



## Reconciling with One Another: Forgiveness

### Selected Scriptures

January 8, 2017

As we turn our attention to God's Word this morning, you can open your Bibles. With the passage of Scripture that Bret actually read to open us this morning, 1 John 1:9, we are going to get a running start with a bit of review of what we covered last week. We have entered into just a short little series, three weeks, it might go four but I think three, just a short little series on reconciling relationships.

I think all of us understand that even though we are Christians, we are not completely freed from the presence of sin. We wish it were so, but that day is coming when we will graduate and go to heaven, and then we will be free completely from the presence of sin in ourselves and in other people as well. We look forward to that day, and we'd love to speed it along if we could, if it weren't sinful to get there on our own. But as long as we are here on this Earth, doing the work that

the Lord has given us to do, we are going to experience sin. We are gonna experience our own sin, hurting other people, and we are gonna experience other people's sin hurting us. And when sin happens, as we talked about last time, it divides. It breaks relationships, and so we want to find out how to restore, reconcile broken relationships.

We started last week with trying to get a grasp on confessing sin. Confessing sin, that is the first step of biblical reconciliation. It is because it is the most fundamental of the steps. Whether we are reconciling with God or with one another, you cannot move forward in reconciling if you are not willing to acknowledge your sin. So humble yourself. Confess your sin. Shouldn't be hard; you have had practice at it because if you are a Christian and you claim the name of Christ, you had to do that to become a Christian. You had to acknowledge your sin before a holy God. As the Psalmist said in Psalm 130, "There is forgiveness with you, so that you may be feared." And so that's the only source of forgiveness is God. And so if we are gonna come before God, we have to seek his forgiveness, which means we have to confess our sin. We have done it before; let's continue doing it. We've got to humble ourselves and confess our sins to one another. We want to start first in

confession by confessing our sins toward God. We noted last time that all sin, whether it is a private sin or a public sin, all sin is against God.

Whenever we become aware of sin, we need to confess our sins, first and foremost to God. We reviewed this amazing promise of his in 1 John 1:9 that God will forgive us when we confess sin. It says there, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." God is gracious with us, to bring sin to mind, isn't he? And especially so when you, as a Christian, have the habit of cultivating a sensitive conscience before God. If your conscience is sensitive, then you will be aware when he is bringing sin to mind. God gave us the conscience for that very purpose, to bear witness to our sin. The conscience is that spiritual, you might call it a spiritual member, that mechanism within us which becomes sensitive to the guilt of our sin. It is that internal sense of shame that we feel, that spiritual warning light that goes off when we become aware of our guilt. When that is a regular experience for you of that warning light going off, and that's a good thing. Because, it's a sign of a sensitive conscience, which is a healthy thing. The conscience brings sin to mind and the conscience will either accuse us of



committing sin, tell us we are indeed guilty, or it will excuse us in a matter.

Our conscience is not an infallible guide; it's a warning light. It's like a nerve ending, sometimes your nerves fire when they shouldn't. Sometimes your conscience fires when it shouldn't. So your conscience is only as reliable as it is biblically informed. So we need to not only cultivate a sensitive conscience, but we also need to educate our conscience so it works properly. So it fires when it should, and it doesn't fire when it should not. When it alerts on something, we need to pay attention to that thing. We need to test those thoughts biblically and see if anything in our life is out of sorts.

God put the conscience there so that we can know that we need to confess our sins, so we can make something right with God or with, with one another. We need to deal with something that's spiritually damaged, just like when your nerve ending is alerting you that your hand is feeling something very very hot. You look down and say, oh, my hand is over an open flame, that's why it's hurting, so I'm going to pull my hand back. Hopefully, that happens quicker than I just described it. And you pull your

hand back so that there is no more damage to the tissue on your hand, right? Same thing when our conscience alerts, we want to examine that thing and see what's going on so that we cannot do any further damage and actually restore what's broken.

Sometimes God uses other people to bring our sin to our attention, both believers and unbelievers. In fact, unbelievers are sometimes more useful in telling us where we've sinned. Why? Because sometimes unbelievers aren't as restrained as believers in telling you that you're a knucklehead. They tell you straight forwardly because there is nothing restraining their anger. That's actually a blessing. You can take that and use that. God uses other people to bring sins to our attention. Even then, though, it's our conscience that reacts to their words of confrontation.

