

New Covenant Priesthood (Part 10)

Forgiveness

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Given 28-Mar-02; Tape #549B

Several different subjects are brought together in the timing of the subject of this sermon. (1) These days (of Unleavened Bread) portray Israel coming out of Egypt, which is a type of sin, and coming out of sin strongly implies the forgiveness of sin. (2) There is a direct line attaching pride to being unforgiving of people who sin against us. (3) This subject is essential to the other subject of priesthood. I don't mean this subject in terms of priests forgiving sins like the Catholic church does as a function of its office, but of the *understanding* of forgiving sins committed personally against us.

This understanding is important because we're going to be kings and priests. Both responsibilities involve judgment. Pride is a powerful barrier to making proper judgments because it tends to make us intolerant of anything that we don't already hold as true. Pride prejudices us. When we feel that we are sinned against, we get defensive because our ego is threatened, and our prejudice then tends to be strong and the "fight or flight" situation kicks in.

We are commanded in Matthew 6 to ask God's forgiveness of our debts (meaning our sins) as we forgive our debtors (meaning those who sin against us). Apparently many Americans are troubled by this concept of forgiveness now that America and Americans have been directly attacked. Since September 11 articles have appeared in newspapers and news magazines in which the authors have sought out the opinions of many people in order to get a cross-section picture regarding what *they* feel we should do about forgiving those who attacked us.

This cross-section is interesting because some people with a theological bend of mind quoted scripture to support their views. Others surveyed quoted no scriptures, but rather referred to sources steeped in human psychology. Others gave opinions gleaned from their own personal experiences gained from facing a tragic disaster in which violence touched either them directly or someone close to them. Like every other Christian subject, the cross-section picture showed a great deal of misinformation and general confusion about forgiving.

In my forty-two years in the church, tragic disasters have not often come upon church members. God has truly been gracious. But at the same time, on a smaller scale, we offend, and others offend us. Sometimes the offense is great enough that forgiveness becomes a matter of great concern, so we wonder at what point we are expected to forgive. We wonder if it is possible to both *"forgive and forget."*

Sometimes there is a tendency for some to forgive too quickly. Some, with a great deal of pride, act as though forgiveness is a divine right to be given them whether they ask or not, regardless of the circumstance of the sin. Many times we are in confusion because we don't know *whether* it should be given. On the one hand there are generalities regarding forgiveness that are easily understood. But there are also times that forgiveness requires a great deal of wisdom.

In practical application, on the background of our experiences with the *offending* person and our emotions getting involved, our judgment can get muddled in quite a hurry. These and other elements are important to learn, and to be practiced by those who are in training to become priests of God.

Turn to Matthew 6:11-12. This is the model prayer that Jesus gave to His disciples.

Matthew 6:11-12 Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

I don't know whether you are aware of this, but verse 11 contains the first request in this model prayer for something personal. There are other requests before that which have to do with a broad scale of life, but this is something *personal*. Since we learned in a few sermons back that we are to pray and to not give up, the implication is strong when it says, "Give us this day our daily bread," that this is a request intended to be asked each day for that particular day.

We're going to look first at the word "daily" in "Give us this day our daily bread." It doesn't quite mean what the word "daily" implies to you and me, because it literally means "indispensable." "*Give us this day our indispensable bread.*" Another way of putting it would be, "*Give us this day that which is needful to go on.*" That's probably the smoothest translation. Both are acceptable.

I'm going to go back to Deuteronomy 8:1-4 and use this again as a hook for this sermon. We'll be going back again to Matthew 6, so don't lose your place there.

Deuteronomy 8:1 All the commandments which I command you this day shall you observe to do, that you may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore unto your fathers.

Put yourself into this by taking out the word *land* and inserting *the Kingdom of God*. This is just for your own reference. God has given us commandments so that we can go into the land. That includes the commandment in the model prayer to "Give us this day our daily bread" and "Forgive our sins as we forgive others who sin against us." Both are commandments, and they are to help us get into the Kingdom of God.

