

New Covenant Priesthood (Part Twelve)

Forgiveness and Sacrifice (Conclusion)

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We're going to begin this sermon in Proverbs 18:19 to touch on something that is going to be a major part of the message today.

Proverbs 18:19 A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle.

We saw during my sermon on the Last Day of Unleavened Bread (April 3, 2002) what can be the extremely serious position of anyone who does not follow through with God's command that we are to *forgive even as we are forgiven*. Sometimes, brethren, reconciliation can be very difficult. I think we're finding out that barriers to friendship are easily erected, but destroying and dissolving the barrier between us once it is erected can be very, very difficult.

In that sermon, we also saw a major thing in Romans 2—a potential for a spiritual condition I called "the vulnerability of the upright." It is not at all that difficult for us to allow pride to suddenly lure us into a sense of superiority over others even as we are (in principle) falling short in the same manner as the ones we feel superior to. Brethren, not one of us—just like the unconverted—lives up to all we know of God's way. Our mind is capable of knowing—sometimes long in advance—what we are able to do, what we can envision. In other words, our vision outruns our ability to perform.

Simply *knowing* does not create character. Sometimes a very complex, difficult and long process that includes learning, sacrifice, experience, and making choices in relationships with both God and men, creates character. The process I'm talking about includes the active use of such qualities as faith, and love, the fear of God, hope and vision, endurance, humility, meekness, and forgiveness.

There is absolutely no room for an elevated sense of our value because we have been given qualities in advance of others in order to prepare us for the time when they will be given theirs. There is no way that we have, in any way, *earned* the privileges that have been given to us. Every one of them was given. We were made holy and sanctified on the basis of God's grace only. Our responsibility is simply to respond to what He has given. No one can respond to what He has *not* been given. Therefore God's judgment is greater and more exacting upon those who have been given the gifts. There is where we bring ourselves into danger.

The gifts impose a very important, greater, and higher responsibility along with the privileges. So instead of having a sense of superiority that reveals itself in harsh attitude, judgment, and the wrong sort of separation from others, we should be humbled by the greatness of the favor that has been given.

There are times when preparing a sermon that I get a pleasurable and excited feeling that I am on to something good. I am discovering things about myself, and about God and His way, and about human nature that I can share with others. That was the way I felt when I was preparing that sermon I gave on the Last Day of Unleavened Bread.

In the same manner, there are times, after delivering a sermon, that I feel up or down about it. This past week (unlike how I felt about preparing the sermon) I didn't feel good about giving it. I think Evelyn hit upon the reason why when we discussed it. She suggested that I felt bad because it was such a heavy subject. It's not one of those messages that fills one with encouragement and inspiration. Rather it was an alarming message of how much pride insinuates itself into the fabric of our character, and suddenly, without even being aware, it inflates our opinion of ourselves over others and motivates rebellion against God.

Through these two characteristics—the subtle inflation of our evaluation of ourselves, and the rebellion—it dominates much of our life, and at times produces intense sadness and pain both in our lives, and in the lives of others that we love. These thoughts are alarming once we begin to realize what a battle we have on our hands. It may also be discouraging to realize how

many times we're going to have to sacrifice in order to stop pride's negative domination of our relationship, and how much our ego may be painfully smashed in the process.

Before we go any further on the subject of forgiving, I want to mention that pride does have a positive aspect to it as well. We use this term to indicate self-respect, such as when one might say to another who has done something poorly when he could have done a lot better, "*Where's your pride?*" In that case it can be a positive influence for good. We're to love others *as* we love ourselves. We're to love them in the same manner and to the same degree we love ourselves. If we love ourselves by God's definition of love, then we can also love others to the same intensity and degree, in the same manner, and that is very good.

We also use pride to indicate pleasure, joy, or satisfaction in a job well done, as God did when He pronounced all that He had accomplished during the Creation Week as "**very good.**" God created us to experience this pleasure when we do well, and this too is good. That pleasure serves to impel us to continue to perform at that level, or even to improve a notch or two higher. In so doing we are using our gifts to serve, to entertain, to encourage others, and also to glorify God.

