

# OpenTheo

## Forgiveness



### Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses forgiveness as a Christian duty, emphasizing the importance of letting go of anger and wrath and leaving it to God. Forgiveness does not necessarily mean letting the offender off the hook or withholding legal actions to ensure justice. Christians who refuse to forgive others will suffer the consequences of torment and lack of forgiveness from God. Forgiveness is a decision that requires discipline to align emotions with reality and is necessary for repairing broken relationships between humans and God.

### Transcript

Let's begin by turning to Ephesians chapter 4. I think everybody knows that forgiveness is a Christian duty, but we want to examine some of the logistics and the rationale and some of the things to get an understanding of what God's mind is on the matter. A lot of Christians, this is an area of difficulty for them, forgiving other people, and so we want to do what we can to give a biblical encouragement in this area and maybe some help in that practice of forgiving others. In Ephesians chapter 4, the last two verses of this chapter, verse 31 and 32, Paul said, Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

I think some translations say God, for Christ's sake, forgave you or something like that. I've got the New King James as God in Christ forgave you, which is excellent. I don't know if you all have the same reading in your Bible, but the important thing here is that forgiving others is enjoined on us on the basis of the fact that God has forgiven us.

And we count on that, of course. We all believe in justification through Christ by grace, and that means that what we've done against God and that which would have provided alienation in the relationship between ourselves and God has been taken care of by Christ. By his death, resurrection, he has made it possible for there to be a new and living way into the presence of God from which humanity was debarred by sin.

And so God has forgiven us in Christ, and Paul here tells us that we should forgive others

as God has forgiven us. Now, forgiveness is easily misunderstood, and there's certainly more than one aspect of the subject. If you read some passages and compare them with other passages, you might get opposite ideas.

You might think the Bible says some things rather contradictory about this. This is not the case because the subject of forgiveness as a duty is multifaceted, and I just want to do what I can to clarify as much as possible. Now, I want to begin simply by raising the question of forgiving people.

Is this always something that requires that we let them off the hook when they've done something wrong? There certainly is a biblical basis for a criminal justice system, and some people have said, well, this person did wrong to me. The police arrested them. Should I press charges or should I forgive them? Well, this is not the easiest thing to answer because obviously Christians want to be forgiving by disposition and by habit.

There are some times, though, that one has to wonder is it my obligation to cooperate with the criminal justice system because God, it says, has appointed the government to enforce criminal justice, that is to punish criminals. I don't have this in the notes partly because, again, I made these notes somewhat in haste, but if you look at Romans 12 and 13, at the end of Romans 12, in verse 17, Paul said, Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.

If it's possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath, for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay. Now, he says, instead of avenging yourself when someone's done you wrong, you should not do so, and by not doing so, you are giving place to God's wrath because he has promised to avenge.

It's his business to avenge, not yours. Therefore, in a sense, you let it go by when someone has done you wrong instead of avenging yourself, and it doesn't mean they're getting away with it. You're giving place to God to take care of it, to settle the matter, to settle the score, and he will.

He said, Vengeance is mine, I will repay. Now, in the next chapter, though, when Paul is telling the Roman Christians to be submissive to governmental authorities, he talks about the rulers, and he talks about the police, essentially, the law enforcement officials, and he says, in verse 4, that he, meaning the policeman, is God's minister, that is, God's servant, to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid, he does not bear the sword in vain, for he is God's servant and avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

Now, notice, in chapter 12, Paul tells us not to avenge ourselves. We're supposed to put away all wrath. Ephesians, we read in Ephesians 4, put away all wrath.

Don't be wrathful. Don't be angry. Forgive.

Don't avenge yourselves. Leave that to God. But then Romans 13 says, and one way God does that is through the agency that he has appointed for that purpose, and that is the governmental agency, the criminal justice system God has ordained to be his avenger.

Okay, so we could avenge ourselves, but we're told not to. God will take care of that. How does he do it? Sometimes through the police.

If the police show up and the criminals hold off, then this is simply justice being done by an agency that God has ordained to do that justice. Now, there are times, perhaps, when we should say, well, I'm not going to press charges. Our forgiveness of that person would mean that we're not going to hold them responsible.

An elderly Christian woman I know well was in an accident last week. She made a left turn, misjudging the nearness of a motorcyclist who was coming toward her, and he clipped the back of her car, and he was thrown over the car, apparently, and hit his head. He hit his face on the ground, lost some teeth, his face all bloody, and he was taken away to the hospital.

Now, she doesn't know what has happened to him. She thought he was dead at first because of the blood around, but apparently he was not killed, and he's in the hospital. She doesn't know what's happened.

But, of course, there's always the possibility that he could sue over this if he survives, and he could take a lot from her, and yet he could also forget. Now, technically, I believe that the police there indicated that she made a misjudgment. She judged wrongly how near he was and so forth, so she would be culpable.

She's guilty. The law would find her guilty, and she'd probably suffer penalties, considerable penalties, if he presses charges. Now, if I were the man, I wouldn't press charges.

As you may know, I had a wife who was killed in an accident by a careless driver, a young man, 16 years old, on Thanksgiving Day, 1980, and she was hit and killed, and he fled the scene, but he later turned himself in. It never crossed my mind to press charges. People said, oh, this is a wrongful death suit.

He's in the wrong. You could get a million bucks out of him. Well, I couldn't get a million bucks out of a 16-year-old kid.

I'm pretty sure of that. But even if he was a millionaire, I wouldn't even dream of it. But the poor kid, he's got to live with it.

He's got to live with the trauma of what happened. He didn't intend evil. He was driving carelessly.

It's true, and hopefully he drives better now. In fact, I talked to him after 40 years of not having ever spoken to him previously. He's in his 50s now, of course, and he teaches truck driving safety.

I found that out just a couple years ago. I looked him up. I sought him out.

When it first happened, his lawyer wouldn't let him speak to me. I think his lawyer thought I was going to try to get something from him that I could use against him, and so he was 16. He was put in the juvenile system.

I lost track of him, even forgot his name, and then decades went by. I never had talked to him. I was going through some old files from that where I signed away my right to sue, and his name was on it.

So I contacted his uncle, who had owned the truck he was driving. His uncle happens to be a Christian. The kid's not, but the kid who's 50-something now is not.

I told the uncle, let him know I'd like to talk to him. So the guy, he's no kid anymore, he called me, and we talked for about an hour. The accident happened 40 years earlier almost, but we had never spoken.

Anyway, I told him I'd forgiven him right from the beginning. He didn't have to worry about that. Although I lost my wife in that situation, God's blessed me, and my life has been positive since then, and he doesn't have to feel badly about that.

Anyway, he's not a believer, but he's in the company of believers, his uncle and so forth, and I thought it was good for me to talk to him. But to forgive, I forgave him instantly. I mean, sure, I could have pressed charges, but what good is that going to do? I think he learned his lesson, wouldn't you? If you're an ordinary kid just driving a little too fast, taking a curve too wide, coming around a blind curve, and suddenly to your chagrin, there's somebody standing there, and they get nailed on the grill of your truck, don't you think you'd drive more carefully after that? It's not like he's a threat to society for the rest of his life.

I could have ruined his life, but I didn't want to. There's times when you don't press charges, but there may be times when you should. It really depends.