Deuteronomy 8:2-3 And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God led you these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you, and to prove [test] you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled you, and suffered [allowed] you to hunger, and fed you with manna, which you know not, neither did your fathers know; that he might make you know that man does not live by bread only, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD does man live.

There is an overall purpose for all that we go through. We are to learn to live by every word of

God.

Deuteronomy 8:4 Your raiment waxed not old upon you, neither did your foot swell these forty years.

I wanted to touch with you on that because we find in this series of four verses that God not only supplied the Israelites with manna each day, but it also states that their clothing did not wear out, nor did their feet swell (which is just a simple term to say that He healed them all along the way). He was supplying them with food. He took care of their clothing, and He took care of their physical needs in terms of health. Now would you say that these things are indispensable to life? Would you say these things are *needed* to go on? Absolutely!

This is clear evidence that He was supplying them with what they needed *each day* to go on. Therefore, "*bread*" in Matthew 6 can represent whatever provision is needed, and is not necessarily restricted to food. You understand that manna later in the Bible clearly becomes a symbol of "*the word of God*," and "*clothing*" (mentioned in verse 4) becomes a symbol for *righteousness*. This request in Matthew 6:11 begins to touch on *spiritual* needs as well, so there is much more here than meets the eye at first glance. In its intent, "*bread*" broadly includes whatever we need for that day's walk. However, the emphasis is on indispensable *physical* need.

Immediately following verse 11 of course is verse 12, and that is the second personal request in this model prayer, and it is a specific *spiritual* request for *forgiveness—as we forgive*. Notice again in Matthew 6 that those two verses are connected by the conjunction "*and*"; thus the implication from verse 11 carries through to verse 12, and that request in verse 12 is to be made each day for that day's need of forgiveness. That is indispensable as well. The first request is for a need clearly fundamental to physical life itself, but with an undertone toward spiritual life. However, that request is also less important than the second one.

The implication then regarding the second is that it is as fundamental and as indispensable to spiritual life as food is to physical life. It too is in one way a *general* request. Jesus' outline here in Matthew 6 is not requiring that we name each and every sin, but at the very least we be acutely reminded that we are sinners in need of forgiveness *every* day. Hang onto that because this becomes important to being able to give forgiveness. We are to do this every day, if only to be reminded that we are sinners.

It is our duty to ask for forgiveness each day if only to inscribe a consciousness of sin in our understanding and evaluation of ourselves. God made us to need food, but we have made ourselves to need forgiveness from our transgressions. Now "give" and "forgive" refer to our primary need, but it would be interesting to know how many, who know full well the first need (the food), are virtually unconscious to the second. We all know that we need forgiveness. But do we know—are we acutely aware—that we need it every day?

I mentioned the word "duty" a couple of times, and the word "debt" a couple of times, and these words have a specifically different meaning, but they are linked in this subject of forgiveness. The same is true of the words "owe" and "ought." Now listen to this: "*Duty is a debt*

that we owe to God and to each other, and ought to pay." We'll expand on this as we go along here. All four words bear upon the sense of obligation that we are under. If a duty is not completed or is not fulfilled at all, it becomes a debt that we owe and ought to pay.

We automatically divide our duties between those that we owe to God and those that we owe to our neighbor and to ourselves. But this division is, in reality, at least somewhat superficial because what we owe to other men and to ourselves is already owed to God. He comes first. Now why? It's because He is the Creator, and the Ruler. It's because He is the One who gave the commands in the first place, thus establishing the duty that we fulfill those obligations to Him, to other men, and to ourselves. Was it not He who laid down the Two Great Commandments of the law: "we are to love God with all our heart," and that the second is like unto it—that we are "to love our neighbor as ourselves" Therefore we can reach a conclusion. The failure to fulfill our duties to men is in reality a sin against God.

We're going to turn to Romans 14: 7-9 in order to expand this reality about things that we owe to God.

Romans 14:7 For none of us lives to himself, ...

Doesn't that phrase not assume that there are duties that we owe to other people?

Romans 14:7-8 ... and no man dies to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord.