We are very wise if we pay attention and examine that thing biblically. So whenever we confess the sins that we become aware of, God promises to forgive those sins. That's what 1 John 1:9 says, "He is faithful." That is to say, his immutable nature, the fact that he is unchanging, means he is totally reliable.



When he says he is going to do something, we can count on it. He is also just, which means that he dealt with our sins and he dealt with our sins justly and permanently and fully when he punished Christ for our sins on the cross. That's the promise of 1 John 1:9.

But that promise goes further still. He not only promises to forgive the sins that we've become aware of; he also promises to cleanse us of all unrighteousness. What's that? That's a promise to wipe the relational slate clean. Every time we come to confess our sins to God, he is going to wipe the slate clean. What a promise! Because we're fallen creatures, we tend to be spiritually insensitive. We are never going to be as aware of how fallen we actually are as God sees us to be. We're never going to be aware of the myriad of ways we have sinned against God or even comprehend the true gravity of our sins because we are fallen, because we don't see things as clearly as we should.

But God tells us, even though we will continue to be dull and insensitive, he, whenever we come to confess the sins that he reveals to us, the sins that we know about, we're still

guilty of many sins we don't know about, right? But God is gracious to receive us anyway, to clear the entire balance of our guilt for unconfessed sin, to cleanse away all the attendant unrighteousness of all sin, whether it's known or unknown. That is what is called magnanimous grace, or what the hymn writer described poetically as "marvelous, infinite matchless grace, freely bestowed on all who believe." That in and of itself is compelling motivation for us to keep short accounts with God, isn't it? To go daily and examine ourselves before him to see if there is anything outstanding with God and to take care of it because he promises here to forgive us, to wipe the slate, relationally, wipe it clean and embrace us in his holy love.

So we confess our sins to God, but we also confess our sins to one another, right? James 5:16 was our verse, "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed." That verse encapsulates this entire process of biblical reconciliation that we're talking about right now. To confess our sins to one another, that in and of itself acknowledges the obstacle that's hindering our relationship, that's creating any sense of division or disharmony. And what follows from that confession of sin is the asking and granting of forgiveness, and

that's summarized here, and we're going to get to that and unpack it more in a moment. But then in James 5:16, to pray for one another that's the positive outworking of love toward one another especially, particularly, when we pray for those who have so deeply hurt us, who have offended us. That is the genuine God-like love that marks a true Christian. That is the remarkable evidence of genuine salvation, to forgive, and to love, and to pray for those who have offended you and hurt you with their sin. Only Christians can do that because only Christians have experienced that kind of love from God. We love because he first loved us. Those who do not love like God loves; they don't know God.

So we're to reconcile with one another, and we learn biblically the first step in that process is to confess our sins. This is the first of three steps. Step one: Confess your sin. And just to review, I'll briefly mention the sub-points we talked about. If you were not here last week and you missed this you need to download that message from our website. Listen to it. If you need a CD of that message let us know; we'll get a CD for you. But there were four sub-points in confessing sin, sort of a checklist that we want to run through to help us to confess

sins in a wise way, not to create more damage and destruction, as I've tended to do in my life, when, when we don't confess sins in a wise way. I've learned over the years to do this better. Believe me, I'm trying to let you learn from my mistakes. Two ways you can learn, right? By making your own mistakes and you know, watching somebody else make mistakes. Don't follow my path; follow this path here.

First of all, sub-point A: Clarify whether or not this issue is truly a sin. Right? Clarify whether or not it's truly a sin. We talked about sin as any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God. So if it's that, then it's a sin. It's not a mistake; it's not an accident; it's a sin. If it's a sin, then proceed to sub-point B: Clarify whether or not the sin is known to someone else. That is to say, if you sin in a way that only God knows about, you've had a prideful thought, you've had a flash of anger toward somebody, you've had an instance of covetous desire, lustful desire, something like that, if it's a sin that's contained in the mind and the heart, then deal with it in the mind and the heart before God. Don't bring that out. But if that sin goes outside, that anger turns into a verbal attack on somebody or that impatience you feel

inside bursts forth in an impatient word, an unkindness; if it gives birth to an external fruit, then and that sin has had a social effect. That sin has hurt another human being. That sin has become known to somebody else and so you can proceed to sub-point C.

