes. After all the things we have been through as a church, I really think that today will be helpful for a lot of us. We all have preconceived ideas. Most of us think we can forgive and forget as long as the other person doesn't forget that we forgave. Isn't that the way we operate? I can forgive and forget but you better not forget that I forgave you. That's how we think. We're always in this jostling position of "*How do I feel about this situation?*" and "*I don't want to be short-changed*" and "*I don't want to forgive somebody who's not being very forgiving back.*" The reality is God has laid out in his word the way we are to forgive, the criteria on how we are to forgive, and we're going to see that laid out today. So we can either forgive or we can relive but let's learn to be forgiving and also let's learn the pattern of biblical forgiveness both from God to us and from us to one another.

Ephesians 4:32: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

Or if you have the New King James it says, "even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you". Depending on what version you use, the concept is the same. There's some words here we'll look at quickly and then we're going to talk about forgiveness.

BE KIND TO ONE ANOTHER - This is Paul's admonition to the Ephesian church. Remember he said, "Put off the old man, put on the new man, now put away the works of the flesh". These are works of the spirit that he says we should put these on. He is stirring us to be kind. The word kind just means useful. It means virtuous. It means good or pleasant. It's the opposite of being harsh or hard or sharp or bitter. It's not doing acts of random kindness as the world would look at it. It is intentionally being good and virtuous and useful to one another. It's not just I saw you drop a penny and picked it up and here you go that's my kind act of the day. It is being involved in their life to be kind and virtuous bringing about good fruit, pleasant, useful – those kinds of things. That's what the word means.

TENDERHEARTED - This is a funnier word. Literally it means deep moving of the bowels. When we think of that we're like, "*That doesn't sound like something I'm interested in.*" It just doesn't. But now remember in that age and mindset the bowels were the innermost being. So the word tenderhearted here means the correct way to look at it. It means to have a soft heart towards the people. It means to have pitiful affections. It's not "I feel bad for you" but full of pity, full of empathy. Relating to them, able to discern and understand them. Being sympathetic. Or as the word says: ***to be able to grieve with those who grieve, rejoice with those who rejoice, to bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ.*** To be able to have compassion and passion, one unto another. That's what this word means.

Now we'll look at the heart of what we are going to talk about

FORGIVING ONE ANOTHER - Forgiveness on a horizontal level. I'm going to ask some questions but I don't want you to yell out answers because then people always end up looking at each other if they don't agree.

Should I, should you, unconditionally forgive people? Most of us would say, "*Absolutely, all the time.*" Some other people would say, "*Absolutely not, never.*" Other people would say, "*Sometimes I think,*

maybe.” Those are all fine but what does the word of God say? I notice when we talk about forgiveness we are going to challenge a lot of what most of us have been taught. Most of us have been taught wrong. We have been taught what’s popular.

G. Campbell Morgan says **“Even the commentators are like sheep. They simply follow each other.”**

I don’t know if you’ve noticed but if you like to study and you get a commentary on something almost all commentaries are all the same. They all say the same thing. And the verse that you really want to study, they don’t say anything about. Like for example: **“Because of the angels a woman needs to have a covering on her head”**. That’s a verse in scripture. People wonder what’s up with that. I have never read a commentary that even commented on it. They just let it go. They’re like, *“I don’t know, who knows?”* It was a 2 year search for me to find answers to that question. Most of the people I asked said, *“What’s the difference?”* I said, *“It makes a difference because it’s in the word.”* So God obviously has a reason for it to be there so it would be smart of us to figure it out. That’s what I am talking about. We parrot each other, we believe doctrinally whatever’s popular, whatever we hear most on the radio is what we gravitate towards and I think today we will challenge some of that. So just be open and be berean and check and see if these things are so and let’s see what the word of God says on the matter.

It doesn’t say forgiving another. It says **forgiving one another**. What that means is he who gives forgiveness today will probably be the one who needs forgiveness tomorrow. We are constantly in the state of being forgiving but there’s a criteria upon which we forgive. The criteria is here, the standard. Look at what scripture says: In the same way or just like; to the same degree; on the same basis; just as, even as, God has forgiven you. So when God forgives us there’s a criteria and there’s a standard. The standard is what we are going to look at. The standard is what God’s says we are to use one to another. That’s really important. It’s not open for debate.

The first thing I’m going to challenge you on is: administering unconditional forgiveness to unrepentant sinners is not a biblical mandate and it’s not something that should be done. The bible doesn’t say that you should. We may think that the bible says that we should but the scripture does not say that we should, and that’s where problems begin to arise.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was the great German Lutheran theologian during the Nazi Germany reign, simply said this and see if this is true: **“Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance. Absolution without confession.”** The cheap grace rendered the Lutheran church in Germany incapable to resist Hitler’s rise to power. Do you see that? They just assumed that what God would want for them is to be bobble head dolls and just say, *“Yeah, we forgive everybody for anything at any time”*. Not discerning that God’s commandment to his people is to forgive one another as the Lord forgives, as the Lord sets precedent, as the Lord puts guidelines in his word for us to follow.

We’ll look at some of that. I’ll give you some thought-provoking things.