Now Paul has expanded this out to make sure that we understand that we live unto God.

Romans 14:8-9 For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we *are* the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.

That little series of verses shows that we don't live in a vacuum, and therefore because we don't live in a vacuum there are duties and obligations that we owe to others. We owe them first of all to God, and then secondarily to other human beings, and even to ourselves. Brethren, there are obligations laid all around that we owe to God. Let's first understand that this declaration by Paul is addressed to Christians. It is not addressed to the world in general. They don't live their lives unto God. They don't yet owe Christ for things, so the world doesn't live unto Christ.

Because Christ died for us, and because we have sought forgiveness from God through His blood, we have all become owned by Him. This places us under the obligation—duty—that we owe and ought to pay. In a general way this means to not live a self-centered life, but rather a God-centered life in which we are interdependent upon each other as His children. It means we have the duty always to act in all things according to the mind and the will of God, and not on our own will.

Let's think back again to Matthew 6: 11-12. Those are obligations that God laid down for us. We are obliged every day. If we are living our lives in the God-centered manner that we should because Christ bought and paid for us, then every day we are not to take for granted what God supplies, but to ask Him every day to supply our need as specifically as possible. Of course God knows a great deal more about us than we know about ourselves, and He can give things to us that we didn't even think about, but it is an obligation. It is an obligation and it is our duty, and ~~w~~we owe it to Him every day to ask for His forgiveness, and (if I can add this) to forgive others as well. It begins to be drawn into this.

Forgiving others is part of the debt that we owe Christ for His blood. If we understand it, this is a mind-transforming understanding of the way that life is to be lived. There are things that need to be understood. Let's begin with this: How often do we fall short of God's will? How often do we fail to hit the mark? How often do we go off the path? How often are we in ignorance of what God's will is? All of these are expressions used in the Bible to indicate sin. Another one I might add here is this: How often are we in ignorance that we are *failing* to pay our debts to God in the way that we treat men?

Let's go to I John 4: 20-21.

I John 4:20-21 If a man say, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar: for he that loves not his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loves God love his brother also.

There is a word there that I think kind of throws us. It influences us maybe in a wrong manner. It's the word "hate." In English the word "hate" has an absolute sense to it. It's synonyms are loath, abhor, detest. What we have to understand is that this Greek term which is translated into the English word "hate" can include abhor, detest, or loath, but on the other hand it does not have to. It can include such things as seemingly benign, as simply neglecting to do something good. It would be included within the proper usage of this Greek word that we would translate "hate."

There are many times that we just neglect to do things. We're too tired. We don't have enough time. We're too busy doing something else, and so an opportunity arises to do something that would lift a burden or whatever and serve somebody else, and we just don't do it. That is included within verse 20. We didn't make the sacrifice necessary to carry through.

In brief, what John is saying here is that if we really do love God, and we're really beginning to get it, and beginning to realize how much we are under obligation to Him, and how much we owe Him as a result of what He has paid through His Son for our life, it will show up in the way that we treat men. It won't be able to be hidden. We will see the opportunity to do something, and we will almost, you might say, break our neck to make sure that we do it. Why? Because we don't want to let God down. In reality, what we are doing is paying our obligation to God, and then we do the service for man.

Again, let's not lose sight of the subject here, which is *being able to forgive*. But this is a part of

being able to forgive. I'm setting the stage here. Incidentally, we won't even get to too much here in this sermon, but the stage will be pretty well set. Loving God, and loving man goes hand-in-hand. We cannot have one without the other.

The essence, the heart, the core, the very nature of sin can be put into one English word: failure. Sin is failure. It's the failure to hit the mark. It's the failure to stay on the path. It's the failure to do what we should have done. So what is sin? We almost always think of a legal definition, that it's the transgression of the law, when really all God intends is to get across to us: *Hey, you failed to do it right.*" That's all. So the essence of sin is failure, and it is the failure to meet our duty to live up to the standard that God has established.