Sub-point C is confess your sin to God. God is the one you've ultimately offended, and that's what we just talked about in 1 John 1:9. Right after that, right after you confess your sin to God, asap, you need to confess your sin to the person that you've offended. So sub-point D, confess your sin to the person you have offended. Confess your sin to one another. Just as you confessed your sin to God, you confess your sin as sin, you call it sin, don't try to soften the offense by calling it a mistake. Don't call it an error, an unfortunate lapse in my judgment. If you sinned, own up to it and call it a sin. Not only that, but confess your sin using biblical terms, not worldly terms, biblical terms. Remember we talked about that. God has given us a glossary called the Bible, and it's filled with really, really good words that came directly from God. They perfectly describe and identify our sins. We can deal with sins adequately when we define our sins accurately. If we don't

describe them accurately, we can't deal with them adequately, sufficiently.

So to help us avoid ambiguity, God has defined our sins for us so that there's no confusion, no mistake. We need to use his words when we're confessing sin because it's his law, after all, that we've violated. It is so important to confess our sins to one another using biblical language, using God's language. This isn't about just being fastidious to a certain set of words. This is really profound. This actually helps in the confession of sin and in reconciling with other people. Why? Because it rightly acknowledges that our human relationships, our horizontal relationships, are conducted beneath the interested and involved authority of our holy God, who is by nature relational.

It's him who governs the way we need to deal with one another. If he is not above us telling us how we need to deal with one another, you know what? Then there is no authority. You're your own authority and you deal with people however you want to just like this world is. But if God is the one who's above us, if God is the one commanding the way we speak and the way we act and the way we conduct ourselves relationally, we

need to use his words. He sent his son to die, to reconcile us to himself. And when Jesus died on the cross, he didn't have ambiguity in his head; he didn't have confusion in His head. He didn't die for mistakes, he died for specific sins that you and I committed against him, against his father. So this obviously matters very much to God.

God revealed himself using words written and revealed in a holy book, and he wants us to use those words with one another. So when we confess those sins as sins, when we use God's Word to identify and describe them, we rightly acknowledge the authority of the God to whom we are all accountable; ourselves, the ones who commit the sin, and also to the person who has been offended. That person, also, needs to submit themselves to God even in their offense. Listen, as much as you've ever been offended by somebody else for their sin against you, have you been offended as much as God has been offended? I don't think any of us has the temerity, the audacity, to say that. That's a good thing. We need to use God's Word. We need to rightly acknowledge the authority of the God to whom we are all accountable. We need to acknowledge his authority even in the middle of that situation, which is going to govern every step of

reconciliation within that situation. Now all of that was review, and we're ready to take the next step.

Biblical reconciliation starts with confessing our sins, taking personal responsibility as we formally admit our sin and our guilt before God. But we need to go further to complete the reconciliation that started with confessing our sins. So let's go to Step two, ask for forgiveness. Step two, ask for forgiveness. Jesus said in Matthew 5:23-24, "Whenever you remember that your brother has something against you," that is, even if you are in the middle of worshipping God, if you're there at the altar, Jesus said you need to stop, waste no time, but "quickly go," Matthew 5:24, "and first be reconciled to your brother." Then after you've been reconciled, "then come and offer your gift." When you go to your brother, what are you going to do? You're going to go to him and you're going to confess your sins and you're going to seek his forgiveness. Jesus referred to that pattern of confessing sin and asking for forgiveness often in his teaching. It's all through his teaching, but he illustrated it very poignantly when he told the story of the prodigal son, and I'd like you to turn there.