- Does God forgive his people unconditionally? No, he forgives people in Jesus Christ.

- Does God forgive you outside of Christ? No. In Jesus Christ we are forgiven. So even in God's dealing with His people, there is no unconditional forgiveness. You must be in Christ.

So the same is true for the criteria which God lays out for us to be forgiving one to another. So there is no unconditional forgiveness in scripture. There are conditions for everything God does and the condition is always tied to Jesus Christ.

- Is there salvation for anybody outside of Jesus Christ? No. So you can't say that salvation has no condition. Salvation has a condition that the person be in Christ.

So you need to track with me. Preaching and practicing unconditional forgiveness subverts the gospel; it diminishes the work of Christ; it cheapens God's redeeming grace; it ignores the gravity of sin (which we'll talk about in a moment); and worse it undermines the clear teaching of God's word. So when unconditional forgiveness is thrown around, it's no wonder that God's people are suffering the consequences of it.

Have you ever said, *"I forgive you"* and the person hasn't even repented? What stirs up in your heart? Not healing and wholeness but anger. Let's be real. You get angry. You get angry because you say, *"I've forgiven them but there's no change."* God would say, *"You don't forgive them until there is a change and who are you to forgive anyway for only God can forgive sin."* It is not forgive me, that's one thing to look at but the deeper biblical aspect is forgive me of my sin. That's the difference between night and day. That's the biblical standard we will look at. So "forgive me" is not the same as "forgive me of my sin". We are not called to unconditionally forgive other people. If that was the case, how could a person ever follow Matthew 18? Matthew 18 is the criteria of dealing issues brother-to-brother. You can't follow Matthew 18 if you just say, "Well, I'm just throwing out unconditional forgiveness" because God doesn't say to do that. He says follow this procedure. If your brother hears you then you forgive him.

So "forgive me" focuses on the person and not the act but "forgive me of my sin" is a whole different commodity altogether. When you talk about "forgive" the two most common Greek words in the New Testament, 90% of the time, always have sin as the subject. Always. When you convert the verb "forgive" to the noun "forgiveness" every time in scripture, I could find, it is always accompanied by sin.

Let's look at an example:

Colossian 1:14: *"In Him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."* You see that. It's not just the forgiving of the person; it's the forgiving of the sin. Biblically it's the sin and not just the person that needs to be forgiven. The sin needs to be forgiven.

A human being outside of Jesus Christ does not need to come to any kind of consensus with the Lord on the basis of *"God would you forgive just me."* God would say, *"Your sin separates you from me."* Owning of the sin is what God wants to forgive. Owning of the sin is what causes a brother and brother to come to reconciliation. Not some kind of "sloppy agape". Coming to truth and following God's perimeters.

We've got to be very careful to distinguish between being a forgiving person and actually forgiving sin. For example if I say, *"I forgive your sin"* even though you refuse to acknowledge it or even repent of it; it removes the incentive of the gospel to drive you to the savior. *"Well if you forgave me, I guess that's good enough."* No, you need the Lord if you don't know Him. If we take that preempted action by granting forgiveness of sin to those who don't repent, how can we follow the biblical commands of His word? How can we follow His word?

Let's look at Matthew 18 really quick. It's a great opportunity for us to understand what the word of God says on the matter. Right here you have the clear teaching of scripture.

Matthew 18:15-17: *"If your brother* (this is a guy who says he's your brother, a church member) *sins against you* (now we have here an action, we have a sinful action), *go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.* (Now you can also sin in the way that you tell him. If you go to him with this kind of sign saying this is the salute I'm giving you for your behavior, you're probably sinning. Do it in meekness and fear) *and if he listens to you,* (I believe that interpretation means he owns it. Not that he just goes, *"Yeah, I heard you, see you later."* It means he hears you. The example of scripture would be Nathan going to David. *"David, there's a guy that has lots of sheep and there's a neighbor of his that just has one little lamb. The guy with lots of sheep goes and steals the one little lamb from the neighbor. What do you think should happen to that guy?"* David goes, *"Let's find him and kill him."* Nathan goes, *"You're the man."* And David is cut to his heart and he repents. I'd say that's the equivalent of this text of hearing you) *you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen* ,(or he blows you off) *take one or two others with you that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses 17 If he refuses to listen to the 4 of you or the 3 of you, then you tell it to the church. If he refuses to listen to the church, remove him from the church so that we treat him as a gentile and a tax collector."*

You say that doesn't sound very loving. That's what we don't understand. God's ways are always loving. We don't think it's loving because we have this conceived idea that we are to be unconditionally forgiving everybody and everybody should just be forgiven even if they don't repent. That's not what scripture teaches.