At this point, whether the failures are of omission or commission is unimportant. The important point is that we understand that we very frequently fail to meet our obligations to God, and our everyday need for forgiveness. Therefore, forgiveness by God, and forgiving others, is not something *occasionally* needed. This presents us with another indication that salvation absolutely must be by grace. There is no way around it. Our character imperfections are so many, and our application of His standard so spotty and erratic, it has to be by grace, or we would never make it. It is truly a mark of our pride that we might walk through life only occasionally asking God for forgiveness.

Now how do we break God's law? I'm not going to give a complete list here. It's just to inject the idea into the flow of the message here. We do it by failing to discipline ourselves as we should, by impatiently losing our temper, not really working on the job or in the home as unto Christ, by neglecting the opportunity to perform some kind service when the opportunity arises, or maybe by unkindness in speech or action.

The realization that our failures to meet our obligation to God are so many might be a real downer. But another implication of this prayer in Matthew 6 is that the consciousness of our need for a deliverer from sin's power must be as great or greater than our awareness of our need for food. We know that every day we need to eat, unless we're fasting. We feel within us this urge to eat. Is there a parallel in us in regard to forgiveness? Probably not, because coming to the spiritual is much more difficult because it is unnatural to human nature. But as we come to know God, I think that will begin to develop within us.

I'm beginning to understand more and more, and better and better, why the Apostle Paul, twenty or thirty years after he was converted and an apostle, said, "Oh wretched man that I am!" Do you know what happens? The more clearly we see God, the less blurry the image is, and our imperfections become more apparent to us. Instead of seemingly to get better and better, it works the other way, and we get more and more humbled by how imperfect we are in comparison to Him. We begin to realize what an awesome job Christ did. He lived thirty-three and one-half years without a sin.

We live in a very morally relaxed age, and it has a strong tendency to impose its tolerance for sin on us. If we're ever going to be delivered from this sin-sick world, it's going to be because we have a heart-piercing consciousness of sin in us great enough to drive us to seek God's strength in every situation.

When God forgives a man, is it going to stop any punishment that He might have had in mind?

Absolutely not. Forgiveness though allows His love to flow out to us once again, and the sense of alienation from Him begins ebbing away. This may even intensify our sense of shame and make us more eager to show Him love. That's the way it often happens with a child, and you know that. You may give a child a spanking, and after the child gets over the initial shock of the spanking he or she wants to crawl up on your lap and hug your neck. Even though the child received a spanking, he or she may feel a shame greater than he or she did before the spanking. The child immediately wants to get back into your good graces once again, even though he or she feels that shame.

Turn now to II Samuel 7:13-16. David is receiving the promise from God, and in this case God is telling David that his son that will yet come will build the temple. Notice the promises God gives in these verses.

II Samuel 7:13-15 He shall build a house for my name, and *I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever*. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, *I will chasten him* [That's a flat-out promise that applies to you and me too!] with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: *But my mercy shall not depart away from him*, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before you.

God believes and practices the principle that "he who spares the rod hates his son," and so we find in the New Testament a quotation from the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament of this very thing. Hebrews 12:6 says, "For whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives." We should not think that just because we are forgiven that all pain is going to be taken away. Love and corporal punishment are not incongruous, but are complimentary and necessary aspects of training, and our Creator uses it. So punishment may indeed fall heavily, but the air is cleared whenever we ask for forgiveness so that the communication in every sense and meaning of that word is restored, and the conscience begins to adjust to that of a normal loving relationship. In addition to that, the eternal death penalty is removed. The blood of Jesus Christ still remains effective because of God's patient mercy, but returning the relationship to its former state may take some time. The punishment will reinforce the memory of how *close* we came to losing the greatest gift ever given to us.

A simple illustration will help us to understand why it takes a bit of time when we ask God for forgiveness for the air to begin to be clear. Anybody who has been sinned against in a serious way knows that it doesn't happen immediately, let's say through being raped, through adultery, or through having a great deal of money stolen from them.