It is when it is allowed to grab control and turn us into self-centered, self-serving, and self-seeking, self-glorifying people with elevated opinions and biased judgments that it becomes destructive to relationships. This produces rebellion, and it lifts us *above* having to answer to or to submit to God's law or tradition.

I don't think that any of us actually planned to be proud. The influence is part of our environment because we share our existence on earth with Satan and his horde of demons. Prideful rebellion against God is the foundation of their operation, and gradually through life their attitude becomes ours.

Being unforgiving is part of pride's fruit, and it *must be overcome* . It **MUST** be overcome. A good portion of this sermon is going to be devoted to

showing us that it absolutely **MUST** be overcome, or I will tell you bluntly that not one who has not overcome this is going to be in His kingdom. It will become clear *why* as we go along. In fact it will become clear pretty quickly.

Let's go back to Matthew 18 once again to the end of that parable Jesus gave. We're going to pick this up in verse 32. The "lord" here is the lord of the man who would not forgive the person who owed him a small amount.

Matthew 18:32 Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O you wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you desired me.

The word "desired" there literally says, "begged." "*You actually begged me.*"

Matthew 18:33-34 Should not you also have had compassion on your fellow servant, even as I had pity on you? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors [to the torturers] till he should pay all that was due unto him.

This already begins to indicate that those who do not forgive *even as they are forgiven* are going to be tormented with pain. That's as plain as anything. Now in verse 34, Christ is telling here the application to you and to me.

Matthew 18:34 So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you if you from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

This series of verses has some frightening aspects to it, and I'm going to give you a number of them.

It clearly shows in verses 32 and 33 that God expects reciprocity.

Hang onto that word "reciprocity" because it's going to become important. God *expects* reciprocity. His forgiveness of us is the model and the foundation of our forgiveness of others. That's what He says right there in

verses 32 and 33. "Even as I have forgiven you" is the model, the example. We are to forgive like Him. "Even as" means, "*in the same manner as I have pity on you.*"

In order for God to forgive, the Lord had to make a great sacrifice.

The sacrifice was costly to the One who forgave. Here in the parable it was a tremendous pile of money. It was about \$3 billion American. I don't want us to get focused on the amount, except for the greatness of it.

Though the word does not appear in this series of five verses, it is strongly implied that one of the main reasons the servant did not reciprocate his forgiveness is that he did not appreciate the value of the forgiveness given him. He did not hold it as being precious.

Applied directly to us, it indicates that he did not grasp the foul and serious nature of either his sins against his lord, nor did he appreciate the cost of the sacrifice required to enable his lord to forgive him. Careless ingratitude plays a major role in our failure to forgive others.

In verse 35 it says, "***Every one*** ." There are ***no*** exceptions.

This warning applies to all of us. All of us must forgive our brother who sins against us. There are no exceptions.

It should give us pause to think that God does not forget our sins as quickly as we might like to think.

Taken as a whole, the parable indicates that even though we ask for forgiveness as the servant did his lord, the Lord waits to see what kind of fruit is going to be borne following the appeal. This is an extension of John the Baptist's statement in Matthew 3:8, that one should "bring forth fruits fitting [*or worthy*] of repentance." God waits to see what we're going to do the next time somebody sins against us.

God's warning states that we must forgive from our heart.

The forgiveness that we give cannot be flippant, breezy, or carelessly given. It must be sincere and meaningful, and meant with all of our heart. Now why? At least part of the answer is because *our own forgiveness depends on it*. Do you want to be forgiven? Then forgive others from the heart, because our forgiveness from God depends on it.

I've mentioned a number of times that there is (very definitely) a principle of reciprocity working in our relationship with God. We need to understand the seriousness of God's expectation of us. We're going to go now to Matthew 7: 1-2.

Matthew 7:1-2 Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, *you* shall be judged: and with what measure you mete [or use], it shall be measured to *you* again.

In a very real way, the measure of forgiveness we give to others is the measure that we are capable of receiving from God. That's not John Ritenbaugh's word. That is exactly what it says there. The measure, the degree, that we forgive others, is the degree, the measure, that is going to be given to us. That is reciprocity in action. It is equal dealing on this side and that side. I didn't twist that. That is exactly what God's Son says to us.