Turn over to that story, over in Luke 15. This is such a fantastic story that Jesus told to illustrate the heart of his father in heaven who forgives sinners. Jesus actually told the story as an appeal to the Pharisees because they grumbled against Jesus because Jesus received sinners and ate with sinners. Jesus sat down with tax collectors and the like, those who hung around tax collectors, which, make no mistake, they were not good people. They weren't people you would want to have over to dinner. Jesus sat down and he ate with those whom he forgave. He was there with their friends, and he taught the truth to their friends, that they might also be reconciled to God, and the Pharisees were those who hated him for it, if you can believe that. They didn't understand forgiveness. So Jesus told them the series of parables in Luke 15 to help them understand the heart of God, that they too, even in their pride, even in their Pharisaical thinking, they too, could be reconciled to God, even in spite of that sin. We're going to have to wait patiently to get to Luke 15, but for today we can get a little sneak peak of coming attractions. So let's start reading in Luke 15 and verse 11. "Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me." And he," the father, "divided his property between them. Not

many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs.'" Hard for a Jewish boy to humble himself to that level. "He was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.'"

We'll stop there for a second. When Jesus told that story, you need to understand the level of outrage among those who heard that story for the first time. Because for this young man to ask his father for an early distribution of his inheritance, you know what that was saying? That was tantamount to saying, I wish you were dead and out of the way because the only thing about you that I care about is your money. He had no desire for a relationship with his father. He was willing to trade his father's love and care and household and provision and the righteous atmosphere of the home for whatever he could find at the end of his journey that would satisfy his lustful desire. Is that wicked, or what?

The level of this boy's disdain for his father is an out-and-out absolutely shocking portrayal of dishonor. And the fact that he found himself wallowing in the mud and the slop with the pigs, among those who first heard this, there was absolutely no sympathy for the prodigal in that picture that Jesus told. No, no sympathy whatsoever, none. For those who heard the story about this rebellious son groveling with unclean swine would have thought to themselves, Good, serves him right. This ungrateful, dishonorable, profligate wretch who wanted his father dead, it serves him right. In fact, death's too good for him, wallowing with pigs, that's right, that's exactly what he deserves. They would have considered this prodigal's predicament to be the just retribution for his sins, nothing to be pitied.

This is where the story takes quite a radical turn. Jesus told the story, inserting a number of elements that would just tweak and provoke this sense of outrage for these listening Pharisees. And he's about to take this way, way over the top. Notice what happened starting in verse 17, when this young man came to his senses. "When the young man came to himself," verse 17, "he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have

sinned against heaven and before you. And I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'"

Let us stop there. We'll finish reading the outcome in just a moment. But I want to stop and note how this prodigal's confession of sin applies directly to our subject. This is an excellent description of the pattern we need to follow whenever we confess our sin to someone else. Whenever we ask that someone to forgive us. Notice how biblical reconciliation requires, demands, a transaction between two people. If we're to reconcile with one another, both the offender and the offended have a role to play in completing that transaction of reconciliation. That's what's about to happen here between the son and his father. That's what he's mentally preparing for and rehearsing, and the first thing I want you to notice in this, which is a particularly needful thing to say to any American audience. Notice what this penitent prodigal did not plan to say to his father. He didn't intend to say Father, I apologize. Apology doesn't fit this at all. The word apologize comes from the Greek word *apologia*, which means to give a reason, make a defensive argument. This young man didn't come to his father to make a defense; he didn't come to explain himself; Father, I didn't

have enough money, and that's why I wanted you dead and wanted all your money, so you forced me to it. You were just so legalistic in your household, I had to get some freedom. You drove me to it. No, he doesn't explain anything. He's not making a defense here. His behavior is deplorable. There is no defense for what he's done. There's not just what he's done; it's not just squandering his living on prostitutes. That's, that's just a symptom. The fruit of that, or the heart of that, the root of that fruit, is his hatred to his father. There's no defense for that. So he came to confess. He came to seek forgiveness. He came to be reconciled and restored to his father. He wanted restoration of that relationship that he had so terribly spurned and abandoned and insulted. Notice the prodigal did not say also, he didn't say, hey Dad, I'm sorry.