Some criminals who may victimize you, you may just be one on their list. They may be victimizing people regularly. That being the case, you have to decide, is it more loving for me to help the criminal justice system put this guy out of circulation to save other people who are potential victims, or is it more loving for me to forgive him and say I'm not going to testify against you or whatever? Some people are so legalistic about things, they need to have a one-size-fits-all rule for these things, and you really have to be led by the Holy Spirit.

You have to be led by the love of Christ, and the love of Christ will incline you to forgive when you can and should. But also there are times when you may have to cooperate with the legal system because of the protection of others. Paul, in Acts 16, was arrested for preaching the gospel, for casting a demon out of a girl, actually.

He was wrongfully not only arrested but beaten. Now, as a Roman citizen, which he did not announce himself to be prior to his beating, he was exempt from that kind of treatment. Roman citizens could not be beaten until they were condemned into trial.

He had not received a trial. He was beaten as part of an interrogation and put in stocks, and therefore the authorities had done the wrong thing. And the next day they came back to release him, and he said, I'm not leaving unless you publicly exonerate me.

You take us out, you exonerate us to the public, and then we'll leave. Otherwise, we're not leaving here. Now, the authorities were scared to death because they had beaten a Roman citizen.

This could be their heads. And so they accommodated Paul, and they took him out and publicly exonerated him. Now, why did he do that? Why didn't he just forgive them? They had broken the law.

They'd done a criminal act against him. He could have their heads for it. Why didn't he just forgive them as a Christian? Well, he didn't press charges, but he did hold to his rights in this particular case because, of course, it was for the gospel's sake, because the gospel had been publicly decried by his public arrest, and he wanted the gospel to be publicly exonerated before the public, and then he was going to leave town, and he did.

So there are times when using the legal system is actually a right thing to do, not out of bitterness or anger or whatever, but out of love. There was another time when there were 40 men who took a vow that they're going to not eat or drink until they killed Paul. Paul heard about it.

He heard about it from his nephew, who happened to be in the right place to hear about it. What did Paul do? He said, well, I'll forgive him. I'll just trust this to God's hands.

Well, he didn't. He said to his nephew, go and tell the police, and so he called the cops, and they gave him safe conduct to another place beyond where the Jews could reach him, in Caesarea, in the Roman prisons. Now, the point here is there are times when using the legal system is a right thing to do.

We need to make sure that we don't use it to get back or to avenge ourselves of anything. We shouldn't have any vengeance in our heart toward people if we have the mind of Christ. Jesus was, of course, abused by an unjust system and crucified, though he was innocent.

The courts were corrupt. The witnesses were paid to lie. Everything was wrong, legally, in that situation.

And yet, he said, Father, forgive them. They don't know what they did. So we know that the heart of Christ is to forgive, and that should be our heart also.

So in talking about the need to forgive, we're not eliminating all recourse to the law or to the courts or to the police. There are times when that is no doubt a Christian's duty for the sake of his fellow man to help do what he can to put away somebody who's going to make other victims besides him or herself who has already been victimized. Now, that's not what we're talking about.

We're going to be talking about the general requirement of forgiving people in personal relationship. This is not so much about criminals, although sometimes it may be something criminal that somebody does to you. But we're just talking about things where this actually overlaps a lot with the whole subject I taught on offenses, about refusing to be offended.

But refusing to be offended, which I taught about several months ago here, has to do with not being easily offended, not being easily touchy, basically having thicker skin than what some people do. But this is going to another step. What about if you are offended? And let's face it, some people do things that are very offensive.

What are you going to do about it? Well, forgiveness is what Jesus calls us to do. And why? Why does God want us to forgive? First of all, because God cares about relationships. He cares about our relationships with each other more than we do.

Now, we care about some of our relationships. There are people who we would be loathe to offend, loathe to be alienated from. There are people whose approval and love we want.

Our children, particularly. Hopefully our spouse. Maybe our parents.

Maybe certain friends. There are people that we very much value the relationship and would do a great deal, if we can, to maintain it at its highest level. But there are other relationships we don't value as much, but God does.

There are probably people in this room whom you fellowship with on a fairly regular basis, whom you care about more than others, naturally. Certainly your family would be among the ones you care most about. There might be others here who, the problems in their lives, although they're not unimportant to you, they're just not the high priority in your life that maybe they should be.

Or people that you work with, or people who are your neighbors. God wants human relationships to be perfect. And they are not.

Human relationships are not perfect. And therefore, God wants us to do what we can to be committed to repairing them. God is committed to repairing them.

That's why he sent Jesus. There was a broken relationship between us and him, and he gave his son to repair it. Not only to repair the relationship between us and God, but between each other.

Because Paul says in Ephesians chapter 2 that God sent Jesus to make peace between the Jews and the Gentiles, who were alienated previously. He broke down the middle wall of partition and made of the two one new man, so making peace. God is a peacemaker.

That's why Jesus said in the Beatitudes, Blessed are the peacemakers, they shall be called the sons of God. Because children have traits in common with their parents. You'll be recognized as a child of God if you're a peacemaker by disposition and by habit.

Because that's what God is. You'll have the parental trait of God visible in your disposition. You want to make peace.

Not just between parties who are alienated external to yourself, but especially parties who are at odds with you, or you with them. Now a lot of times it's very uncomfortable to confront somebody who's done something wrong. And maybe they've done something wrong repeatedly.

And maybe you'd just rather just avoid them. I personally think that the majority of people have a temperament like this. That rather than confront, they'd rather just avoid.

So much easier. Now there are people who have a confrontational personality. They look for reasons to confront because they just like to get in people's faces.

But I think the majority of people are not like that. Most of the time if someone does us wrong, we don't necessarily naturally forgive. But we also don't confront.

We just decide, well, this person's unpleasant. I've had some injuries I've suffered in my relationship with this person. And therefore I'm going to kind of just, you know, phase them out of my relationship life.

I'm not going to be meeting with them as much. Now there are times when people should be put out of your life. There are people who are not receptive to God or to you.

And Jesus actually tells us how to reach that decision about people. And we'll see that in what Jesus taught on the subject. There comes a time when people are not going to show any interest in a relationship with you and they're going to resist it and they're not going to repent.

And then there has to be separation until there is repentance. The Bible teaches this in a number of places. But God wants every step possible to be taken to restore anything

that's a wedge between you and another person.

And therefore, because God values relationships, we need to do so. In 2 Corinthians 5, verses 18 through 21, Paul said that God has given us the ministry of reconciliation. He says God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.

And he's given us the word of reconciliation. And we beseech you in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God, he says. But of course, reconciliation to God is going to require that we are forgiven by God.

And it's very clear that the Bible says that we won't be forgiven by God if we don't forgive other people. Because as much as we hopefully value our relationship with God, God values our relationship with other people. That's why Jesus said, if you bring your gift to the altar, meaning you're coming to worship God at the temple with a sacrifice.

If you there remember that your brother has something against you, that means you've done something wrong to him in this case. You need to get forgiven by him in this particular case. It may be the other way.

Maybe he needs to be forgiven by you. But you've got a rift in the relationship. He says, if you remember that, you go leave your gift at the altar.

Don't even offer it to God at this point. Just go and make it right with your brother. And then you come and offer your gift.

Now, this could be followed rather mechanically, and it probably is not really to be taken entirely literally, because it wouldn't really be possible to leave your lamb there at the temple while others are waiting to offer theirs and go do this. He's simply trying to graphically speak of the priorities that God has, that rather than you worship him while you're neglecting a relationship with your brother that's broken, he'd rather you didn't worship him until you get that straightened out. That's a priority.