Our own judgment sets the standard that we shall receive in return. You can understand why Jesus said "from the heart." The reality of this is, if we aren't forgiven, we have nobody to blame but ourselves. Let that sink in. You can't shift it to somebody else. We can't justify, we can't rationalize, because *we* are the ones who set the degree of forgiveness. God makes this fact of life very plain, and He repeats this principle many times in His word.

God judges according to truth. We saw that in Romans 2 last week. The truth of the matter—regarding His judgment of whether or not He is going to forgive us—is that we are going to be forgiven by Him to the same [degree] that we forgive others. That's the truth. Let's go to Mark 11, and we'll see another shocking verse on this subject.

Mark 11:24-26 Therefore I say unto you, What things soever you desire, when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you shall have them. And when you stand praying, forgive, if you have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

Isn't that plain? There is something else I want to point out here. In verse 25 it says, "that your Father also which is in heaven **MAY** forgive you." It doesn't say, " **WILL** ," does it? The English word "may" implies "*permission*" to forgive. It's clearly conditional. Now what is the condition? The condition is— *whether we have forgiven others* —so that God *may* forgive us. When we forgive others, ...believe it or not, ...we are actually giving Him *permission* to forgive us! That is an interesting thought to let rattle around in our cranium.

Whether or not we like to think of it in this way, our forgiveness gives God permission to forgive us. God's action is actually limited and constrained by *our* action. This is reciprocity in practical application. What this adds up to is that the wonderful experience of forgiving cannot be given to a heart that knows nothing of forgiveness.

If God just automatically forgave, He would not be the Father as He is described in His word as One who chastens, who disciplines, who teaches, and puts His children whom He loves through drills in order that they might become like Him. He would be nothing but a heavenly version of a rich indulgent parent spoiling his children by giving them their every wish, but having no concern about teaching them kindness, and goodness, and mercy, and compassion, and pity.

If we retain a hard, relentless ,and retaliating spirit, we set up the obstacles to our own forgiveness. There can be no casual receiving of this extremely costly gift of forgiveness as if it is an automatic affair like going to the store to buy something. God is judging. Life is serious.

Let's go on to James, because he adds his own serious aspect to this. Turn to James 2:8.

James 2:8-13 If you fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, You shall love your neighbor as yourself, you do well: But if you have respect to persons, you commit sin, and are convicted of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if you commit no adultery, yet if you kill, you are become a transgressor of the law. So speak you, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy that has showed no mercy; and mercy rejoices against judgment.

Beginning in verse 8, James is developing a sequence of law, transgression, judgment, and mercy. These four are linked as vital aspects of Christian life because they are realities that all of us are dealing with. He does this because we exercise some control over every one of them, and James is concerned that we exercise it properly.

You might wonder where James got that statement in verse 10. It actually came out of Deuteronomy 27 from a context that begins in verse 11. This is the time that God had half the Israelites on one mountain, and half on the other mountain, and they read the blessings and the curses. The context that we are looking at here actually begins in verse 15.

Deuteronomy 27:15 Cursed be the man that makes any graven or molten image. [We're talking about sin, are we not? We're talking about breaking the commandment against idolatry.]

Deuteronomy 27:16 Cursed be he that sets light by his father or his mother. [There's the fifth commandment right there.]

Deuteronomy 27:17 Cursed be he that removes his neighbour's landmark. [That's stealing.]

Deuteronomy 27:18 Cursed be he that makes the blind to wander out of the way. [Where's the mercy, compassion, and pity? This is taking advantage of someone weaker than you.]

Deuteronomy 27:19 Cursed be he that perverts the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow.

Deuteronomy 27:20 Cursed be he that lies with his father's wife. [We're getting into the area of incest now.]

Deuteronomy 27:21 Cursed be he that lies with any manner of beast.

Deuteronomy 27:22 Cursed be he that lies with his sister.

Deuteronomy 27:23 Cursed be he that lies with his mother in law.

Deuteronomy 27:24 Cursed be he that smites his neighbour secretly, *And all the people shall say, Amen* .

He didn't say—"And all the people shall say, Amen"—as we were going through *each* one of them, but every one of those verses is followed by an "amen." Do you know what "amen" means. It means, "*so be it.*" It means, "*I agree.*" It means, "*I approve with what is being said.*"

Deuteronomy 27:26 Cursed be he that confirms not *all* the words of this law to do them. **And all the people shall say, Amen** .

