

## ARE YOU SERIOUS

*Holding On*

November 26, 2023

**INTRO.:** Good morning! We hope you and your family had a truly blessed Thanksgiving, celebrating the goodness of God! It is a joy and privilege to have you here this morning. We also welcome those listening on the radio and those watching online. This morning is our conclusion to our sermon series on forgiveness: **ARE YOU SERIOUS**. We spent the first five messages looking at what the Bible has to say about forgiveness and the last five messages, including today, looking at the fruits of unforgiveness. This morning we will begin with the third fruit of unforgiveness and conclude with the main points and takeaways about forgiveness.

So, what happens when you and I do not forgive others? The first fruit of unforgiveness we looked at was anger, **I'M MAD!** Ungodly anger can do an incredible amount of damage. There are things we should be angry about; those things that make God angry. What makes God angry? One word could encompass it all: **SIN**. How much of my anger or your anger could be classified as *godly* anger? Anger, unchecked, gives the devil a foothold in our lives and causes incredible hurt.

Anger can devour (picture of animals fighting)

Anger can explode and spew over everyone (picture of volcano)

Anger can be a raging fire (picture of a fire)that has a

Anger can be a harsh or mean spirit (picture of angry bird)

As we began the next three messages on the fruits of unforgiveness our title was, **LET ME TELL YOU**, highlighting gossip. When we refuse to forgive it can lead to anger which can then lead to gossip. We looked at what gossip is and what it isn't and then how to stop it when it comes to me from others and when I am the one guilty of gossiping. Last week we examined what I should do when the gossip is about me. All the notes on this whole series can be found online.

As we begin this morning I am reminded of these next pictures. I begin with a picture of a vegetable garden. I know that several in this fellowship have gardens and we have been given some of those fresh and delicious vegetables. What do you always have to battle when you have a garden? (show picture of weeds) You don't need to do anything to grow weeds. You don't need to plant them, fertilize or water them. They are actually one of the consequences of the first sin by mankind in the Garden of Eden.

**Genesis 3:17–19** To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. **18** It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. **19** By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

This reminds me of the third fruit of unforgiveness. Anger which can lead to gossip which can result in bitterness. This occurs when we are **HOLDING ON** to those offenses that have been done against us. What does the Bible have to say about bitterness?

### **HOLDING ON TO BITTERNESS**

Lawrence Richards, in his book, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, says, “In the OT meaning, bitterness is close to despair, an anguish felt as one is crushed by overwhelmingly painful circumstances.... Not anger or resentment but helpless pain.” He continues to describe how this is different in the New Testament.

“While bitterness in the OT focuses on inner emotional responses to crushing circumstances, bitterness in the NT focuses on that angry and resentful state of mind that can develop when we undergo troubles. The developed portrait in the NT reveals bitterness to be an angry, hostile outlook on life, an outlook expressed in resentment and in attack on others.”

Bitterness is a deep-seated emotion that deeply affects the life of the one who is bitter and those with whom they are bitter toward. What does the Bible have to say about bitterness? We are told to:

Get Rid of all bitterness

**Ephesians 4:31** Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

We reviewed this scripture when we talked about anger.

*“get rid of:”* this is a command and means to take away or to remove

Bitterness is not supposed to be present in the life of the believer. Why is it so important to get rid of bitterness and to not allow it to continue to fester?

**Hebrews 12:14–15** Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. **15** See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.

Bitterness spreads and we need to watch out for it. As believers we are to be responsible to one another. Some will say, “That’s their life and it’s none of my business.” This is Cain’s approach after he commits the first murder by killing his brother Abel.

**Genesis 4:8–9** Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. **9** Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” “I don’t know,” he replied. “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

The Apostle Paul clearly shares what our responsibility is as brothers and sisters in Christ.

**Galatians 6:1–2** Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. **2** Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Bitterness will infect others and grow like weeds in a garden!! If bitterness is so powerful and spreads so easily, how do we stop it?

#### Respond in forgiveness

**Ephesians 4:32** Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

*“be:”* present tense command

*“forgiving:”* present tense participle

*“forgave:”* past tense

To do this you and I need to get a grasp of God’s grace, mercy, and forgiveness. Next Sunday we begin our Advent series, *Darkness to Light*. We celebrate the arrival of Jesus Christ to earth, born of a virgin, born to live, die, and raise again for your sin and my sin. Jesus Christ, God the Son, left glory to come here to provide the way to have our sins forgiven and to give us a restored relationship with God! Not one of us here earned or deserved this! I think we need to be reminded that we are a people who are in desperate need of the grace and mercy of God! Every one of us here is messed up. Somebody sent this to me a while ago and I believe it expresses our needs very well.

“Stop looking for a perfect church. Go worship our perfect God today with a group of flawed people who need grace as much as you do.”

Instead of holding on to bitterness, or anger or gossip, I want to challenge us to conclude this series with the challenge to be:

### **HOLDING ON TO FORGIVENESS**

What will you and I decide to hold on to when we are wounded by another? To tie this all together I want us to look at 4 things regarding forgiveness: Why, What, When, and How. We began this journey back on September 10<sup>th</sup>, which means we have covered a lot of ground. To summarize this in the next minutes is extremely challenging, but I’m going to give it a shot.

#### Why

I think this is the first question that needs to be answered when dealing with forgiveness. Somebody has done something or said something to me that has hurt, and they don’t deserve my forgiveness. This kind of thinking comes with a misunderstanding of my need for forgiveness from God.