What does sorry mean? What is sorry? Sorry is appropriate for bumping in to somebody accidentally. You run into them head long, and you say, hey, sorry about that. I'm so sorry that I ran over you. I'm so sorry that I stepped on your toe. That's appropriate. Sorry is great for unintentional offenses, but it's woefully insufficient for confessing sins. When you're talking about mistakes, sorry is perfect. When you're trying to explain

righteous behavior, an *apologia* is appropriate, an apology is appropriate. When you're talking about sins, the only word that's appropriate is confession. Just to reinforce that a bit, this bad habit of saying sorry is so common today. In fact, just so you know, I, I make this mistake myself, saying sorry when I ought to say, will you forgive me?

For the young man to say sorry to mend his relationship with his father, here's how that would sound. Hey Dad, that whole thing about wanting you dead just so I could get your hard earned money, just so I could use it for the unrestrained pursuit of my lusts, hey, sorry about that. Sorry. It doesn't fit! What is that? You see how utterly inappropriate the word sorry is for confessing sins as sins and seeking forgiveness for those sins? It totally cheapens the true nature and the offense because it fails to bring God in his authority into the equation. As I said, sorry is appropriate for mistakes, for accidents, unintentional oversights, and offenses, and we do plenty of those. So please have at the word sorry for those things.

It is very inappropriate for the biblical category called sins. Even worse is when people use the word, sorry, to kind of subtly turn the tables, and do a little blame-shifting. Have you

ever heard this one? Hey, I'm sorry if what I said offended you? Have you ever heard that? Or, Hey, sorry if your feelings were hurt by that. Do you know what that is? That's a not-so-subtle way of blaming the offense on the other person. It's their sensitive feelings that are the problem. It's the fact that they have such thin skin, they can't handle a bit of a robust disagreement. It's just adding insult to injury. It's turning the whole thing on its head. The victim then is victimized once again by your sin as you pile sin upon sin.

Listen, this is why it is so important to be biblical in our thinking about this and to use biblical language. We need to be accurate and precise not because we're Pharisaical. We need to be accurate and precise because it accurately acknowledges the true nature of the offense, because we love the other person, and we want them to be helped. We want to help them over this issue of trying to forgive us for what we've done. If we say sorry or I apologize, that's not helping them forgive us. What? You're telling me you're sorry? You kind of bumped into me with your insulting words and language and when you smacked me in the face like that? Okay, you're sorry. Thanks for letting me know you're sorry. What if we say, you know, when I was

impatient and I let forth with all those expletives and, and when I hurt you in that way, or when I said something insulting about you and all your family relations?

Remember that time at Thanksgiving when I said that? That was sin. Will you please forgive me? You know what you've done? You've helped that person. Then they have taken down the barrier in their mind of your sin, and they've said, okay, they get it. They understand. They're putting themselves under God. Now it is up to them whether or not they're gonna forgive, which we'll get to in a second. Without accuracy, without precision in the words we use, we fail to acknowledge the appropriate level of gravity. We fail to acknowledge the true nature of the offense. And that fails to communicate our true desire to reconcile a broken relationship with one another. Sloppy communication, lazy communication actually does the opposite of what's intended. It actually serves to widen the division by increasing the offense rather than acknowledging the true nature the breach has caused by the sin.

Now with that in mind, let's consider what the man actually did say. This young man, as he comes to his father, look what he actually does say. He says, "I have sinned against heaven," God

first, "and before you." That is the essence of confessing sins, that's what we've been talking about. Again the authority of God, clearly acknowledged from the very first word. What this young man had done was to commit an offense against God. It's not his dad who gave the fifth commandment, "Honor your father and your mother." God gave that commandment.

Well, we've talked a lot about that already; let's keep moving and notice, second, how this young man has humbled himself before his father. He's gone very low in this case; he truly is, make DNA tests or whatever, he truly is the flesh and blood of his father. But he is at this point, he not willing to trade on that fact, and this is another acknowledgment of the seriousness of his sin. His sin, which was essentially a killing off of his father to get his wealth. He acknowledges that he's done that. He acknowledges that basically he, by his actions, by his taking his father's property for himself, he's really killed off his father. He's really said, I don't even want to be in this family, I don't want to be with you. I don't want your name, I don't want your, your rules. I don't want your relationship. I don't want you. So rather than appealing to the relationship that he has disdained, that he has demolished, that