James lifted that right out of Deuteronomy 27. James 2:10 is a practical application of that broad principle stated in Deuteronomy 27:26. Verse 26 says, "I agree with everything that has been stated here. Therefore, since I agree with everything that has been stated here, if I break any one of these laws, I am responsible for bringing the plague of that curse on myself."

How about those apples? Life is serious. Making a covenant with God is not something to be trifled with. God wants us to be in His image, and it takes

serious-mindedness to be in His image; not this pap that the Protestant churches are feeding their people—that God is going to save us regardless. No, He's not. He wants to see that we are responsible enough to be imitating Him in everything in our life. The reason this is important begins to come out here in James 2:12.

James 2:12 So speak you, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

That law of liberty was what was being stated there in Deuteronomy 27. Of course it contains the Ten Commandments. James gives us a direct and emphatic command that we both speak and act in accordance with God's law that gives freedom. Why does he do this? He does this because we are being judged against the standards of that law which brings freedom. It is the transgression of the law which also brings upon us the problem of sin, and needing mercy. Mercy is beginning to come into the realm of James' thinking now.

Let's think of it this way. Anyone who transgresses the law—according to the principle that is given there in Deuteronomy 27—is actually bringing the curse upon himself. When we bring the curse upon ourselves, we are actually bringing *judgment* upon ourselves. We are also bringing upon ourselves the need for mercy. Once we realize we need mercy, what do we do? We do the same thing that the man in the parable in Matthew 18 did. He went to his lord and **begged** for forgiveness. He **begged** for mercy. He needed it. **We** need it.

God shows in that parable He is willing, that He freely grants us mercy. We also saw, in that parable, the teaching that He expects us to imitate Him. Now James 2:13 begins to come into the picture, because it shows what happens when we neglect or we refuse to show mercy to our fellowman. God withholds mercy from us, and instead He gives us judgment *without* mercy. The Bible is consistent in this matter. We will not receive mercy unless we reciprocate God's mercy originally given us.

Mercy is defined in the dictionary as: "*compassion, forbearance, or pity.*" Chances are if you look up the word in your dictionary, you will find it's going to say (right at the beginning) that mercy is one, or two, or three of

those terms; but then it will very likely have a longer definition as my dictionary did. I think that this is very interesting when it is applied within the context of what we are talking about here. The longer definition given in my dictionary (the *Reader's Digest Oxford Complete Word Finder*) says that mercy is: "compassion, or forbearance shown to **enemies**, or offenders, who are in one's power." That last part is important.

When we want mercy, and we go to God, isn't He the One who is in power, and we are begging Him, because we have sinned against Him? When somebody sins against *us*, who is the one who holds the power? *We* do, and so our brother comes to us begging—asking for forgiveness. Now that we have the power, are we going to show the same compassion, and pity, and forbearance—the same kind of mercy that we expect from God—to those who have sinned against us? Are we going to use that power in the right way, and forgive? Why does God want us to forgive? The answer, in a way, is quite simple. It is by this means, in practical application, that God is giving us the opportunity to *practice* a weak form of *giving grace*.

James goes on to make a rather unusual statement, that mercy triumphs over judgment. Take the word "judgment" out of your mind for a minute and put in the more commonly-used English word "justice." What is justice? Justice is the getting of what we deserved. Right? Mercy *triumphs* over what we deserve. Did the man who came to his lord in Matthew 18 deserve to be forgiven? No. God's mercy was triumphing over what he deserved. He deserved to have to pay the debt, but God gave him *grace*. The man didn't bring forth the fruits, and so God took away the grace and put the sins back on the man's head, along with the torturer, and possibly also the death penalty as well.

Now put yourself in the same position as God, as one who is exercising the power to forgive, the power to exercise grace, the power to be merciful. Whether the person deserved it or not is not really the question. Did we really deserve to be forgiven? Not on your life! But somehow or another we have to learn to give grace.