Let me take some time for me to review our plight apart from Christ. This may not be anything new for you, but we all need to be reminded. First of all:

**Romans 3:10** As it is written: “There is no one righteous, not even one;  
**Romans 3:23** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

I think we begin with a false standard. I can believe that I am a pretty nice person compared to other people but is that the correct standard. The standard is God. Jesus states the standard:

**Matthew 5:48** Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Nobody here is perfect. There is only one who has ever walked on this earth who has never sinned. That is Jesus Christ, God come in the flesh. Our sin has caused a separation from God along with eternal consequences.

**Romans 6:23** For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Because of our sin we are rightfully under the wrath and judgment of God. To be forgiven is totally grace on His part and zero our part! Let’s say this next Scripture together.

**Ephesians 2:8–9** For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— **9** not by works, so that no one can boast.

Salvation, the forgiveness of God, is totally of grace!! How much of our sin has been forgiven?

**Romans 5:1** Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

*“we have been justified:”* past tense, passive (somebody else is doing the justifying (being made righteous))

*“we have peace with God:”* present tense

**Romans 8:1** Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,

God has forgiven us **ALL** our sin!!! Hallelujah!! Praise God!!! This is the basis for my forgiveness of others. God gives both the reason and power to forgive.

In Matthew 18, after Peter asks how many times he should forgive his brother (Jesus’ reply: seven times seventy), Jesus tells the story of the unmerciful servant. The servant owes a debt he could not pay and begs the master for time to pay it back (which would be impossible) and the master cancels the debt. That’s us:

“We owe a debt (our sin) we cannot pay, and He (Jesus) paid a debt He did not owe.”

The forgiven servant then finds someone who owed him a small amount of money and had him thrown into prison. When the master heard this, he had the first servant thrown into prison.

**Matthew 18:32–35** Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. **33** Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ **34** In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. **35** “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”

### What

It is important to remember what forgiveness is and what it isn’t.

Forgiveness is:

\*God’s idea

The thing about Jesus that irritated the religious leaders the most was His claim to forgive sins. They were extremely upset when, in Mark 2:5-12, Jesus told the paralytic, who had been lowered down through the roof, that his sins had been forgiven. That is our most urgent need: to have our sins forgiven!

**Isaiah 55:6–7** Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. **7** Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

**Psalms 32:1** Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

**Colossians 2:13** When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,

\*Costly, therefore not easy

**2 Corinthians 5:21** God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**1 Peter 1:18–19** For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, **19** but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

**Hebrews 9:22** In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

I'm amazed at what people are willing to pay for things. I looked up some sports memorabilia:

-jersey worn by Michael Jordan during 1998 NBA Finals game 1 (his sixth and final championship) 10.091 million

-1952 Mickey Mantle baseball card in mint condition: 12.6 million

-LeBron James rookie card: 5.2 million

-Babe Ruth 1928-1930 jersey: 5.64 million

None of this can compare to the cost Jesus paid for our sins on the cross. Why should we think forgiveness will be easy? Because Christ has forgiven us, we can forgive others. We may need help in working through forgiveness.

Forgiveness is not:

\*Pretending it didn't happen

But it does mean that I put the sin behind me, through God's strength and power, and not keep bringing it up.

\*Sweeping it under the rug

We need to deal with sin! Going to the person, in humility, if they have wronged me, or if I have wronged them.

\*Adding "But"

I can't make excuses for myself or for others. An apology with a "but" on the end is not an apology.

\*Continuing to allow

God does not expect me to remain in an abusive situation!

We see the why of forgiveness, the what of forgiveness, and the:

### When

Forgiveness is an act of the will; it is something we must decide to do. The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the church at Colosse gives some of the character qualities that are to be evident in followers of Christ.

**Colossians 3:12–14** Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. **13** Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. **14** And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

"*clothe:*" command (to put on)

"*bear with:*" present tense participle (to endure, to bear with, to put up with)

"*forgive:*" present tense participle (to show favor, to forgive)

"*forgave:*" past tense (to show favor, to forgive)

Someone has said that believers reflect Christ most when they forgive others. Jesus said that the world will know we are His disciples (committed followers) if we love one another (John 13:34-35). We need to recognize that this is a spiritual battle! Our enemy isn't one another. The real enemy, Satan, wants to bring anger, gossip, bitterness, unforgiveness into the body of Christ. We fight Satan with prayer and the Word of God.

We may need some help in the form of biblical counseling in working through past hurts and the process of forgiveness.

We see the why, the what, the when, and finally the:

#### How

\*I need God's power and strength (prayer & scripture)

\*I need to recognize God's goal (that I become more like Jesus)

**Romans 8:28–29** And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. **29** For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

\*I need to give up my rights (Jesus' example)

**Isaiah 53:1–9** Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? **2** He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. **3** He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. **4** Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. **5** But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. **6** We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. **7** He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. **8** By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. **9** He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

**Philippians 2:1–11** If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, **2** then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. **3** Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. **4** Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. **5** Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: **6** Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, **7** but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. **8** And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! **9** Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, **10** that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, **11** and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

#### **SO WHAT???**

A story is told of two friends who were walking through the desert. During some point of the journey they had an argument, and one friend slapped the other one in the face. The one who got slapped was hurt, but without saying anything, wrote in the sand, "Today my best friend slapped me in the face."

They kept on walking until they found an oasis, where they decided to take a bath. The one who had been slapped got stuck in the mire and started drowning, but the friend saved him. After he recovered from nearly drowning, he wrote on a stone, "Today my best friend saved my life."

His friend asked him, "After I hurt you, you wrote in the sand and now, you write on a stone, why?" The other friend replied "When someone hurts us we should write it down in sand where winds of forgiveness can erase it away. But, when someone does something good for us, we must engrave it in stone where no wind can ever erase it."

Will one of the characteristics of this church and us as individuals be forgiveness?

Have I recognized my need for forgiveness?

Who do I need to forgive?

Do I need to seek biblical counseling in dealing with forgiveness?

What Scripture concerning forgiveness am I memorizing?