he has destroyed, the young man, in an attitude of true repentance here, utter humility, meekness, deference. He comes before his father and he acknowledges his unworthiness. At the same time, he doesn't just grovel there in his unworthiness; he expresses his desire to be restored. He said, I realize I'm not worthy to be called your son. But I do want a relationship with you, I've come to my senses, I want to return to you, I want to be restored in fellowship with you even if it is in a limited form, not as your son but as a hired servant, even if it is limited because of my sin. What else could he say, rightly, righteously? What else could he say? That is all a penitent sinner has the right to say. He has no claim on his father's forgiveness, no right to be forgiven. So he comes forward in meekness, simply to acknowledge his guilt, to confess his sins, to ask for a restored relationship. He seeks reconciliation with his father. He seeks to be forgiven of his sin and when he asks, he asks in humility. Notice how he doesn't come in prideful expectation; he doesn't demand forgiveness. He realizes forgiveness is not a right, it's a grace. It's what he seeks, it's what he hopes for. He recognizes that he is at the mercy of the one he has offended, in this case his father. Forgiveness is his father's, either to grant or to withhold. That's what we need to do with one another as well.

We need to identify our sin biblically. We need to be specific, using biblical language in the way that we have offended that person. We need to confess our sin, to acknowledge our guilt before God and before that person. We need to ask forgiveness of that person and then wait. Wait. Once you've asked forgiveness, you have discharged your responsibility before God. You've done what's right. You have fulfilled your part in the transaction of reconciliation. By confessing your sins and seeking forgiveness, you have shifted the responsibility from yourself onto the person that you've offended. And now it's up to that offended person to respond righteously, but that's for them to deal with before God. The person you've offended in his or her conscience before God, he's the right to decide whether he'll please the Lord by granting forgiveness or whether he'll displease the Lord by withholding forgiveness. But for your part, you've done what's right. You've fulfilled your responsibility to restore a broken relationship; you cannot force somebody to reconcile with you. But you must do your duty and provide them with the opportunity to reconcile as, as Paul put it in Romans 12:18, "If possible as far as it depends on you," what? "Be at peace with all men," right? As far as it depends on you. So once you've confessed your sin, asked

for forgiveness, you've done what God wants you to do. You've discharged your responsibility before the Lord, and now it's up to the person you've offended to complete the transaction of biblical reconciliation.

So we've taken Step one, confess your sins. We've taken Step two, ask for forgiveness. Those are your responsibilities when you have sinned against somebody else. Now, let's consider this final step in this process of biblical reconciliation. At this point we need to look at this from a different angle. Here's where you need to put yourself in the position of the one who's been offended. Is that hard for anybody to do? I can help you with an example if it's hard. I think you can imagine yourself in the position of an offended party. Let's consider our responsibility when someone comes to us, this person who's hurt our feelings, who has offended us, who's done something terrible, even horrible. But they come to us, they confess their sin using biblical language, they, they seek forgiveness. What do we do to complete that transaction of biblical reconciliation? Step number three, grant forgiveness. Grant forgiveness! It's pretty simple right? Pretty simple. When you've been offended by someone else's sin, and that person

comes to you confessing sin, asking for forgiveness, you forgive. Sadly, there are many, even within the church if you can believe it, there are many who refuse to forgive people, and often it's some minor infraction. It's some petty offense, some little quibbling argument that started it all in the first place, and yet they're holding on to it with a death grip. And it's making them bitter, it's souring their countenance, and it's causing them to withdraw from people, withdraw especially from that person, retract from relationships. Often when you see somebody isolated like that, that's what's going on.

Refusing to forgive others, listen, that is not only a blight on the body of Christ, not only an offense against the forgiving nature of our reconciling God. Listen, I'm going to use very accurate language here. It's absolutely stupid. It's stupid to hold on to something like that, to harbor unforgiveness in your heart. It doesn't hurt somebody else; it hurts you. It kills you, it poisons you. This attitude inside of you of unforgiveness, it festers and it becomes septic in your system, and eventually it poisons the whole of you and kills you. It does so, though, slowly, and it takes months and years and years, and then it becomes so enmeshed in your thinking that

it becomes entrenched. And you learn this habit of self-justifying. Sometimes you pull that offense out and you play with it a little bit like a little fantasy. You think about how you would've said this if you'd only had the chance, and then if this could happen to that person, it would serve him right. And you think about all these different... Am I the only one that has these thoughts? Okay, I just wanted to make sure. But this, this is killing you. It's stupid to hold on to this.