Why would you remove an unrepented brother from the church? Because God cares about the purity of the church. God cares about the holiness of the people. God cares about the unity of the people. God cares about the reputation of the people and the images people portray in society. God cares about the beauty of his body. **Be holy as I am holy**, is God's call. He says, *"I want my church to be beautiful, I want my church to function, I want my church to be loving, I want people to come in and see the difference that Jesus Christ makes in people's life."* When a person is unrepentant that leaven spreads through the whole lump. So God says, *"Remove him"*. That's not unkindness on God's part. That's God saying, "Look man, I have giving him 4 opportunities to repent and he won't. So I will put him outside the church and then Satan will work him over and *maybe* at that point he'll say, *"I miss fellowship"* or *"I miss being in the body"* or *"I miss my friends who love Jesus"* and *"What the heck was I thinking?"* They will come to their senses even as the prodigal did living in the pigsty and said, *"Even a servant is treated better than this in my father's house. I'm going home."* And then they repent and come back and then you

receive them and when they repented you forgive them and restored them into the body. That's God's way.

So you see that, it's not unconditional. It's not, "No, it's OK." God says, "Follow this" because the restoration process is God honoring and God glorifying. Let's look at this. There is a proper biblical or a gospel order. We are to forgive. The criteria was, as God forgives. Same criteria, same way.

In ***Ephesians Chapter 5*** (we'll get there, should the Lord allow, in a few weeks) he says, "***Be imitators of God.***" We are to do what God does within our limiting capabilities, obviously. We are to exhibit godly characteristics. We are to follow His word. We are to model Jesus Christ. He is our example. He is our savior but he is our example and we are to follow His lead.

Let's look at some scriptures here.

"God forgives the sins of those who repent." Likewise we must always grant forgiveness to those who repent. Scripture requires us to distinguish between being forgiving, which is the virtue of always being ready to forgive which is God. God is always forgiving. He is always ready to forgive. But does God always forgive on no criteria or basis? No. He forgives on person's coming to faith in Christ. That's his only criteria. Thus we have God as always forgiving, meaning He is eager and desires to forgive, but He forgives those who repent. Christ-likeness is to do the same. Peter asked Jesus (which is a quote people often give that I should be unconditionally forgiving) in ***Matthew 18:21-22*** ***"Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?"*** ***Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven."*** People will say, "See, that verse says seventy times seven." Do you not see that this verse came right after Matthew 18:18? Jesus is talking to Peter and says, "This is how forgiveness works. Your brother has an issue and you go to him. He doesn't hear you; you take somebody else with you. If he doesn't hear you, you tell it to the church. If he still doesn't hear you, heave him out." *"Oh, how many times should I do that? Seven times?"* "No, seventy times seven."

Then in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus said this, amplifying the same thought: ***Luke 17:3-4: "If your brother sins rebuke him.*** Now rebuke doesn't mean give him a smack-down. It just means you say, *"You know what, I may have a log jam in my eye, help me to see it. But what I'm seeing is this and I'm concerned about your walk. Can we pray about it because I'm noticing something here?"* We should have those kinds of relationships where we are not waiting to the last minute. We should be proactive to say, *"What areas would you like to see me grow? Is there any areas that maybe I'm missing it?"* We constantly should be that way. Jesus says, with a condition. ***and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him.*** Now again it just doesn't mean you say "I repent". It's not your trump card. It means that you repent biblically. You're not sorry you got caught. You're sorry that you've done it and you take steps to correct it and you turn from it and you humble yourself under it and you own your sin.

David owned his sin. In Psalm 51 he is lamenting over his issues that he's had. He said, *"How could I be so stupid. How can I send my men to war while I sit around in the castle? How can I do that and then look*

at a woman in a bathtub and say, "I've already got enough wives, what's one more!" "What's wrong with me? Then she's pregnant and I'm ashamed of it. I don't want people to think bad things about me so I'll try to get her husband to sleep with her when he has too much integrity. The goodness of him drives me crazy so I put him in the front line, withdraw everybody from him and he gets killed. Now I guess it's OK," Nathan calls him on it and David owns it. In Psalm 51 he repents and laments over his condition and says, "**Lord against You, and You only, have I sinned.**" He owns the sin. He's not sorry he got caught. He owns the sin.



A great example of a biblical way to approach an issue was a few weeks ago in Minnesota a woman's husband was murdered. Leaving a woman and her child. She wrote a letter to the man who murdered her husband. Most of us would think the letter should just say, "Oh, I just forgive you. Be at peace." You know what she wrote? She writes this, she was angry (now remember from last week, you can be angry and sin not but don't be angry too long and let that anger mix with grieve) and was grieved over the loss of her husband but she is more grieved now as a Christian over the soul of a human being that would do that. Recognizing that vengeance is the Lord's and He will repay, how much fierce of a judgment do you think God would put on somebody who killed one of his children? She recognizes that. She says, "*Vengeance belongs to the Lord.*" She reaches out to the murderer and writes this: **"I am angry but I am ready to forgive but I pray for your soul that you would find forgiveness of your sin in Jesus Christ and when that happens I will forgive you and you will be my brother."** That's bible forgiveness. Do you see that? It's not appease the guy's conscience as he goes to hell. That's the bible. "I pray that you find forgiveness of your sin in the savior and when you do, I will receive you as my brother." It's very poignant, isn't it? It helps us to be very discerning on how God would have us to behave and the consequences of being forgiving.