And that's why Jesus taught that only the merciful will obtain mercy. Only the forgiving will be forgiven. We see that in a number of places.

There's actually, there's not very many subjects that Jesus taught as often as he taught this particular one. And yet many Christians, if they know about it, they nonetheless hope that they're an exception and don't have to, don't have to be, you know, under this particular rule. But in the Beatitudes, I mentioned, blessed are the peacemakers, they shall be called sons of God.

There's also in verse 7 of Matthew 5, blessed are the merciful, they shall obtain mercy. Now, when someone forgives you, that's them showing mercy. When God forgives you, that's God showing mercy.



Are you interested in that? You're interested in God being merciful to you? Then he says, then you better be merciful. Blessed are the merciful, they, and by implication, they alone, will obtain mercy. And he emphasizes that even more specifically in chapter 6 of Matthew, when he's teaching how to pray.

Of course, one of the well-known petitions in that prayer in Matthew 6, 12 is forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. We are only authorized to ask God to forgive us in the same manner as we are forgiving people who've injured us. And he clarifies that in verses 14 and 15, Matthew 6, 14 and 15.

He says, for if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you your trespasses. So, it's very clear, forgiveness from God is conditional upon our forgiving other people.

That's one of the scariest verses in the first. It is a scary verse for the unforgiving, to be sure. And yet, if someone says, well, that's just a passing remark of Jesus.

No, it didn't pass quickly. He said it on numerous occasions. In Mark chapter 11, he made the exact same threat, as it were.

And he's talking to his disciples. He's not talking to the heathen here. He's teaching his disciples.

And he says in Mark chapter 11, verse 25 and 26, whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him. That your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.

Again, the same teaching. And he gives a whole parable about this in Matthew chapter 18. I'd like us to look at that parable, because it contains some of the most important parts of what the New Testament teaches on forgiveness.

In Matthew 18, beginning at verse 21, everyone knows at least the first part of this, if they know the whole thing, that's good, too. But the first part is well known. Verse 21, Peter came to him and said, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times? Jesus said to him, I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to 70 times seven.

Now, we all probably know that first. But then he goes on and says, therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king whom we will find, of course, in the parable corresponds to God. Who wanted to settle accounts with his servants.

And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him 10,000 talents. And different preachers have said different things about the amount of

that money, but it's a huge amount. A wealthy man could not pay it in most cases.

It's a huge amount of money, a huge debt. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold with his wife and children and all that he had and that payment be made. So this is the predicament that sinners find themselves in when confronted with God's justice and God's demands.

We owe him a debt we cannot pay. And it results in us being threatened with a life of slavery. And that debt, of course, that we owe God is the debt of perfect obedience.

He owns us. We're supposed to obey him. There's no wiggle room there for you to say, well, I obey him 90 percent of the time.

Remember what happened to Saul when God said, wipe out all the Amalekites, leave nothing to breathe. So he wipes out the whole army of the Amalekites and apparently men, women and children. We don't know how many were killed, but certainly just about everybody spared one man.

Again, he spared some sheep. He mostly obeyed. And when Samuel came to him, he said, I've obeyed the word of the Lord.

And Samuel says, what is this sound of sheep? I hear that. He says, oh, the people spared those to offer as a sacrifice to the Lord. And Samuel said, has the Lord as much pleasure in sacrifice and offering as he has in obeying the words of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice.

And he says, because rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft and stubbornness is as iniquity. Now, here Saul was described as rebellious and God and Samuel said, therefore, because you've rejected the word, Lord, the Lord has rejected you from being king. This man was thrown out of office because he left one man and some sheep alive after mostly obeying.

He just didn't obey all the way. He apparently didn't intend to. He apparently thought he could modify it a little bit.

He knew what God said well enough. But he thought, well, I've got a better idea. And God should allow that I can disobey a little bit in this area since I've obeyed in, you know, 99 percent.

Now, that's not the way it is. God is owed complete obedience. And when a person is disobedient, they stand condemned as debtors to God, a debt they cannot repay.

You could start obeying God today. And even if you could do it perfectly from this day on, it doesn't cancel out the disobedience from the past. You can't pay that unpaid debt.

This is unpayable. This man could not pay. So he's said to be under the wrath of his king and sentenced to be sold into slavery with his wife and children and all that he had.

However, the servant therefore fell down before him, saying, Master, have patience with me and I will pay you all. Now, this is kind of an empty promise, obviously. But the master of the servant was moved with compassion and released him and forgave him the debt.

So the man is forgiven. He owes nothing now. He should feel this huge burden off his back.

He's just dodged a bullet. He was about to go spend the rest of his life in slavery. And then he said, well, I'll pay it all back in the messes.

How about you don't? How about I just forgive you? Go free. Now, that is obviously the position of a Christian who's been confronted with his own sinfulness before God and knows that he's beyond hope of rescuing himself. And he begs for mercy.

And God says, OK, you're forgiven. So here's a man who represents a Christian forgiven of his sin by God. But the story goes on.

But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him 100 denarii, which is not really very much. It's about three months' wages for a peasant laborer. It's a fair amount, but it's not a huge amount, nothing like what he'd been forgiven, much less.

And he laid his hands on his fellow servant and took him by the throat, saying, pay me what you owe. So his fellow servant fell down on his feet and begged him, saying, have patience with me. I'll pay you all.

The exact same thing this servant had said to the king and where he'd received forgiveness after that. And it says, and he would not, that he wouldn't have patience. But he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt.

So when his fellow servant saw what he had done, they were very grieved, and they came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, you wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you? And his master was angry and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due him.

That's the end of the story, but it's not, but what's the application? Well, Jesus gives the application. So my heavenly father also will do to you. What? What the king did to the servants.

That's what my father will do to you. You disciples? He's talking to Peter. He's talking to the disciples.

They're in a house, just Jesus and his disciples, and Peter said, how many times should I forgive? Seven times? No, 77 times. And he's speaking to his own disciples. If you don't forgive every man his brother from his heart, my father will do this to you.

What? Deliver you over to torturers until you pay what's owed? Now, that's not one of the easy passages of scripture. Paul thought one of the ones we looked at earlier was a scary passage. I think this is fairly scary.

But the question then is, what's really going on here? What is really the penalty at the end here? This guy's thrown in over. He's given over to torturers. The King James says tormentors.

And how long is he going to be there? Until he's paid his entire debt, what he owes. But what is his debt? He's been forgiven. He was forgiven his debt.

Technically, when someone forgives a debt, you don't owe it anymore. And you can't forgive somebody for something and then come back there and say, oh, I'm not happy with the way you've been behaving, so I'm going to make you pay that debt back. If you forgive, it's forgiven.

It can't be reimposed. So what did this man owe after he had been forgiven his huge debt? He owed it to the king to forgive his fellow servants. That's clearly the only offense the king's put him in jail for.

Not because he didn't pay the money, but because he didn't forgive his fellow servant. Apparently, that was, by implication, the servant's duty. That was his debt now to his king.

Not to pay the original amount, but to forgive his servant. This man was going to be delivered to tormentors until he had done so. Now, what are these tormentors? Notice this passage in greater detail says the same thing Jesus said in several other places.

If you don't forgive others, God won't forgive you. Well, what's that mean? Does that mean that if you have somebody you're holding a grudge against or you're bitter toward at the moment you die, even though you're a Christian, you're going to go to hell because God doesn't forgive you of your sins? Well, it could be taken that way. I have suspicion that it's not quite that way.