This story was on the front page in today's paper about a young woman whose identity was stolen. (Did any of you see the movie "The Net"?) This literally happened. This young woman had her identity stolen, and before she was aware of it, thirty thousand dollars had been charged against her credit card. The person who stole her identity had done some research. The person knew her date of birth and her Social Security number. The person knew just enough information to apply for things and charge it to the young woman's credit card. That person got

away with thirty-thousand dollars.

How would you like something like that to happen to you? Could you forgive such a person that kind of thing? That ought to illustrate to you that if you are in the position of the one being sinned against, you know very well it is awfully hard for trust to be established right away. It takes time. I would say in some cases, like maybe in a marriage or such, it may take years for that to occur. We just don't erase memories all that quickly, and the pains of hurt don't go away.

I'm warning you of this because sometimes we expect too much when we ask somebody else for forgiveness, or they ask us for forgiveness. The forgiveness may be tendered to us, but that doesn't mean that everything is going to just disappear and be honky-dory, and we'll be best of friends by tomorrow morning. That just will not occur. It will take quite a bit of time on occasion for the mind to adjust, but the punishment in the long run will be helpful.

Matthew 6:12 states a very serious condition to receiving forgiveness from God. There are more conditions of course—faith, exercising faith, and repentance. Those things are not mentioned in this sermon. I am just assuming that they are understood by you. Our forgiveness by God has attached to it the condition of forgiving those who have sinned against us. There are already three conditions to forgiveness.

I want you to turn to Ephesians 4:32. This begins another section in this sermon, and we are once again in a position where we are the ones who are forgiving rather than seeking God's forgiveness.

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

Colossians 3:12-13 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do you.

In both cases Paul mentions that we are to forgive others as we have been forgiven by God. We're going to go back again to Ephesians 4, read part of this paragraph, and then come up to verse 32 once again. What Paul does here is enumerate a number a ways in which we can sin against one another.

Ephesians 4:25-32 Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. Be you angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil. Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needs. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed unto the day of

redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be you kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you.

The way this section begins, in verse 25, I get the distinct impression that Paul is reiterating back to them things he heard that had been going on in the congregation. He probably heard there was a thief, or thieves, and that people had angry tempers and were sinning against one another through that. Some were not speaking the truth one to another, because he says, " We are members, one of another." But corrupt communication was proceeding out of their mouths, and so forth.

Attach to this the thought from I John 4: 20: "*These people say they love God, and they are doing this to their brother in the church?*" You see, there was something wrong here. What was wrong was these people's perception of what loving God means. Paul and John both pointed out, "*If you're doing these kind of things to one another, you don't love God either. You need to be forgiven by God, and then go on from there to forgive one another.*"

What we're beginning to come to here is we have to realize these things were done right within this congregation of God, and this kind of thing happens right within the Church of the Great God, and the church of God in general as well. We're coming to an important understanding that helps set the stage for one being in a position to forgive, and that is that a major element enabling us to forgive is the recognition of and the acceptance of the fact that we are sinners just like the people who sin against us. Maybe we don't steal, but we might lie. Which is worse? We might feel greatly offended if somebody in the congregation stole something from us, but we feel no offense of guilt at all when we lie to somebody else. You see, our standard of judgment is prejudiced in favor of the self. Should we not judge ourselves just as hard as we judge those who sin against us? The answer is yes. This is important because it begins to set the stage for being able to forgive, because once we begin to see that we're all really on the same level, giving forgiveness begins to become easier.

You might recall the Publican and the Pharisee of the parable in Luke 18. I know I pointed out to you as we were going through that parable that both of these men were sinners. One *looked* like a sinner, and the other *didn't* look like a sinner, but they were both sinners. They were just simply sinners in different areas. The Publican's sins were obvious. Everybody knew that the Publicans were getting as much out of the people as they possibly could by jacking up the taxes, or whatever they did to get a bit of graft.