In a book called *Forgive and Love Again* the authors cite a number of the biblical word pictures that portray the releasing power of forgiveness. They cite 88 different pictures in the Bible. To grant forgiveness is such a powerful virtue; it's so God-like. It's been said that you're never more like God than when you forgive. It's very healthy for us because it's righteous in God's sight. Here are just a few pictures that the authors pull out from Scripture which are particularly helpful. To forgive is to turn the key, open the cell door, and let the prisoner walk free. To forgive is to write in large letters a court room and declare, Not Guilty. To forgive is to shoot an arrow so high and so far that it can never be found again. To forgive is to bundle up all the garbage and trash and dispose of it, leaving the house clean and fresh. To forgive is to loose

the moorings of the ship and release it to the open sea. To forgive is to grant a full pardon to a condemned criminal. To forgive is to loosen a stranglehold on a wrestling opponent. To forgive is to sand blast a wall full of graffiti, leaving it looking like new. To forgive is to smash a clay pot into a thousand pieces so it can never be pieced together again. So helpful. The authors say when we forgive, we consciously before God, cancel the debt, we discard the note, we pardon the prisoner, we release the offender.

That's forgiveness. That's freedom, beloved. That's the freedom we have been brought into as Christians, to be able to forgive other people. This is why Jesus continually commanded his disciples to forgive others. In Luke 17:3-4, he said, "If your brother sins rebuke him, and if he repents forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in the day and returns to you seven times saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him." He's, he's concerned about the health, the spiritual condition, of his disciples. Listen, when someone who's sinned against you, when that person comes confessing their sin, asking for forgiveness, Jesus said you must forgive him. There are no options here. Why? Because God forgives all those who come to him confessing their

sins and asking for his forgiveness. So if God, the greater, forgives those who come to him, who are you, the lesser, to withhold forgiveness? That's sound logic.

It's all patterned on the character of God the Father, the one who revealed himself to Moses in Exodus 34:6-7, reciting the attributes of that very nature. He said, when he revealed himself to Moses, Moses said, "God, show me your glory. If I'm going to lead this people I need to see your glory. I need to have a knowledge of you so that I can have the strength and the courage to lead a rebellious and sinful people because I'm rebellious and sinful myself. Help me, let me see your glory." And the Lord said, "I'm going to put you in a rock, and I'm gonna hide you and protect you from the full glory of my presence, so that you don't die, because no one can see me and live. But I will pass by and I will declare to you my glory."

Notice it's not in some goose-bump experience that Moses gets here. It's in words. Words. "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." He goes on from there, but for Moses' purposes he needed to know that. He needed

to know that when those people wanted to stone him and go back to Egypt, that God is by nature a forgiving God. And as the mediator of the people, as the leader of the people, he by nature needed to be a forgiving man. God doesn't excuse sin, but he does forgive sin and he doesn't do it reluctantly either.

If you are still in Luke 15, let's finish that story, by observing the father's response to the prodigal's return. Look at it there in Luke 15, starting in verse 20, "He arose," probably wiped off some muck from the pigsty, tried to clean himself up as much as possible, "came to his father. while he was still a long way off, his father saw him." How did he see him a long way off? His father was looking for him. Isn't that awesome? He's got out the first-century binoculars, and he's looking for his son. While he was still a long way off, his father saw him "and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead,

and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate." stop there. We'll save the details for later when we finally get to chapter 15 in our study of Luke's Gospel one day. But for now just know at this turn of events the father's immediate, expectant, exuberant, magnanimous response to his penitent son.

We love this story, but you know what? It may surprise you to know that this absolutely outraged the Pharisees. This was the most shocking part of the story, even more shocking than the sin of that son against his father. In the last part of this story, verses 25-32, Jesus is speaking directly to the Pharisees. He is appealing to them to understand the nature and character of God, who rejoices over one sinner who repents. Before we're too quick to condemn the Pharisees, perhaps we should consider how often we can be just like them. We need to take the full force of this parable right on our own chins. Let this have its intended effect. Because we can be just as unforgiving as they are.