I'm going to tell you what I think, and you can just weigh it and see if it fits the passages as well in your way of thinking. I personally believe that a relationship can be compromised without it being completely over. My children, for example, have on occasion done things offensive to me.

And have not repented. And if they want to be in right relationship with me again, on good terms, we're going to have to deal with those things. I'm going to have to ask them

about that.

How do you feel about what you did here? Would you do it again? You know, you've sinned. Do you repent? If they say no, then I'm going to have to withhold full fellowship with them until we are in relationship on the same terms. It will remain an unforgiven thing in the sense that it's unsettled.

There's no closure. There's been an offense done. I've sought reconciliation.

They're not willing to be reconciled on responsible terms. Therefore, there remains a rift in the relationship. Are they still my children? Of course.

Do I disown them? No. Never in a million years would I disown my children. Does God disown us when we displease him? I don't think he disowns us.

I think we can disown him. That's apostasy. And I think that if we do, we won't be saved.

I don't think apostates are still saved. But we're not talking about apostasy. We're talking about neglecting an important duty.

And that is to forgive other people. We've got a lot of duties the Bible lays out. And when we die, there's going to be several of them probably that we haven't carried out fully.

But when we do that which is offensive to God, it creates a rift there. It's not like he says, okay, I'm done with you. You're going to hell.

But rather, there's a problem in our relationship. And I'm not going to pretend like it's not there. I'll forgive it.

As soon as this gets straightened out, and things will be as they should be between us. But they're not like they should be until this gets straightened out. Any father would responsibly treat a rebellious child that way.

If the child comes back, you know, repentant, the father will forgive him and pretend like nothing happened. If they don't repent, then the father is going to have to keep pressing for that. Say, this is not settled.

This is not a forgiven thing yet. Now, in my heart, I might forgive you, but the relationship is still broken. And I believe that there are compromises that occur in our relationship with God.

And unforgiveness of other people is one of those compromises that needs to be settled. Not so that we go to heaven when we die. If we're children of God, that's how we go to heaven.

We go to heaven by being God's children. Not by being perfect. Not by never having

sinned.

Not by even having repented of every individual sin we've ever committed one by one. There are things in which we are flawed, which the grace of God apparently covers because we are his children. Now, I do believe we can cease to be his children in an extreme case where we choose.

I don't want to be God's child anymore. I don't want to be a Christian anymore. That's apostasy.

But Christians usually don't come to that point. They usually are compromised in various ways. But that compromise impairs the relationship with God.

And God's not going to leave it sit. This man who is a forgiven man and refused to forgive his fellow man greatly displeased his king. And his king didn't just say, oh, well, I'll wait for you to come around.

No. The king was proactive. He delivered him over to torturers.

Now, this is discipline. Now, some people may think not. If we're thinking in terms of the unforgiving Christian loses his salvation because he didn't forgive, then this is hell.

Then this guy is thrown into hell. And by the way, Roman Catholics use this passage and a few others to try to support their doctrine of purgatory. Because he'll be there until he's paid what is owed.

That means he may get out at some point if he ever has paid what he owed. Now, some people say, no, it's clear the debt was so large, he'll never pay what he owes. So by saying that, it's just saying you're there for good.

But he could have said you're there for good if he wanted to say that way. You're there forever, no matter what. He says you're there until you pay what's owed.

It certainly holds out the possibility that wherever it is he is with the torturers, he may at some point no longer be there. There's no guarantee that he'll pay it, but there's no guarantee that he won't. He might have rich friends.

You never know. A man who in debtors prison will never be able to pay his debt by his own labor. But if he has a rich family or rich friends or someone else, it may get paid and he may get out.

The point is the conditions of him being delivered to the torturers is until he has done what's required. And what's required, I believe, is for him to forgive. But who are the torturers then? Now, Jesus does not identify the torturers.

But Jesus in his ministry encountered a great number of people who were tormented by

torturers. These would be the people who were demonized. The Syrophenician woman said, Lord, my daughter is greatly tormented by an evil spirit.

That's the term that's used. People who are demonized in the Bible, we should remember, people who are demonized are not recognizable as demonized by their bad behavior in terms of being the most wicked people in the neighborhood. They may be.

They may be exceedingly wicked. But many of the demon-possessed people in the Bible, they weren't particularly wicked. They were just crazy or tormented.

The man of the tombs. He was tormented. He cut himself with stones.

He howled out at the moon. He was a tormented soul. We don't know much about his moral life.

That's not really an issue that's brought out about him. It would appear that lots of people who are demon-possessed appear to be more like victims who needed to be delivered from bondage. But they were tormented.

And Jesus delivered them. Now, I don't know if this is talking about demons. I'm not sure what kind of tormentors God delivers people to.

But Jesus is emphatic. This is what my father will do to you. What? What the king did.

What did he do? He delivered him over to tormentors. Jesus could have put it differently. He could have said the king had him executed.

The king had him thrown to jail without any reference to torture. Without any reference to until he gets out, until he's paid to do. Jesus chooses his words, I think, purposefully.

I don't think he's careless when he gives teachings. I think he's saying that the Christian who has not forgiven others may come under torments by the hand of God. But who are the tormentors? If you look over at 1 Samuel chapter 18, and I don't really mean for this to become a teaching about demonology.

But it may be that we can't talk about this subject without bringing up the points that Jesus brought up. And it may well be that it gets us at least to brush on the subject of demonology. I don't want that to be our focus because it isn't the focus of what I intend to talk about.

But in 1 Samuel 18 verses 8 through 10, we find David has killed Goliath and the people are singing David's praises. And it says in verse 8, then Saul was very angry and the same displeased him. And he said, they have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they've only ascribed thousands.

Now what more can he have but the kingdom? So Saul eyed David from that day

forward. Now, eyed him? He was watching him with suspicion. Now David should have been a great friend to Saul.

He rescued Saul from a bad situation. He rescued the people of Israel from the Philistines. Saul should have been appreciative.

But he was jealous and he was angry, it says. He got angry at David, though David had done nothing wrong, but he was angry at him. He didn't let it go.

He didn't forgive him. And it says he eyed him from that day forward. Look at the next verse.

And it happened on the next day that an evil spirit from God came upon Saul. Now it says distressing spirit in the New King James because of how uncomfortable it makes us think of an evil spirit being sent from God. So the New King James, in order to be a little more accommodating to our sensitivity, says it was a distressing spirit.

But I'll just tell you this. The word distressing in the Hebrew is evil. And in the Septuagint, which is the Greek Old Testament, it's the same word that is used of an evil spirit in the New Testament.

So when Jesus cast out evil, a man with an evil spirit came and Jesus cast out. It's not a different word. In the Greek, in the Septuagint, it's an evil spirit, the same words used of the demons that were driven out of people in Jesus' day and the apostles' day.

Now, but people are bothered by this, are they not? Aren't you? An evil spirit would be sent from God to Saul. What hadn't Saul done wrong? Only he let the sun go down on his wrath. In Ephesians chapter 4, verses 26 and 27, Paul said, be angry and do not sin.

Do not let the sun go down on your wrath, neither give place to the devil. Don't let the sun go down on your wrath, neither give place to the devil. A Christian can give place to the devil by letting the sun go down on his wrath.