Meanwhile, the white collar Pharisee was sinning in a really slick executive way, maybe embezzling from his company, or whatever. He was guilty of self-righteousness, thinking that he was so much better than everybody else. That part is obvious right in the parable. Which one is worse? Looking at it legally, one is just as bad as the other. "The wages of sin is death," whether it's embezzlement by the white collar crime, or whether it's lying by a Publican. They are both earning exactly the same penalty. So in that case one sin is just as great as the other. In that parable, the only difference between the two men was that the one recognized his need for forgiveness, and the other one did not.

What I'm hoping to accomplish in this sermon is for us to recognize our need for forgiveness, because that is a *major* step toward being *able* to forgive. If we're able to do this, and I want to add that we *can* do it if we don't allow our deceitful heart to overwhelm us. This will level the playing field by helping to dissolve one's self-centered prejudices and making righteous judgments, and therefore forgiveness is a great deal easier.

We're going to go back to verse 32 in thought here. God's requirement, given through Paul, is that we be kind to one another, tenderhearted, *forgiving*. In verse 31 Paul uses the word "malice." We're to set aside malice, which is *evil* intent. It's what's in the heart. We may look pretty good on the outside but have evil intent with what we do. God's requirement is that we lay those things aside, like evil intent, and replace them with tenderhearted mercy, kindness and forgiveness as part of our mode of operation in imitation of Him.

Why does Paul have to instruct us to lay aside evil intent and replace it with tenderhearted mercy and kindness? The answer is because human nature's first reaction when it is offended is almost invariably to retaliate in order to defend itself. The *fight or flight* mechanism kicks in, and it then goes on to take vengeance, usually first verbally, and often through reputation-destroying gossip that may sometimes include slander. If that doesn't bring the desired satisfaction, it will go on to take even more stern physical measures.

I'm going to go back to Romans 12:17-21, where the same apostle's advice is given in another somewhat similar situation.

Romans 12:17-21 Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lies in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath, for it is written, Vengeance is mine: I will repay, says the Lord. Therefore if your enemy hunger, feed him: if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing you shall heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

In an overview here we can understand that human nature is vindictive. It is a powerful drive to get even with those who damage its ego. We need to understand that retaliation is central to human nature's operation. This is yet another place where pride lifts a person up so that it might show itself as God. This is because pride forces us to assume, as a private individual (yourself), the right to function as a civil magistrate, judge, jury, and carry out the punishment according to its own judgment. This in effect takes God right out of the picture. That is why Paul says "Give place unto wrath": "Vengeance is Mine, says the Lord."

What I'm talking about here sometimes takes a great deal of self-control, but I will guarantee you this, that if we don't control ourselves, giving forgiveness is going to be immeasurably harder. If we follow the course that would be normal for human nature, it takes God right out of the picture. This virtually assures that not only will the judgment be wrong, so also will be the punishment.

I wrote myself a note to inject here that Paul is in no way saying that one should not take steps

to resolve the issue. We should. The second thing that he does not say, but really becomes evident when we try to do it, is that doing as God commands here takes a great deal of faith.

Another part of the reason for this command—this obligation that God lays on us, which is our duty to do (as he says in Romans 12)—is for the distinctiveness of Christianity to be witnessed. If Christians retaliate, then the world can honestly claim that Christianity is no different from any other religion, and no different from the unconverted. We are to set our affairs right in the sight of everybody, especially God. If there is a circumstance that we cannot live at peace with somebody, we are to make sure that we are not the cause of that warfare, that we have done what we could to establish peace, but *never ever* at the sacrifice of truth. You don't compromise truth just to make peace.

There are situations that at times will severely test our conversion. However, we must always leave room for God's wrath. The emphasis there is on *God's* wrath. We may get angry, but God says, "Be angry, and sin not." If we take the wrath ourselves, we have sinned. We have broken this command. This makes forgiveness so much more difficult.

This is the time of the year for I Peter 2, so let's go back there again. I just want to use this as an overall example within the context of this sermon that Christ showed us that He did this. Even though every charge against Him was false, and even though (as we found out in Richard's sermon of a couple weeks ago) that the Hebrew law, the Jewish law, was broken seventeen times in order to convict Him, Jesus never opened His mouth in retaliation. Everything about that trial was unfair.