As Jesus was told by the Pharisees, which is a truth in **Luke 5:21 "Only God can forgive sin."** They said "**Who are you to forgive sin? Only God can forgive sin.**" Jesus goes, "Fine, your sins are forgiven." He's good with that but do you see it's not our place to usurp God's authority in the forgiving of people's sins. It is our place to hold the standard and follow the procedure so that the person is remorseful and goes to the Lord in repentance. The goal isn't just to sweep it under the rug. The goal is to restore your brother. And the unsaved, the goal is bring them to Christ. The way that we behave and the way

that we follow or don't follow biblical guidelines is the way we do or don't assist the Lord in his work of truth. So the bible doesn't call for "sloppy agape". It doesn't call us to say, "*Oh, I just forgive you even if you don't repent.*" The bible calls us to follow biblical patterns of behavior so that the Lord is glorified and His standard and his word are upheld for us. That in a nutshell is the way we are to horizontally behave and forgive and interact with each other on sin issues.

I hope that, God forbid, we go through other issues where we have to do those kinds of things; we are all on the same page because we have a clear understanding of what God expects. We have a clear understanding of God's way. It won't be, "*I don't think that's right!*" "*Well, who are you a man to talk back to God about what's right?*" It is our job to hold the word in front of us and say, "**Thus saith the Lord**" and we comply with it. As we do that, we see the benefit and the blessing of it. Not arguing and striving against our maker. The reason that God has these things is because this is His way which is always good. **The ways of the Lord are perfect.** God's method for doing things will bring fruitfulness and blessings. The usurping or going around it brings chaos.

Too often the churches are so busy trying to figure out what works, instead of doing what God says, because they think what God says is a hard saying and who can accept it. None of God's sayings are a hard saying if you are humble. All of God's sayings are hard sayings if you are prideful. All of God's sayings are hard if you're rebellious. None of God's sayings are hard if you are submissive. So it's driving us back to the creature/ creator relationship; the king/the servant relationship; the ruler/ the citizen relationship. We follow the ways of the Lord because those are the ways he says to go. "**My sheep hear my voice and they follow me**". Jesus again is the pattern. Jesus just didn't go off all the time in anger **Acts 8:31 "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he didn't open his mouth."** But when someone blasphemed his Father or bought the ways of the Lord into disrepute then He responded.

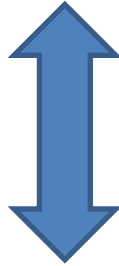
So when he calls us to be forgiving he calls us to forgive just as God does in the same manner as God does. When your brother repents and he turns from his sin then we forgive him and we forget it and we put it into the sea of forgetfulness just as the Lord did. We may still have consequences and actions you take to protect things but the reality is there's still that forgiveness where you put it away. You don't hold it against him anymore. In the same way that God doesn't hold our sins and lawless deeds against us anymore, we don't hold them against somebody else and we move on. That's God's way.

THE HORIZONTAL WAY.



Now I want to spend a few minutes to talk about

THE VERTICAL WAY



Our text today says this: ***Ephesians 4:32: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."*** Now we are going to have an apparent contradiction here. When we talk about forgiveness we talk a lot in counseling because people don't forgive themselves and they don't forgive each other. So we have to cover how you forgive when somebody sin's against you. We cover that part first. But if you are going to be a really forgiving person you must first have experienced forgiveness. If you are going to be a very loving person, you must first have experienced God's love. So we have Jesus saying, quite frankly conditional, in ***Matthew 6:15 "If you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you yours."*** Now that's a condition. It's a saying, according to Jesus, that if you are not forgiving, you won't be forgiven. Here we have Paul writing to the church at Ephesus saying "God has forgiven you." Now the word "forgave" here in our text in Ephesians 4 is in the aorist tense of the verb which means (as I told you before) that something happened at one time temporal. It's a past occurrence that is applicable to the state of the person that's reading it right now. It is something that happened at one time and you are in that state as you read it. It is in God's case of something that God gives you, and will always be in that state. So if a person is in Jesus Christ they are forgiven of all their sin. That's why Paul says "God has forgiven you." Jesus is saying you better be forgiving otherwise God won't forgive you.

So who do we believe here? Do we have a contradiction? Do we say the bible is not accurate and now we need to toss it out? We use to get these calls at the radio all the time. There are always people with their contradictions. So far we haven't been able to find any. It's a matter of taking the whole counsel of God. It's very dangerous to pull a scripture out of context. I just don't mean the context of the text, or even the context of that particular book. I'm talking about pulling a scripture out of the context of the entire bible. You need to know the whole book and then you piece things together. So we have this distinctive of, "*What's going on here?*" Jesus says it is conditional. Paul says it's done. In bible school they'll say, "*How do you reconcile these issues?*" Somebody will say, "*Here's what I do. The red letter takes precedent over the black letter.*" I remember one of the guys in one of my class say that. I thought, "*Wow, that's really insightful and profound!*" The teacher said "*No.*" The word of God is perfect, there are no contradictions, there are just misunderstandings.

So how do we piece Jesus and Paul together here? It's very simple. I think I have mentioned this before. This is the pivot; this tells us how to reconcile these two.