If you look over at 2 Corinthians chapter 2, Paul is talking about the need for the church to be forgiving toward a man who had earlier been placed under discipline at Paul's recommendation. And now Paul's ready to restore the man and to forgive him for what he did. And in 2 Corinthians 2, verse 10, he says, 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're not ignorant of his devices. Now, I don't know what Paul means by Satan taking advantage of us, and too bad we don't.

We're not supposed to be ignorant of this. He says we're not ignorant of his device. Well,



he wasn't, and I guess his listeners weren't.

Maybe we are. Maybe we're more ignorant than we should be of the devil's devices. But Paul definitely says, church, you need to forgive lest you give an advantage to the devil.

Ephesians, don't let the sun go down on your wrath, neither give place to the devil. Saul began to eye David with suspicion rather than being reconciled and forgiving. The next day, an evil spirit from God was sent to him.

In fact, in the Old Testament, you always read about the demons being sent from God. In 1 Kings chapter 22, there's the story about how Ahab, who was under God's wrath, but wasn't mindful of it, asked King Jehoshaphat to go to war with him against the Syrians. And Jehoshaphat said, well, can we inquire of a prophet of the Lord about this? And so Ahab's court prophets, who were all prophets of Baal, came in, and they said, go and prosper.

You'll prosper and succeed at Ramoth Gilead. And Jehoshaphat, who was the king of Judah and was a godly man, said, I don't see anyone here prophesying in the name of Yahweh. Does anyone prophesy in the name of Yahweh here? I guess Jehoshaphat hadn't been told that Jezebel had put all the prophets of Yahweh to death, except for one who was still somehow hanging on.

And Ahab knew where to find him. He said, well, there's one guy named Micaiah. He prophesies by the name of Yahweh.

But I don't like him. He only says bad things. And Jehoshaphat said, nonsense.

Bring him here. So a servant goes out to fetch Micaiah, and he's bringing Micaiah into the king's presence. And the servant says, now, all the king's prophets have counseled good.

Speak like them, and it'll go well for you. And Micaiah said, well, I'll just say whatever God tells me to say. And he comes in, and Ahab says, Micaiah, shall I go and try to recover my territory at Ramoth Gilead against the Syrians? And apparently with a tone of sarcasm, Micaiah says, go and prosper.

He says the same thing the prophets of Baal said. But Ahab knew he wasn't sincere. He said, Micaiah, how many times do I have to tell you? Only speak what is true in the name of Yahweh.

Oh, yeah, Ahab's now talking all pious. Oh, I only want to hear what Yahweh says. Yeah, sure you do.

Why do you have 4,000 prophets of Baal then? You know? And your wife is killing all the prophets of Yahweh. Well, he's in front of Jehoshaphat. He has to make a good show.

I have always told you, just speak what Yahweh says. And Micaiah says, OK, if you really want me to. Let me tell you what I saw.

I saw a vision. I saw a vision of the hills of Israel, and they were all abandoned, and the sheep were scattered. And I heard a voice saying, there's no shepherd for these people.

And he says, I saw. Oh, and then Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, see, I told you, he only says bad stuff. And he said, no, listen on.

Micaiah says, I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the hosts of heaven were brought before him. And he was saying to them, who will go and make Ahab fall at Ramoth-Gilead? And he said, one spirit said one thing, one said another. And finally, one came up and said, I'll persuade him.

And the Lord said, how? He said, I'll be a lion spirit in the mouth of his prophets. And God said, go and do so. Then Micaiah says, therefore know, Ahab, that the Lord has sent a lion spirit into the mouth of all your prophets, so that you'll die.

And again, that's difficult. An evil spirit from the Lord comes on Saul. A lion spirit from the Lord comes in the mouth of the false prophets.

It's very clear that although the evil spirits are under Satan, we know that even Satan is under God. Satan can't even afflict Job. He can't touch a hair of his head, as long as God has a hedge around him.

Satan has to beg God for permission to do something to Job. Satan and the demons are totally under the sovereign power and command of God. That means that there are demons, no doubt, seeking to attach themselves to you and me, but God's not saying yes to them.

No. I think Christine said that Satan's power is only as much as we give him ground. And I think that that's no doubt true.

There are things people can do to give ground to the devil, to give place to the devil. Do not give place to the devil. And one of the things that may, in fact, give place to the devil besides rebellion, as Saul had, and also his unforgiveness to David, is unforgiveness in general.

Don't let the sun go down on your wrath and don't give place to the devil. When Jesus said the king was angry at that servant, he delivered him over to tormentors. What does that mean? What does that look like? I don't know, but I don't know anything that would fit the wording of it and the general teaching of scripture better than the suggestion that he says he's going to let the devil come at you.

He's going to let the demons torment you. I'm not talking about demon possession, per

se, necessarily, but I'm just talking about you get to be a punching bag until you decide you want to forgive. I don't have very much experience when it comes to casting demons out of people.

It's just not my bag. And I mean, I've encountered demon possessed people a few times, and on a couple of times, I think I've managed to cast some demons out of them. Other times, I failed.

I'm not an exorcist, per se, and I don't advertise myself as one who is. But there are people who do it a lot more than I do. Some of them I respect.

Some of them I think are kooks. But a lot of the ones I have respected have said that a lot of times people who are demon possessed have gotten that way because they're holding a grudge against somebody because they won't forgive and that you can't cast the demon out of them until they do forgive. That's because the demons have ground, that God himself has delivered them over to the tormentors until they do what's required.

I would point out that's anecdotal. I'm not saying the Bible clearly teaches that, but it doesn't clearly teach against it, and it seems to conform to the wording of a passage like this one in Matthew 18 somewhat. Notice it doesn't mention a person dying and going to the judgment.

It doesn't say, and when this servant died, then the king threw him to the pits of hell or even to purgatory. It basically just says the king heard and was angry and delivered the guy over. This doesn't, I mean, it could be talking about after death.

It could be the afterlife or it could be in this life. Certainly there's nothing in the passage that would prevent it from being so that the person who refuses to forgive as Christ commands us to do and who remains with an unconcluded issue between himself and God over this matter and is not yet forgiven for that. That that might be God's way of disciplining.

That might be God's way of putting the pressure on. Not that God torments him. He gives them over.

God didn't crucify Christ, but he gave him over. It says he was delivered by the predeterminate counsel and foreknowledge of God. He's delivered over to the Jews who wanted to kill him.

Otherwise, Jesus was protected from them. We are generally protected from the demons. We have the armor of God.

We have the power of God. We have the name of Christ. We have the angel of the Lord and camping around about us and delivering us unless except when we don't.

There may very well be things we do, and maybe Jesus told us about them. Which which compromise that protection, which compromise that immunity, which has God see it as important, desirable, maybe necessary to put the pressure on to deliver us over to those torments. Now, it could just a torment of conscience could just be a torment of inner bitterness.

I don't know, but it may well be demonic. There are demons, and I think we don't pay attention to that fact as much as we perhaps ought to. Certainly, the New Testament writers paid attention to it all the time.

People in pagan lands and mysteries who go to them see it all the time. We we know because our Bible tells us there's demons, but we don't see it all the time. And so we live our lives most time as if kind of there may be a fantasy or a problem somewhere else in another country or, you know, maybe even a superstition.

It's the New Testament rise. We're not at all superstitious when they were talking about the dangers of spiritual warfare and of the demonic host and and that God would deliver somebody over to that for corrective purposes. It's like when Paul said the man in the church who was living with his father's wife, what's he supposed to what's the church supposed to deliver him over to Satan for what the destruction of his flesh so that his spirit might be saved in the day of Christ Jesus.