I want you to understand this statement here does not exclude justice from God's thinking, and it shouldn't exclude justice from our thinking in our

operation in daily life. We could really be sappy parents if we didn't execute some judgment on our children in giving them a spanking or whatever kind of punishment they deserve. But maybe, in what they did, they may have actually (according to God's law) deserved death. Do you ever stop to think of that? We just read that in Deuteronomy 27—*if a child makes **light** of his parents*. It also says in Exodus that a child who swears at his parents deserves death. Do you think God isn't strict? He could demand justice, but mercy triumphs over it. Mercy does not rule out justice, which means that even though one may forgive, there may be a penalty to follow, even as God does.

We have to understand that we can never claim God's mercy just because *we* have performed deeds of mercy. Mercy is never earned. It is always something that is given. It is always something that is **granted**, and we have to learn this. It is given because it is in God's power in relation to us, and it is in our power to do so when somebody has sinned against us. Do you realize that if mercy can be earned, it would cease to be mercy? There would be no such thing. It would be nothing more than a wage.

What about in our case? The reality is that we don't really have the power to forgive in the legal sense, because all sin is against God. He is the only One who can **really** forgive. But in our case, this is what enables us to operate so that mercy triumphs over justice. By faith we look to God as the One who grants it. The triumph of mercy is based on the atonement made possible by Christ through **His** crucifixion and **His** resurrection. The emphasis is on the word "**His** ."

Mercy (grace) triumphs over what we deserve (justice) because of Christ's meritorious works. The same basic rule is true in operation when we forgive our brother. The person who sins against us is not forgiven because of his meritorious work toward us, but because we, by faith, obey God's command to forgive *from the heart*. We are therefore doing something that we would not do except, that through Christ, we have been brought into a relationship with God, and are applying the things we are learning as a result of that relationship. We therefore forgive, and leave the justice to God's discretion. Mercy, you see, therefore has triumphed over justice.

At that point in time, it is going to be more than likely we don't even know whether the person has really repented. At that point in time, it doesn't matter whether we know for sure, because, in faith, the judgment has been handed over to God. That is *the government of God* in action.

Let's go to Luke 23:34:

Luke 23:34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.

Here is an example of a couple of elements important to forgiving. We all understand that one of the conditions to being forgiven is repentance. I want you to think about this circumstance when it took place in its wider context. There is absolutely *no evidence* that anybody involved in Christ's illegal trial, His conviction, and His crucifixion had repented of *anything*. These people, brethren, didn't even know they had sinned! Do you see a pattern being established here? What is shown is that Christ was clearly **WILLING** to forgive them. He was therefore already of the mind to extend mercy.

Now another thing: It does not say here that they were forgiven *then* and *there*. They will be forgiven when they understand and repent before God and ask for forgiveness in the second resurrection.

Is Christ setting the example for us? Whom did He ask to do the forgiving? God. By faith, mercy is triumphing over judgment, and so our responsibility (according to this model, this pattern that is established here) is that we are to be in the mind to forgive—to forgive from our hearts, and to follow the example of Christ, and by faith hand the judgment (the justice) over to God. In that case, in our situation, mercy has triumphed over justice.

Do you know what's going to happen? When the time comes, God is going to reveal the sins of these people to them, and then they are going to understand that the real sin was against Him and His Son. These people are going to repent, and the mercy then is that they will not have the death penalty facing them. But you see, we are free and clear, because when we had the opportunity to extend the mercy, we did.

The instruction for us then is that we must be ever ready to be of the mind to forgive by faith, because this is one of the first and major steps toward restoring peace. The Beatitude in Matthew 5:9 says: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God." It is not, "*Blessed are the resentful and grudge-bearers.*" For one thing, the stress of holding grudges and the bearing of resentment and bitterness is very detrimental to both physical and psychological health, and it does absolutely nothing to restoring peace.

Let's go to Hebrews 12:12-15.

Hebrews 12:12-15 Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.

This section aptly describes a person involved in the very kind of situation that we are studying into here. "Root of bitterness" in verse 16 is actually a symbol for idolatry. It's something that is hidden below the surface of the ground, but as long as that root is alive, it's going to eventually produce a plant and fruit. A root of bitterness is going to produce idolatry.

Now what is the sin that pride will not permit one to take the steps and make peace? What's the sin? It's idolatry. I'll give it another name. In this case the idolatry is *self-worship*. Self-worship is going to produce bitterness, and bitterness is going to produce other evil fruit.