Galatians 4:4-5: “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law.” The New Testament does not go into effect until the death of Jesus Christ. That’s clearly illustrated in the Book of Hebrews Chapter 9 where it says even in our existence, does the will go into effect while the person is still living? No, your parents, grandparents can say, “*I’m leaving you my classic care in my Will.*” Then you go over there the next day and say, “*Here I am, I’m coming to pick it up.*” The point is that it doesn’t go into effect until your death.

Jesus didn’t come until the New Testament. People think the New Testament is Matthew. It’s not. The New Testament is Acts. Jesus taught under the law. Jesus came and went to temple, didn’t he? Jesus came and did all the Feasts, didn’t he? Are we supposed to model him in doing all the feasts? Are we supposed to go to Jerusalem for all the feasts? Are we supposed to follow everything that he said and everything that he did in that sense? No, because he came and people called him Rabbi. He came to fulfill the law. He said, “***I didn’t come to abolish it but to fulfill it.***” He came to fulfill it because there were all these great promises that were sitting there untapped that nobody could get because they were all disobedient and rebellious. So he came to fulfill the law and as he fulfilled the law the promises of the law were given to him. That’s why as many promises as God has given are given in Christ. So he came under the law. The fulfillment of the Old Covenant Law was you better be forgiving. When the people asked Jesus, “Teach us to pray.” Jesus said, “OK, forgive us our trespasses just as we forgive those who trespass against us.” That’s a prayer that Jesus gave but I’m telling you it’s not a model that you should really think you want to be true of you. Do you want God to forgive you to the extent that you in your weakened, fallen condition can forgive somebody else who murders your children? Is there something that might always be hanging there? You go, “*Lord, I don’t want to have that.*” Do you want the Lord to go, “Oh, there’s something just hanging there that I can’t forgive you of.” Or do you want forgiveness not based on you but based on the merit of another? Do you want forgiveness based on God’s ability and not your own? That’s the point.

Jesus taught the law to drive them to the Lord. ***“You have heard it said don’t murder, but I tell you if you are angry with your brother you’ve killed him”*** Now what are you going to do? ***“Be thou perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.”*** Now what are you going to do? You have heard the greatest commandment: ***Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself. If you’ve done that you’ve kept all the commandments.*** You say, *“I can’t even do the first one.”* EXACTLY. Therefore you need a savior. Jesus came to point people to him. To drive people to the purpose of the law was a tutor to point you to Christ.

So Jesus and Paul often teach things that are often contradictory apparently. They are teaching two different covenants. So the Old Covenant was conditional. *“I will be your God if you obey me. If not I will send you into captivity.”* The New Covenant is unconditional because it is based on the finished work of Jesus Christ. When I say unconditional I mean the condition is that you are in Him and once you are in Him the promises are good and they will never be taken from you.

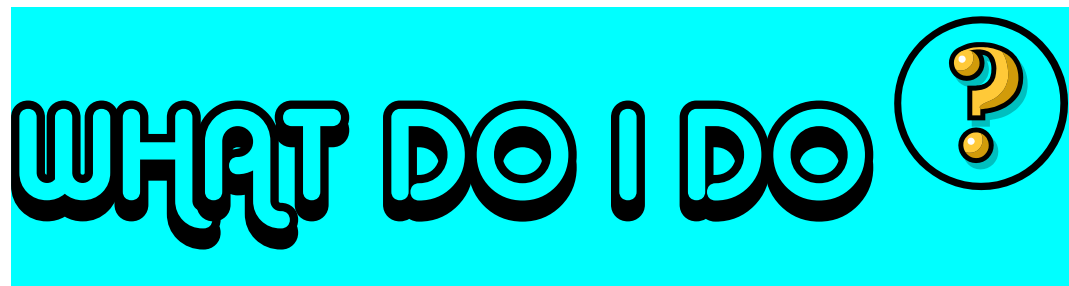
Forgiveness is one of the things that you get as you come to Christ. I’ll give you a few verses to see that. In all these texts they are telling us the tense of the verb, if the forgiveness is done, if that something has taken place before and if it’s something that God promises when you get saved.

- ***Acts 10:43: “To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.*** You see there’s forgiveness and it’s tied with sins. The gospel has the message that your sins can be forgiven but you have to own them. If you own them and turn from them the Lord will forgive you of them.
- ***Hebrews 10:17-18: “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.*** God doesn’t remember the sins of his people. He chooses to forget them. ***Where there is forgiveness*** (past tense, where there has been forgiveness) ***of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.”*** If your sins have not been forgiven then we would need a continual offering for sin. That’s where the Catholic Church errors. They continually offer in the Eucharist the Son back to the Father as a sacrifice for the sins of the people. Jesus said, to tell to die is finished. There’s a substantial difference there. In the reformation we got rid of the priests but we kept the confessional. We were so hung up on justification by faith that we kept a lot of the other stuff we should have rooted out. The forgiveness of people’s sins is one of them.
- ***Colossians 2:13: “And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with him, having forgiven us of all our trespasses.”***
- ***Colossians 3:13: “Forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you.”*** Again, do you see the criteria? Forgiveness of sin comes in the atonement. It is not Jesus forgave you on the day you got saved of your past sins and now it’s up to you to figure it out. It’s that lack of understanding of biblical forgiveness that keeps God’s people in bondage and fearful and full of anxiety. They read the Book of Hebrews for example and they say if we keep on sinning after receiving the knowledge of the truth no sacrifice for sin is left. *“Oh my gosh, I’ve got saved and I sinned after I received the knowledge of the truth. There is no sacrifice for my sin and I am going to perish.”* We deal with that all the time. It’s like you do not understand that book. You’re not understanding what comes in the death of Christ. You don’t get it.