Paul said in first Corinthians five. It's a it's a disciplinary thing. You turn the guy over to Satan.

Why? So Satan can now buffet him. Satan can now hurt him. Satan can now torment him so that he'll repent and his spirit will be saved.

After all, that's the point. At least that's how I understand it. You know, if you find a more scriptural way to understand it, you're welcome to have it.

I don't require people to agree with me about anything. But I do think we need to agree with scripture and therefore we need to discover the best we can, what the scripture does and does not teach. I think I think it does incline this way.

Now, why is it so difficult for us to forgive? I mean, so you think that once you're forgiven by Christ, you'd naturally want to forgive other people. I think one of the reasons it's difficult to forgive is because we feel that if we forgive them easily, they got away with something that they shouldn't get away with. We just let them off the hook.

And we are, in a sense, punishing them, holding their feet to the fire by remaining unforgiving toward them. The sad thing is, many times the people that we're punishing don't even have a clue that we're doing so. We're the ones punishing ourselves.

We're the ones afflicted with bitterness and resentment and maybe even tormentors.

And, you know, we're the ones suffering because of unforgiveness. The person we're not forgiving may not even know that we don't forgive them.

The ones we don't forgive and don't confront probably aren't hearing much from us at all. Like I said, we withdraw rather than confront. And because we withdraw, they may not even know what we're thinking.

We may live for years with bitterness toward somebody, and we think we're holding their feet to the fire, we're keeping them accountable, we're not letting them off the hook. But they're off the hook as far as they know. They don't know anything about it.

You're the one who's suffering. You're punishing yourself. Someone says it's like giving them free rent in your brain.

Or like taking poison hoping someone else will die. You know? You're the one with the poison. You're the one with the bitterness in you.

And you're the one suffering. God doesn't want that. And yet we are so blinded to it.

It's certainly the devil who blinds us and who deceives us into thinking, I dare not forgive because then it's as if it didn't happen. Then they've gotten away with something they shouldn't get away with. But remember, Paul said, don't avenge yourself, give place to wrath.

God will avenge. He promises. And in a sense, we should almost hope that he doesn't.

Because we're supposed to love our enemies and bless those who curse us and do good to those who spitefully use us. The very people that we're failing to forgive are the people we're told to do good to and to bless them and to pray for them and to love them. I shouldn't even necessarily be wishing that God would avenge me on them.

There is a promise that if these people don't get right with God themselves, then the vengeance will come upon them that is due them. And we should hope that doesn't happen to them. But sometimes we want to make sure that they get what they deserve.

And this is a strange thing, it seems to me, because it seems to be putting ourselves in a unique category vis-a-vis everybody else. We know that we want to be forgiven when we do what's wrong. We want God to forgive us and we hope people will forgive us.

If a person is caught gossiping about a friend and the friend finds out about it, or you do something else, you've cheated a little bit on your time card at the office or whatever and it's discovered, you certainly hope that something can be done to get you forgiven of that and that things can get back to what it was the way before it happened. And we don't seem to have any quarrel with us getting away with it, if we should do so. You know, it's like, it's an injustice to let that person get away with it.

I can't forgive him. Well, is it an injustice for you to be getting away with what you did by being forgiven? And does anyone really get away with anything? Do not be deceived. God is not mocked.

What you sow, you will reap. And that's not just our final judgment. If you get away with something, that is a dangerous thing to you.

It says in Ecclesiastes chapter 8, I think it's verse 11, it says, Because the judgment against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully established in them to do evil. That is, if you do seem to get away with something, it hurts you. It makes your heart harder.

It makes you feel like you got away with something and maybe you can do it a second time. The best thing that can happen to a person is for them to become sensitized to their sin. To become convicted of sin before they do it.

And to say, no way am I going to do that. For me to become more like Christ and to become more honest and be more righteous. I mean, that's the very best thing that can happen to me or to anybody else.

If I do something wrong and I get forgiven for it, and it seems to me that I got away with it. I didn't get away with anything. My heart is changing.

Our hearts are not static. They're dynamic. They change for better or for worse.

This is why it's so important to confront something and get it squared away in a right way. And that's what Jesus teaches in Luke chapter 17. Now earlier we, one of the earliest verses we read was Mark chapter 11 verse 25-26.

And there you may recall, Jesus said, when you stand praying, forgive if you have ought against anyone. So there's no confrontation here. You're just praying, presumably alone or at least it's a private thought.

You remember someone has done something wrong to you and you forgive them. Just as right on the spot, when you stand praying, if you remember someone has done something wrong, forgive them. Just like that.

And yet you see a slightly different procedure recommended by Jesus in Luke 17 where he says, in verse 3 and 4, take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him. And rebuke him means to confront him about it.

And if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day and seven times a day returns to you saying, I repent, you shall forgive him. Now notice there's something a little different here than what's in Mark chapter 11.

Mark 11 says, if you just remember that someone's wrong, you just forgive them. Now

there's this other detail. Well, if he sins against you, go tell him, confront him, rebuke him about it.

If he repents, forgive him. And if it happens seven times a day, keep it up. Forgive him every time he says, I repent.

Now, what if he doesn't repent though? Well, there's something about that too in the teaching of Jesus. That's in Matthew 18, as probably many of you would know this passage. In Matthew chapter 18, verse 15, Jesus said, moreover, if your brother sins against you, we just read about that in Luke 17, 3. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him.

And if he repents, forgive him. Jesus says in Matthew 18, 15, moreover, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. That's basically rebuke him.

And if he hears you, that is if he says, I repent, you've gained your brother. So this is really the same teaching. Matthew 18, 15 is the same teaching as Luke 17, 3 and 4. Your brother sins against you, you confront him.

If he repents, you forgive him and it's done. But this goes further. What if he doesn't? What if you confront him and he doesn't say, I repent? Do you forgive him then? Well, verse 16 says, but if he will not hear you, take with you two or more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established.

In other words, if he's not repenting, maybe he doesn't agree with you that what he did was wrong. You're going to need to have some more witnesses to back you up on that. You bring two or three witnesses to him and they say the same thing you're saying.

He should say, okay, maybe I am wrong after all, maybe I should repent. But it says, if he doesn't hear them either, if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. This becomes a public scandal then.

But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector, which is a way of saying, don't hang out with him. Don't fellowship with him. I said earlier, there comes a time when it is the right thing to distance yourself from somebody who's not going to change.

But you have to be very committed to reconciliation prior to that point. First of all, when you stand praying, if you just remember that someone's sinning against you, forgive them. But then why does Jesus later say, and confront him and if he repents, forgive him? Because there's two aspects of forgiveness.

There's what takes place in your heart and there's what takes place in the relationship. The forgiveness in your heart is to be automatic. I remember he hurt me, I forgive him.

That's just between me and God. I love him, I love my enemy, I love my neighbors, I love myself, I forgive him, just like you forgave me. Between me and God, I forgive him because I'm praying, by the way.

While I'm praying, if I remember, I forgive him. It's strictly a transaction between me and God in my own heart. But there's still that other matter between me and the other guy.

There's that relationship too that God is concerned about. Now, in addition to forgiving your heart, you need to go to the guy. Now, you wouldn't even go to him unless you'd already, in your own mind, decided to reconcile.

You have this in your heart already. You love him unconditionally. But you can't trust him unconditionally.

That's the point. A relationship is built on trust. When somebody betrays you, they break trust.