Doesn't this whole word picture one being worn down, dispirited, discouraged and in need of healing and of strength? Their hands hang down, their knees are weary. You can just see them practically dragging along. He is describing not necessarily something that is physically taking place, but he is using this to describe someone's *inner* psychological sickness. Now what is the counsel? It is *to repent*, and to make peace. It is to change your mind and make peace, because there is a root of bitterness that is actually producing this feebleness and need of healing.

Let's turn now to Romans 5:1-2.

Romans 5:1-2 Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Romans 5:6-8 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet perhaps for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commends his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Any of us familiar with computers is aware of justified margins. The word "justified" means "*to align with a standard.*" When you are making a document in [Microsoft] Word, the standard is the edge of the paper, and so you align, you justify your writing with the side of the page. Legally the term has the same sort of application. To justify is to align with a *legal* standard. In this case, the legal standard is God's standard of righteousness. So justification means to square things up, to make things right, to align with the standard. In the spiritual and psychological realm that we are dealing with, justification is shown to produce a very important fruit. What is it? Peace with God.

This particular peace is a standing, a position in relation to God. You are not to think of this peace here as being a feeling. When we say a person is at peace, it means that their spirit is tranquil. That is not what is being talked about here. What *is* being talked about here is the sacrifice that the Father and the Son made. Christ's sacrifice was made in order that there would be a legal basis for the forgiveness of sin so that when a person repents, it aligns them then with the standard of God—the Ten Commandments of righteousness—and it produces then a legal position. They are justified before God. The feeling comes *later* .

The feeling is something that develops *within* the relationship once we begin to understand that, "*Hey! I really am accepted into the presence of God! He*

really is my spiritual Father. He really is dealing in my life." This is something that grows. Prior to that, though, is the fact that we are looking at a legal standing, and God is now satisfied because the legal requirement has been met through the blood of Jesus Christ. This is what opens up the possibilities that are then stated by Paul a little bit further.

First, it produces peace. Second, it produces access to God. Third, it produces rejoicing in hope of the glory of God. This means there is a possibility that we can actually inherit the kingdom of God, and so we rejoice that the possibility is there. What I want us to get is the fact that what starts this whole process that may end with us being in the Kingdom of God is a **SACRIFICE** .

Who absorbed the pain of our sins? Somebody else did. He absorbed not only the pain, but the death that we deserved. So reconciliation is produced by this means. These things that it produces are a far cry from anger, simmering resentment, and fear, or a dispirited bitterness that we saw in Hebrews 12. Because of this process, uplifting attitudes replace the alienating discouraging ones. We need to understand that the same process that makes peace with God is the pattern for making peace between men.

Notice that the Father and the Son didn't wait around for us to come to repentance before they *moved* to make peace. Now get this: The Ones sinned against *moved* to make peace while we were still very clearly their *enemy*. They are Peacemakers. What they did, in this sense, is less important to us at this point than the principle that is involved. They made a sacrifice to produce reconciliation, fellowship with each other, and hope. In other words a healing took place. A healing of a breach occurred. This is exactly what the scripture terms it when a change of this sort is made. The sacrifice that begins the process of forgiveness does not merely begin the healing of a rift, but also the healing of the mind and the spirit as well.

Let's go back to Ephesians 4:32.

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

Ephesians 5:1-2 Be you therefore followers of God as dear children: And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, and has given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor.

There is the example. The Father and the Son didn't wait for us to ask them for forgiveness. They made the sacrifice necessary to make it possible for them to forgive. So here we are, back in a context where forgiveness is the subject. We are commanded to be tenderhearted, to forgive on the basis as God forgave us, and even so, we are warned, by the mention of Christ's sacrifice, that this is going to require sacrifice from us.

Sacrificing is rarely easy, and it will be a sacrifice because human nature doesn't want to forgive. Its solution is to become hateful and to retaliate. But brethren, wars never end among men because rarely is anybody willing to make the sacrifice, *trusting God* . There is the key. There are people who will sacrifice themselves to a cause. That is why Paul mentions this thing that "*some will even die for a good man.*" There are people who are willing to do that, but how many are willing to do it, trusting God? Only His sons will do it, because they are following the example of the Father and Son by *faith* . Faith is the key element here, because faith then opens up the door to *the love of God being shed abroad* —forgiving in that manner.