There's dozens and dozens of scripture that all teach the same thing. As a matter of fact, Paul never says as a Christian that we are to go and confess our sins to God. Not ever in any of his letters. Paul who wrote 2/3rds of the New Testament you would say that would be pretty substantial if that was something we should know. The only verse that says anything even similar to that is **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.***" Now there again is a conditional clause. There again is a passage that people say is the Christian soap, "*You get saved, God forgives you of your sin and then you wash yourself with this Christian 1 John 1:9 soap as often as you think of it. And that cleans you up.*" Is that the teaching of scripture or is that verse taken out of context and really mean something completely different?

Next week we are going to look at *1 John 1:9* exclusively for 40 minutes because it teaches something completely different than most people even think. You'll look at the context; you'll see the tense of the verbs and you'll say, "*Oh, it's not a verse that says you are not forgiven until you confess your sins again and then you get back forgiven and then you mess up and you confess your sins again and then you're unforgiven.*" You're not going through this cycle. As a matter of fact, both forgiven and both cleanse are there in aorist tense again. So it means something different. Has forgiven, has cleanse – it means different and we'll look at that. Just because people teach something and preach something all the time, doesn't mean that it's true. It means we have to be discerning and check and see if these things are so.

So Paul is he going to teach the same as Jesus? No, two covenants. But here Paul and John are not in sync. Paul says, "God forgave you of all your sins" (past, present and future). John says, "Only if you are confessing them." Now that's another condition so we need to look at that. That's too much for one day so we'll look at that next week.



What does a Christian do if they do sin? There's a specific verse that talks about Christians when they do sin. Look what John says:

1 John 2:1-2: "***My little children,*** (He's talking to Christians here. Remember 1 John Chapter 1 is a vacillation between gnostic thinking and people who are saved; some people think they are saved and they are; some people are saved and don't think they are; and other people think they are saved and they're not. John is writing to correct that. That's why he says, "*If you walk in darkness you deceive*

yourself the truth isn't in you. If you say you have no sin, you deceive yourself and the truth isn't in you. If you walk in the light as he is in the light". Now walking in the light or walking in darkness isn't walking in terms of how; it's walking in terms of where. If you walk with the Lord or if you don't. Now here we have the same thing.) ***I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.*** (In other words God doesn't want us to sin) ***But if anyone does sin,*** (Here's his remedy) ***we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation of our sins.*** Do you see that? What if I do sin? You have a wrath-bearer, propitiation, one who justified you, one who sanctified you, one who cleansed you, you have Jesus Christ the righteous one and he's taking care of it. You repent; you turn from it but you haven't lost your relationship with the Lord. You need to be reminded that he ever lives to be an intercession for you. That forgiveness is not something he dangles in front of you and says, "Earn it". It's something that he gives and it comes in the relationship of a father to his redeemed children. The reason that God loves us, and the reason that God can give us blessings, and the reason that we'll go to heaven one day and not be turned away, is because the bible is true and it says, ***"He who knew no sin became sin so that in him we would become the righteousness of God."*** God sees us as pure and righteous as His Son because he has imputed the perfectly obedient righteousness of His Son to each of us. He sees us like that. That's why we aren't forgiven and then unforgiven.

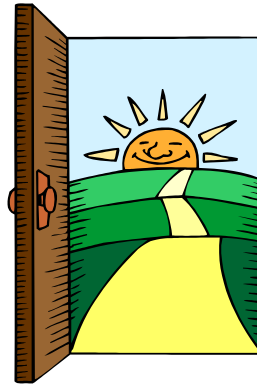
I'll give you a precursor. If you are going to take 1 John as that what I must do, whatever is not of faith is sin and if you are going to follow that line of thinking, if you don't confess it, God doesn't forgive it. What about the sins that you do that you don't know because whatever is not of faith is sin? Do you see what I'm saying? It's a huge problem. There is no more Day of Atonement do what do we do with those? *"Well, I remember I had a big sin because everybody reminds me of it."* But what about the other ones? What about the bad look, the hard heart, the bad attitude, the mean-spirited comment that you've forgotten about? What happens to those? *"Well, I just assume they are covered."* Well, then you should have assumed they were all covered. It's all or nothing. It's not a religious system anymore. It is redeemed and forgiven. That's why Paul is trying to drive to the people. You need to understand the forgiveness that you have in Jesus Christ.

Does sinning or messing up, does that break fellowship? There's another mindset that says that there are two cords that a person is joined to the Lord with, one of salvation and one of fellowship and if you sin you break the fellowship. They'll give you this: You've got to keep a short account with God and they usually make a plea for you to do something for they have need, so then you feel guilty and then you serve out of guilt and then God doesn't look good because all his people are bitter like baptized with lemon juice. He wants us to serve in joy and freedom not guilt and manipulation.