I Peter 2:21-23 For even hereunto were you called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that you should follow his steps. Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again: when he suffered, he threatened not: but committed himself to him that judges righteously.

Christ, guided by faith, humility, and the fear of God, submitted to *God's* will, *God's* judgment, *God's wrath*. We'll come back to this example a little bit later in the sermon. Now I want you to go to I Corinthians 4:12-13. Look at the advice. (We're breaking into a sentence. Paul was talking about himself and his companions.)

I Corinthians 4:12-13 And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.

I Corinthians 6:7 Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because you go to law one with another. Why do you not rather take wrong? Why do you not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?

We're going to look at Peter, as he weighs in on this.

I Peter 3:9 Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that you are thereunto called, that you should inherit a blessing.

I want to note right here that none of these verses we have just read provide forgiveness, nor are the verses telling us that doing good is going to have the desired effect immediately. Christ did everything right in that trial, and He was still put to death. They are only telling us what *is right* for us—as sons of God—right now. Now why is it right? (1) It is right because it puts faith in God *actively* to work. (2) It is right because it leaves room for the all-wise Judge (God) to clearly exercise His sovereignty. (3) It is right because it sets the stage for a truly effective forgiveness both in us (because God will forgive as we forgive) and for others benefit.

Even as Jesus' example during His trial and crucifixion set the stage for the eventual forgiveness for *all of mankind*, it didn't happen immediately. But because He did it right (almost two thousand years ago), all of mankind is eventually going to be forgiven. It is *right* because it sets the stage for peace rather than war. It takes two to tango. If there's nobody to fight against, the war dissolves, doesn't it?

Conducting our lives in this manner is virtually guaranteed to be perceived as *weak* by the world. How many movies have you seen in which a person portrayed is trying to follow through on his beliefs, and would act in that manner? A couple of them came to mind when this illustration came to mind in which I have seen that. The local bully is shown goading this person time after time until the person is once more pushed too far, and then he explodes in retaliation, taking vengeance. Everybody in the audience either cheers, or at least heaves a sigh of relief, silently urging him to get even, and get even good.

What kind of a person was Christ? How was He described in the Bible in terms of His disposition? Let's go to Matthew 12: 18-21. This is a prophecy being quoted.

Matthew 12:18 Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall show judgment to the Gentiles.

I want you to note this because of what should be the outgrowth of a person having the spirit of God.

Matthew 12:20-21 He shall not strive, nor cry: neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name shall the Gentiles trust.

In more modern English what that means is what one would not hear from Christ. One would not hear the uproarious public wrangling and the boisterous boasting of a revolutionary demagogue. Even though what He was saying was certainly revolutionary, it was not given in the *voice* of a revolutionary out on the street trying to wrangle all kinds of people to join with

Him in a crusade. He didn't do that. On the other hand (and I'm putting this into modern English) it says that His conduct would never be callous or indifferent to others' positions, but always with tender concern, genuine sympathy, and reserve of manner.

Matthew 11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls.

Matthew 21:5 Tell you the daughter of Zion, Behold, your King comes unto you, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.

I want to examine this word "*meek*" because it is really interesting. The closest word we seem to have for this word in English is "*gentleness*." But *gentleness* is only partially a synonym because the word is mostly describing an inward disposition rather than outward behavior in one's relations with another. If we were looking at a person who was really meek, he would look gentle. We could look at somebody who is gentle, but maybe he is not really meek in the way that this word means meek, because meekness is something that comes from the inside out.

I'll expand the definition. It is actually the temper, or the spirit, that permits a person to meet the circumstances of life in the proper temperament. It is that spirit that looks upon God's dealings with us as good, regardless of whether they appear good on the outside. A simple illustration: Christ went through that lopsided trial and that horrible death never opening His mouth in any argument whatsoever at all, not defending Himself, because He was meek. He looked upon that situation (as horrible as it was on the outside) as good. That's hard to fathom.