But don't be deceived. Just because we can make the connection and actually be doing it, don't be deceived that it's going to be easy. That's why the warning is here about sacrificing. It is essential to recognize, though, that God would not command us to do something that we cannot do. Regardless of how difficult the sacrifice may seem, it can be done. It's done by means of faith and love, that we are enabled to forgive as we *grow* , seeing His hand in events and trusting His judgment as to what is to be done. We must be different from the world. We can't conform to the world's pattern.

Paul acknowledges the difficulty in doing this in two ways. One of them is difficult to see in the King James translation, but perhaps can be seen in a more modern translation. In Ephesians 4:32, where it says "be you kind," in

the Greek it says, "*become you kind.*" That is an indication this is something we must **grow** into. We don't just automatically have it. We are to **grow** into it. We become this way, by way of a process, so that we are able to do it.

The second thing is the mention of *Christ's* sacrifice. He had to go through an awful lot of pain that we might be forgiven. Paul says that's the pattern—to sacrifice ourselves. Then we know that this—*forgiving as Christ forgives*, and *as God forgives*—is going to cost us something.

Incidentally, Paul's authority for this actually came out of the Sermon on the Mount. There is an important principle there, and I want to go back to that in Matthew 5:38.

Matthew 5:38-45 You have heard that it has been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That you resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue you at the law, and take away your coat, let him have your cloak also. And whosoever shall compel you to go a mile, go with him two. Give to him that asks you, and from him that would borrow of you turn not you away. You have heard that it has been said, You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despiteful use you, and persecute you. That you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

Believe it or not, Christ lifted this principle right out of the book of Exodus. We won't go into that because of a lack of time, but I have a simple question for you. When does a person become your enemy? It's when they do something against you, is it not? Up until the time they do something against you or me, they are not our enemy. Right? After they have sinned against you, they become your enemy. Now when are all the good things that Christ prescribes here to be done for the person? *After the person becomes your*

enemy . That is the time that we are, according to human nature, the *least* likely to do anything good for the other person who has now proven to be our enemy.

This prescription from Christ for making peace goes *beyond* merely giving forgiveness. Christ said your forgiveness has to be from your heart, and now He is adding that it cannot be static. It's got to be dynamic. You not only forgive the person, you begin doing good things for them, and in their behalf as well. That makes the sacrifice all the harder, because what we would like to do is forgive the person, and then turn our back on the person, and go our own way. They go their way. We separate, and hope we never see them again.

Christ said, "*Oh no. We not only forgive, we do good for our enemy.*" This is not easy, but that's what we're commanded to do. It may be that we won't have much opportunity to do good—especially now that the church is so scattered all over the place. But nonetheless, the principle is there. What Christ is aiming at here is not merely to forgive, but to make this person a friend—a real brother. It's required, but I would have to judge that it is not held against us as deeply and as importantly as the original forgiveness is. I'm sure that as we have opportunity to do the good would be part of this.

I would like to conclude this by giving you a summary of these three sermons. I came up with twelve points.

SUMMARY :

We are to ask for forgiveness every day because it is as needful for us spiritually as food is physically.

Forgiving is an obligation that we owe to God and to each other. It is commanded just as surely as "you shall not steal or lie."

We must understand and accept that we are sinners just like those who sin against us.

Human nature's first reaction is to retaliate, but if we do, we take God right out of the picture.

We must strongly avoid setting ourselves up as judge, jury, and executioner.

The example of Jesus' life is of meekness, not retaliation. We must follow His example.

Meekness is produced from within an intimate relationship with God.

Pride plays a very large part in forging the judgments that render us unforgiving.

Forgiveness cannot be carelessly or flippantly given. It must be from the heart.

This will almost invariably require sacrifice through the exercise of faith and love.

It is not good enough to merely forgive. We must also do good to those who sin against us.

The result of this process is peace and healing.

That concludes the sermon for today and this series. I believe that I am scheduled to speak again next week, but I think that I'll be on a different subject when that time comes.