Does the fellowship bond get broken? No, because fellowship is a salvation concept; it is not a maintenance concept. I looked up fellowship in the New Testament, means koinonia. Means something in common; participation; partnership. So does my partnership with the Lord, when I sin, is that cut off? No, because then I wouldn't be saved. Is my relationship with the Lord cutoff? Is what I have in common with Him – grace, mercy, love, forgiveness – is that cutoff when I sin? No, because there are so many scriptures that teach the exact opposite. This is bad teaching of what we've heard. What I'm trying to tell you now is the forgiveness and freedom is what the Lord wants you to experience. Your fellowship is not cutoff. God never declares a break in fellowship with us. Ever. This

concept isn't found in the scripture. When we examination every mention of fellowship in the New Testament not once speaks of us losing fellowship with God or God ever breaking fellowship with us. Ever. It's a concept that somebody bought in to keep us in bondage.

Look, you know your practical sins when you mess up. Right? What do you do? You cut yourself off from fellowship. Does the church cut you off? No, you cut yourself off from bible reading. Has God hidden your bible from you? No.



You think God shut the door in your face.

God says the door is open.

You haven't lost anything. You're just refusing to take advantage of what you already have. So your fellowship isn't broken, you're just being rebellious. Let's look what the bible says.

2 Corinthians 5:21: *"He who knew no sin to become sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."* The righteousness that God gives you, he doesn't take away when you blow it. That's way you need a savior in the first place. We need a savior because we are constantly falling short. Our falling short does not hinder that and remove it from us.

2 Timothy 2:13: *"Even when we are faithless he will remain faithful for he cannot deny himself."* Because He is the one who are redeemed us.

1 Corinthians 1:9: *"God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful."* So the thought that my blundering is going to separate me from fellowship with God is simply not true. It's not taught in scripture. It's an extra biblical teaching that just because it's popular, doesn't mean it's true. What's true is we have fellowship with Jesus Christ. We have fellowship with God because of Jesus Christ.

Here's what John MacArthur says on the topic: **A Christian would never lose fellowship with God in fact he cannot. We may on occasion choose not to be in the word or choose not to be in fellowship or choose not to pray but in doing so we only hurt ourselves. For God gives us his scripture for our benefit and not his. By willingly forsaking the pleasure of learning about Him, in essence we may consider that a loss of fellowship from our perspective but we really have not lost anything at all because we didn't secure it in the first place. Therefore we could never lose it.**



Do you see that? That's a gift. It's a gift of salvation to be forgiven. That's a gift of salvation to be put in fellowship with the Lord. You can be stiff-necked and rebellious and God will discipline you. You can run away and he'll hunt you down.

Psalms 23:6: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." The Hebrew word for follow is pursue. God is so committed to his people that goodness and mercy will pursue you and run you down. You're like, *"I'm not experiencing that."* That's because you are the one (who God hasn't shut the door on you) who has ran away from what you already have; you are the one who are turned away from it; you are the one who said, *"Look, I have all these great riches but I don't know it."* Turn back and see that the Lord is good. He hasn't broken fellowship with you. He hasn't cast you aside for he cannot and will not disown himself. There is confidence and security and when you begin to receive it you're like, *"So what you are saying is I'm free in Christ?"* Yes. *"So what you are saying is I am forgiven?"* Yes. *"All my sins?"* Yes. *"Even the ones I will commit tomorrow?"* Yes. *"Even the one I may commit on my deathbed?"* Yes. *"Even if I commit suicide as a Christian?"* Yes, because the word of God is clear.

Look what it says ***in Romans 8:38-39: "For I am sure*** (this is something we should also be sure of) ***that neither death nor life, nor angels*** (now these are spiritual beings here) ***nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come,*** (so not the past, not the future) ***nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,*** (this will mean anything else there is) ***will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*** Why is that? Because God is the one who justifies. God is the one who cleanses. God is the one who does it on the merit of Jesus Christ alone. God is the one who forgives on the work of Jesus Christ alone. God is the one who put you in his family based on the work of Jesus Christ alone. It is never because of what you've done; it is never because of what you can do; it is not God looking through all eternity saying, *"Gee I think those guys are pretty sharp. I'll pick all them."* No, it is God's mercy and God's justice and God's righteousness that enables us to be in Christ. Because of that comes all these wonderful blessings.