It is the spirit which grasps God's sovereignty over all things, and therefore does not dispute them or resist them. It is that virtue which greatly enables one to exercise self-control. It is that characteristic which may very well be the firstfruit of humility, because without humility one will never even possess the meekness. It is this spirit that causes one to *be* gentle and give others the impression that the meek person is in reality weak, but that is not the case at all. I don't think any of us would call Jesus or Moses weak. On the contrary, they were *very strong men*. The key was their relationship with God. They saw God in *everything* in life. Whether He actually directed it or not was really in the end unimportant. *God was there!* They were reacting to Him. They knew that everything was under control.

So where does meekness come from? It is an outgrowth of experiencing a close warm and loving relationship with God. It is the outgrowth of intimately knowing God. Meekness is virtually transferred to us by osmosis within the relationship. It is the evidence of growing to become like God in disposition. Does God have everything under control? Yes He does. A person who really knows God knows that wherever they are, God is, and everything is under control. They don't *have* to get angry. They don't *have* to retaliate. They know Him so well they can say, "*My Dad will take care of it.*" It is meekness that plays a major role in setting the stage so that we can forgive. God will take care of it.

As we close here, I want to show you an example of a man who exercised this trait under a very stressful circumstance. Let's go to II Samuel 16:5-14 and see this example in David. This occurred when David was fleeing for his life when Absalom overthrew him.

II Samuel 16:5-12 And when king David came to Bahurim, behold, thence came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera: he came forth, and cursed still [meaning continuously] as he came. And he cast stones at David, and at all the servants of king David: and all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left. And thus said Shimei when he cursed, Come out, come out, you bloody man, and you man of Belial: The LORD has returned upon you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead you have reigned; and the LORD has delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom your son: and behold, you are taken in your mischief because you are a bloody man. Then said Abishai the son of Zeruah unto the king, Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over, I pray you, and take off his head. And the king said, What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruah? [Zeruah incidentally was David's sister, so Abishai was his nephew.] so let him curse, because the LORD has said unto him, Curse David,. Who shall then say, Wherefore have you done so? [Who's going to call God into account?] And David said to Abishai, and to all his servants, Behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeking my life: how much more now may this Benjamite do it? Let him alone, and let him curse; for the LORD has bidden him. It may be that the LORD will look on my affliction, and that the LORD will requite me good for his cursing this day.

Did good come out of Christ's sacrifice? You bet it did!

II Samuel 16:13-14 And as David and his men went by the way, Shimei went along on the hill's side over against him, and cursed as he went, and threw stones at him, and cast dust. And the king, and all the people that were with him, came weary, and refreshed themselves there.

You can see almost the whole picture in this, even aside from what Christ did. With all those other people with David, there is no indication that anybody else saw God's sovereign hand looking over the events that were going on. But David did. He accepted the abuse that God permitted without resistance. The story doesn't end there, because in II Samuel 19 David was now restored to the kingship.

II Samuel 19:16 And Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite, which was of Bahurim, hasted and came down with the men of Judah to meet king David.

That guy was either very bold or didn't know any better! But maybe God put him up to it to see what David would do.

II Samuel 19:17-23 And there were a thousand men of Benjamin with him, and Ziba the servant of the house of Saul, and his fifteen sons and his twenty servants with him: and they went over Jordan before the king. And there went over a ferryboat to carry over the king's household, and to do what he thought good. And Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king, as he was come over Jordan: And said unto the king, Let not my lord impute iniquity unto me, neither do you remember that which thy servant did perversely the day that my lord the king went out of Jerusalem, that the king should take it to his heart. For your servant does know that I have sinned: therefore, behold, I am come the first this day of all the house of Joseph to go down to meet my lord the king. But Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered and said, Shall not Shimei be put to death for this because he cursed the LORD'S anointed? And David said, What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah, that you should this day be adversaries unto me? shall there any man be put to death this day in Israel? For do not I know that I am this day king over Israel? Therefore the king said unto Shimei, You shall not die. And the king sware unto him.

David forgave Shimei. I think this is a good place to stop. That is the end of the sermon for today.