That relationship is damaged in a way that's not easy to repair. And that's what you have to work on. Can this be repaired? Can I trust him again someday? If not, then we're not going to be wanting to be around each other much.

Because you don't want to be around someone who might stab you in the back as soon as you turn around. You've got to trust people that they're not there to destroy you or to hurt you. Because you'll always be on the defensive otherwise.

You might as well just part company if they won't repent. But if they will, then you can forgive them. If they will say, oh, that was a terrible thing I did.

I can't even believe I did that. That's so horrible. I would never want to do that again.

If they repent, then you say, oh, okay, then maybe I will trust you again. I'll forgive you. I'm going to remove the barrier here between us and give you another chance.

Even if you do it a lot of times, you said, if they say they repent, do it. In other words, you've got to take them at their word because you don't know their heart really. They say they repent.

Give them the benefit of the doubt. And let it go. Then the relationship is restored.

That's a matter of restoration of trust. When someone injures you, the biggest challenge is for you to love them in spite of what they did to you. That's got to be automatic.

When you stand praying, just forgive them. Your heart has got to be unconditionally loving toward them before God. But trust has to be restored.

And that has to happen bilaterally. You can't restore trust in someone who betrayed you



unilaterally. It's a fool who trusts somebody who can't be trusted.

Sometimes you say, what, don't you trust me? Like it's an obligation you have to trust somebody? We're under no obligation to trust. We're under obligation to love. Even if you can't trust the scoundrel, you should love him and wish well for him and hope for his salvation.

And bless him if he curses you and so forth. But trusting, you're under no obligation to trust anybody but God. In Jeremiah 17, it says, woe unto him that puts his trust in man.

And other places said it's foolish to put your trust in princes. You're not supposed to trust people unless they earn it. Love does not have to be earned because it's free.

Trust has to be earned and maintained. And where there's no trust, there cannot be any real relationship between parties. That's why God expects us to repent.

You know, it says, I mentioned earlier in 2 Corinthians 5, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their transgressions against them. When Jesus died, God was reconciling the whole world to himself and not counting their transgressions against him. It's like when I say, in my heart, I forgive.

God says, in my heart, I forgive you. But we still have a problem in the relationship here. You can't live with me if you don't have the right relationship with me.

My heart is toward you. My heart is forgiving toward you. I love you unconditionally, but unless you repent, this relationship is not going to get fixed.

I can't trust you because you've been rebelling against me all your life, and I've never seen any evidence that you want to stop doing that. You see, you'd be foolish to trust somebody who's injured you, and they never gave any indication that they don't want to do that again. Repentance is them saying, I'm sorry, that was wrong, I've changed my mind, I wouldn't do that again.

And that's what repentance is. We have to repent in order that the relationship with God is restored. Even though he's in his own heart, not counting the world's sins against them, yet they're alienated from him, and they can't be saved without being in him.

Salvation is in Christ. If you're not going to repent and come back into relationship with Christ, you're not going to be saved. You won't have eternal life.

It's not just a matter of the sins. It's a matter of lacking life, eternal life. This life is in his Son.

He that has the Son has life. He that has the Son of God does not have life. And so, there are two aspects here of forgiveness.

One is what happens in my heart. One is what happens in the relationship. One is between me and God.

The other is between me and the offending party. When it comes to the offending party, I am obligated, under command of God, to confront it. Now, I would imagine this is only for pretty serious cases.

People may slight you on occasion quite unintentionally. It's not like they're malicious. They're just clueless, or insensitive, or busy, or not paying attention.

You've got to be a little thicker skinned than to confront everybody about every time they do that. Because love covers a multitude of sins. But love also requires confrontation of some sins.

Especially the ones that make it impossible for you to trust them. That which really comes down to a betrayal. That which comes down to a serious injury.

Inflicted. That needs to be faced. Because it's something that's not just going to go away.

You're not going to trust them again. Until you find out if they repent. So, Jesus said, you rebuke them.

Now, rebuke sounds a little harsh. But it really just means to confront them about it. It should not be harsh.

Galatians 6.1 Paul says, brethren, if any of you are overtaken in a fault, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering yourself, lest you also be tempted. You don't go to them arrogantly and angrily. You go in a spirit of meekness.

I've done this kind of thing myself probably before. That is, I probably injured other people. I'm not saying you're worse than I am.

I'm just saying that what you did ruins the relationship until we can get it right. I'm not a better person necessarily. Or even if I think I am, I'm not going to say so.

But even if I do think I am a better person, it's by the grace of God. There but for the grace of God go I. So, I mean, how could I hold it against somebody that they're imperfect in their behavior toward me? How many people have I been imperfect toward? Go meekly and restore them. Notice it's not condemn them but restore them in a spirit of meekness.

And so that's what has to happen. Reconciliation has to be sought. But Jesus said if they won't repent, you take two witnesses.

If they don't repent, then you take it before the church so that they've got the witness of

the whole congregation to say, listen, you did a wrong thing and you need to repent of it. And if you won't hear them, well, there's nowhere else to go but say you're done here. Treat them like a heathen or a tax collector.

And he's not saying that people should treat heathens or tax collectors badly. He's just saying, you know how you Jews treat heathen. You know how you treat tax collectors.

That's how you as a Christian should treat somebody who will not repent when they've been given every opportunity and is still holding to their sin. Because the church is not supposed to be filled with unresolved sin. It's supposed to be filled with people who... You know, some people say, well, if we practice church this way, the church will be empty.

Really? You mean nobody would ever repent when you confront them? The church won't be empty if the people repent. Christianity is comprised of people who have repented and are repentant sinners who want to do the right thing by God. If someone doesn't want that, they're not converted yet.

They don't belong in the church. They're sinners. They don't belong... The church is not the evangelism center.

Evangelism takes place where the sinners are. The church is where the Christians are. It's the fellowship of the saints.

It's the encouraging fellowship and community of Christians who are there to build each other up and to pray together and to learn together. It's a fellowship of Christians is what the church is. And Christians want to do right by each other and by God.

And when you tell me that I've done something wrong to you, I might not have been aware of it, but I'm going to ask myself, is that true? Have I? And if I have, I'm going to want to get it right. And even if I think I haven't, I'm going to be concerned that you think I did something wrong. I'm going to do what I can to reconcile because a Christian wants to do that.

If a person goes through all these stages, you said, and they still don't want to be right, there's no evidence they're a Christian. You can't make the final judgment about their soul. Only God can do that.

But he says, treat them as if they're a heathen or a taxer. Only God knows if they're not. You have to treat them as if they are a heathen because a person who will not repent of sin cannot remain in the church.

And no, it doesn't mean the church will be empty to people. Everyone sins, but Christians repent. And when they repent, they aren't eliminated.

You know, it's Christian. It's people who sin and do not repent and will not repent and are given every opportunity to repent and will not. They don't belong here.

That's where separation takes place. Now, how do you forgive people? I want to go this real quick. I know it's late.

First of all, I think it helps to see them as children of God. Now, of course, this is easier if they're Christians, I hope. If they're not Christians, there's still a place for that because God made them in his image.

Even if they're not born again Christians and children of God in that sense, they are still like Adam, a child of God. Adam was called a child of God and they're human, made in God's image. And God values humans.

None of us were saved when God determined to send his son to die for us. So the value he placed on humans in their sinful state was sufficient to die for us. So even an unsaved person has great value before God.