The Book of Ephesians in particular is learning about the blessings that are in Christ. If you are a Christian, God will never bring up your sin because it would devalue the sacrifice of His Son. That was clearly taught with Peter as he was going to go to a Gentile Cornelius in the Book of Acts. The Lord said to Peter, *"Look, down comes the sheet will all kinds of unclean animals. Kill and eat."* Peter goes, *"Ugh,*

those are unclean things. I'm not going to eat any of those." God said, *"Eat these."* Peter said, *"OK, I'm on it!"* The Lord said, *"Don't call unclean what I have cleansed."*

The church today doesn't get the fact that we have been cleansed of our sin. Live like who you are – forgiven, redeemed. Don't let the enemy and bad teaching keep you in bondage to a system that drives you back to a dependent upon yourself to do something in order to maintain your relationship with the Lord. That will never work. That will lead you farther from the Lord. It will frustrate you; it will get you discouraged; it will get you depressed and you will go, *"What is wrong with me?"* Exactly. There's a lot wrong with you. That's why you need a savior. Cling to Him, fixing our eyes on Him, looking unto Him. When you sin you have an advocate. When you sin you have a wrath-bearer. When you sin there is a propitiation forgiveness that is already been given to you. I really think that sometimes we would go to the Lord and say, *"Lord, I want to bring all my sins to you"* and the Lord says, *"I'm not remembering anything what you are talking about. I don't see those when I look at you. I see the righteousness of my Son, that's why I am dealing with you in mercy. If you want to throw sins in front of me, I am too pure to look upon evil and down comes judgment. But I am not judging you because there is no condemnation for those in my Son. I only see His righteousness on you."* When you get that you're like, *"Man, I'm free. I should just start messing up all the time."* And then Paul would come back to you with a big stick, *"Shall we keep on sinning so that grace will abound?"* No but you should feel the freedom of that. You should feel the freedom of being forgiven; you should feel the experience of knowing that your sins and lawless deeds he remembers no more.

This is Paul's exhortation to the Corinthian church, full of problems, full of issues, can't get along with each other. A guy's sleeping with his mother-in-law. To the saints in Corinth, he's writing to them. They are all messed up with all kinds of weird behaviors and all their spiritual gifts and everything else. It's a church in chaos, way worse than any church in our country. He writes and says:

2 Corinthians 13:14: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

Do you see that? It's like, *"Look you guys are behaving like knuckleheads but God's love is with you. God's heart is for you. His fellowship is always there, his redemption has been given, and you are righteous as his son. Just start acting like it."* Do you see the freedom in that?

Augustine said this: **"Forgiveness is the remission of sin for it is by this that what has been lost and was found is now saved from being lost again."**

I just love that quote. You see God forgives us completely. Most of us we receive this terrible teaching that tells us no he didn't. Or we have our friends tell us, *"No he really didn't"* and they pull verses out of context to keep you in bondage: *"If you're forgiving, God doesn't forgive you."* *"He'll forgive you to the extent that you forgive somebody else."* *"He'll only forgive your sins, once you came to Christ, if you bring them to him."* Those are bondage points that never lets the Christian really experience the forgiveness and freedom that they have. It's because of that, that worship gets quenched. It's because of those things people don't praise the Lord like they should. It's because of those things that people walk

around with their heads held down instead of ***I look up for my redemption draws near.*** You can't look forward to seeing the Lord if you don't think the Lord is going to be happy with you when you see Him. Most of us would go through our life fearful of that day. They'd go, "*Man, I don't think the Lord is going to receive me. He's going to turn me away. I don't think he's going to be happy. I'm just rotten.*" Well good you need a savior. "*Well, I have one.*" Then you're forgiven and lift ***up for your redemption draws neigh.*** There's no condemnation for you, there's no turning you away, there's no "*You know what, it really bothered me when you did all these things.*" There's none of those things for you. There is righteousness for you, there is peace for you, there is forgiveness with you, and there is hope for you if you receive truth.

It is my desire that you would just check and see if those things are true. If God's word says it anywhere, anywhere, once is enough. The Holy Spirit said through Paul to them and the Holy Spirit said through his word to us today:

Ephesians 4:32: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted to one another, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you already."

Receive the peace of that and walk in that and rejoice in that.

Let's pray together:

Father, thank you so much for your wonderful, wonderful word. Lord I can't even do it justice. No man can do it justice. It is so rich, it is so beautiful, and it is so precious to us. I pray Lord that today that you would send forth that verse to accomplish what you ordained. I pray that in some people here who believe that the forgiveness is tentative or based upon their own ability or Jesus started it and they've got to finish it, I pray Lord that the truth of your word would break down every stronghold that has been set up by Satan or bad teaching. That you would tear down every thought and every high thing that would exalt itself against the truth of who you are and what you have done and you would allow the peace of God that passes all understanding to guard their heart and their mind. I pray Lord that maybe there is someone here today or some people here today who have never received the forgiveness of their sin. And I pray Lord that today would be the day that they would hear your voice. I pray that today would be the day that you would send your spirit to convict them of their behavior but to point them to the savior who will forgive and pardon. And so with our heads bowed and our eyes closed, how many would say, "*I came today, I never received the Lord but I feel the Lord would have me respond to him. I need to own my bad behaviors. I need him to forgive me of my sin. I need to turn to him and live.*" If anyone, anyone, would like to respond, or as many as would respond, just simply raise your hand or look at me. I'd love to pray with you and pray for you. God looks at the heart. How many? Any at all? God bless you. Anybody else? God bless you. Alright, for those who want to respond to the Lord it's very simple. It's, "*Lord be merciful to me a sinner. Forgive me of my sin. I turn from it and I receive the gift of forgiveness and life in Jesus Christ. Help me to walk with you all the days of my life. And I thank you for it in Jesus' name.*" **And everybody said, "Amen".**