That's why James rebukes us when he says, With our mouth we bless God and with the same mouth we curse men who are made in the image of God. This shouldn't be. They're made in the image of God.

How can you love God and not love that which is made in his image? Now, see them as children of God. And I would say even literally children. It's hard to look at a gruff, mean, ornery, uncouth adult and see them as a little child.

But really, we only live 70, 80, 100 years on this earth and then we go on to eternity. 100 years is still childhood. We're still ignorant fools like children at the end.

If you don't become like a child, if you don't recognize yourself to be like a child, you can't even enter the kingdom of heaven, Jesus said. And if other people don't see themselves as children, I think we should. There was a woman years ago that I found very annoying.

And she was, I think, intentionally annoying. She was very selfish and so forth. And I really had a hard time with her, loving her.

I was determined to do so, but I was finding it difficult. And then at one point, I was over at her family's house and I saw a picture of her when she was a little kid. A little toddler.

Now, I love toddlers. Even ones that grow up to be nasty people, I love toddlers. And we naturally have sympathy for little children.

And we should. And especially if they're born, let us say, disabled. Don't you have a special place in your heart for little children, especially when they're born disabled? Well, we are human beings who are born disabled.

Spiritually disabled. People do wrong things because it's in their nature to do wrong things. We didn't ask to be born and we didn't ask to be struggling with sin.

And when children are born, we give them a pass because they're little children. We know that they're going to be responsible for the deeds they make when they're older in life. But we have to realize this.

By the time they're older in life, they may have already ignorantly and foolishly made so many choices and formed so many habits of the wrong type. It's very difficult for them to make good choices once they're old enough to be responsible for them. I mean, as soon as you start setting patterns of selfishness and manipulation, which little children do all the time, when that becomes a pattern, then by the time they're at an age of accountability, it's easier to do that than something else.

Every choice we make makes it easier to go either better or worse the next time. And when you see a hardened sinner, you're looking at a person who wasn't always a hardened sinner. They were once a little child, just like your children.

Born as innocent as your children were born. And they missed out on something. Hopefully your children turned out better.

If they did, it's probably because, A, the grace of God did something for them that he didn't do for someone else. Also, they may have had a better upbringing and things like that. We don't know what makes people turn nasty and evil.

We know they're responsible, but we can still pity them because they weren't born that way. I mean, they were born inclined that way, but not everyone turns out that way. And I have always found it easy to love people when I... Having seen that photograph, it reminded me that if I see someone who's really ornery and difficult, I think, that person was a child.

I try to picture in my mind them as a little kid. I mean, I'm not recommending some psychological device for doing this, but it's just what I do naturally. I think that ornery, ugly, mean person was once a little baby that came out of the womb without a clue about anything.

Helpless, innocent, and made some bad choices, and then worse choices, and then worse choices. And yet that's the same human being. I'm 65 years old, almost 66.

I still remember when I was 16. I sometimes forget I'm not still 16. I don't have any of those chronic pains old people sometimes get, but if I did, I'd easily remember I'm not 16.

And many of you probably don't feel 16 anymore because of pain, but I'm still in pretty good health. I have to remind myself, I'm not 20 years old anymore. But I remember

when I was, I'm the same guy.

I'm not a different person. I'm 65 years older, but I'm the same person, just the body got older. I'm also the same person I was when I was a little baby.

That person that you find so difficult was once a little baby. And they're the same person, they just got bigger and broken. They were born broken, and they got more broken.

And they got more in bondage to sin and so forth in their life. And that's someone to pity. You can have more compassion on somebody who does you wrong.

If you look at them that way, because that's an accurate way to look at them. That's not just psyching yourself up by, you know, deceiving. That's the way human beings are.

That's the way to look at it. And we, forgiveness is when you give up your right to punish somebody, or to retaliate against them, or to be angry at them. It is not a feeling, it is a decision.

You give up your right. I've heard people so many times say, I'm trying so hard to forgive this person. I say, stop trying, just do it.

Don't try to forgive, forgive. They might say, well, that just sounds like we don't have any emotions. No, you have to realize your emotions are not what forgiveness is made of.

It's your decision that is forgiveness. If you owe me money, and you come to me and say, listen, I can't pay you back, I gave you an IOU for \$500, I can't pay you the \$500, would you forgive me? I say, sure, here's the IOU you gave me, tear it up, it's done. You're forgiven of the debt.

Well, I might later feel like, dang, I could use that money. I saw him spending money on something frivolously, he could have given me that money. I could feel badly, but no matter how badly I feel toward him, I tore up the IOU, it's done, he's forgiven.

I have to bring my emotions back and say, listen, it's a reality. Sometimes people, when they say they're having a hard time, forgive. They think forgiveness is feeling forgiving.

No, forgiveness is a choice you make. Then your feelings have to be brought into obedience to the choice. The feelings don't change as fast as the decision does.

The decision happens as soon as you make it. I forgive. In fact, I personally think when I read our prayers, forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, I think that what we're saying is, forgive me now for my current recent sins, as I am now forgiving people for the sins that they've done against me since last time I prayed.

I am now forgiving them. Forgive us as we are forgiving. It's like, I just habitually need to

forgive people for things, and I habitually need to be forgiven too by God, but it's not something you try to do, it's something you decide to do.

And then, of course, you have to discipline your emotions to come into agreement with reality. I think it's important, once you forgive someone, to tell them that you do. If you forgive someone and say, well, I'm not holding anything against them, but I haven't told them so, and we don't see each other anymore, they may know that you were holding something against them, they may not know you forgave them.

I think to verbally forgive someone, to call them up and say, you know what, I was kind of bad in keeping a grudge against you for a long time about something, but I just want you to know I forgive you. Or certainly, when someone says, I repent, will you forgive me? You don't just say, okay, it's okay. I mean, just say, I forgive you.

That's a legal choice, a legal decision. The IOU is torn up, you owe me nothing, I've decided that that is the case, and I want you to be aware of it. I don't want you to spend the rest of your life thinking that I think you still owe me something.

I'm releasing you from that. And I'm giving up any right I have to retaliate or in any way settle the score. And of course, this all comes down to the one thing, the one thing needful, and that's to love your neighbors, you love yourself.

You want God to forgive you, you want people to forgive you. You can't expect to do so, to have them do so, if you're not willing to do the same thing. What you want others to do to you, do likewise to them.

And forgiveness is obviously one thing that we all want when we know we've done wrong. And we should assume that everyone else would want it too, unless they prove they don't. And that's of course the case where it goes through the whole church discipline thing.

They prove they don't want to be forgiven, they're abstinent, well then what can you do? You just treat them like a heathen or a tax collector. But hopefully that's the extreme and rare case. Most people, I think, are relieved to get it, to get the air clear, and to get things settled and have closure in what was a problem in the relationship.

At least we should, and I think we'll find that other people do. And it's amazing, once you've actually verbalized, I forgive you, and they've accepted that fact, how quickly things can be back to normal, the way they were before the problem arose, if they're willing to do so. And that's what forgiving is, is being willing to do so.

So we need to repent if there's anyone we hold grudges against. We better not let the sun go down on our wrath. We need to realize that we have done far worse to God than any person has done to us, and he forgave us freely, gave up his right to condemn us by forgiving us and sending Jesus.

And so we have to be as committed to forgiving others and keeping those relationships clean, as God wants them to be, as God is, as God has proven himself to be. For more information visit [www.fema.org](http://www.fema.org)