For our purposes, though, for this morning, in understanding this process of biblical reconciliation, note this portrayal of the father's forgiveness. Casting aside all cultural expectations of appropriate retribution, of proper decorum, this father, he's beside himself with joy. He's, he's filled with compassion. He's filled with longing for this son. He runs. He embraces. He kisses his repentant son. That is forgiveness portrayed. The fathers not trapped in bitterness. He's not trapped in sulking anger over the son wanting him dead. So ready is the father to forgive his son, the son isn't even able to finish his, his prepared speech. He didn't even get through it all. His father's eagerness to forgive and reconcile cuts off his son's confession in mid-sentence. "Quickly, get the best robe, cover him in it, put a ring on his hand." He covered him in his best robe because he didn't want anybody to see the shame of his filth. Isn't that beautiful.

Put a ring on his hand, show he's mine. Shoes on his feet, kill the fatted calf, let's have a banquet, rejoice over my son. He was dead and lost. That is no relationship possible with someone like that, but now he's found, he's alive, let's restore him. That's the attitude of a loving father full, complete

forgiveness, profound love, profound joy, and all of it expressed outwardly, exuberantly, lavishly. He didn't care what other people around him think. Listen, beloved, Jesus told that story to illustrate the attitude of our father. That's his love for us, whenever we come to him in a spirit of 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

At this point I want to stop and just do a little bit of theology, all right, on forgiveness, because I want to clarify something, here, that comes up from time to time and causes confusion for people. If we have been fully forgiven as a result of being born again and putting our faith in Jesus Christ, why do we need to ask God to forgive us when we sin? Aren't we already forgiven? I mean, can we be more forgiven than what we were at the foot of the cross? Or is it the case that whenever we sin we have fallen out of the grace of God, that we have lost our salvation, we somehow need to be re-saved? Is it that kind of theology that you may have heard? Maybe you know some people who go to churches like that and teach that. But this issue of forgiveness and reconciliation, admittedly it's been a perplexing issue in the realm of theology which often confuses

how we practice reconciliation. But if we start with the nature of God's forgiveness as it's supplied to each one of us, his children, we're going to discover a pattern we can follow as well. And when we, when we first come to God, think back to before you were saved, you first come to God, it's, at that time, it's in a relationship of you the condemned sinner standing before the just and holy Judge. He's not going to bend the law in your direction, not one fraction of an inch because of our guilt before him. Because we transgressed his holy standard, we face an eternal death in Hell. That is our just and only reward for our sin. So the guilt we feel in our lost condition, this sense of fear we have over this foreboding, this looming punishment, the just sentence for our crimes, that sense of guilt and fear is intended to drive us to repentance. Sadly, most people refuse to reconcile.

But God is gracious and he brings us to himself, and when we come to God, we come repenting of our sins. We come embracing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and God forgives us. He covers us in Christ's righteousness. He adopts us into his family. We once related to God as a holy lawgiver and an impartial judge, and as such he was like to us a terrifying enemy, a powerful

enemy, one we were unable to contend with. Because of his grace here in granting forgiveness, the relationship is changed.

That's what Romans 5:1 says, "By faith we have peace with God."

Do you know what peace means? It doesn't mean at this point in Romans 5:1, it doesn't mean, happy feelings of contentment and security. It means, literally, you were once at war with God, and now you are no longer at war with God. It's an objective peace between two warring parties, you and God. And God made you reconciled and gives you peace through our Lord Jesus Christ. We were once enemies; God has made us friends. We who were once aliens and strangers, God has made us family. He's our father, we're his children. And now, now when we sin against God, no longer as enemies but now as his children, as a result of the change in our relationship, our sin against God is interpreted differently. Sin still fractures the relationship but not eternally, not fundamentally. That question about our sin was answered forever by Jesus Christ when he died on the cross. And when we, when we were born again and when we embraced him in repentance and faith, that atonement that he provided was complete.

Now when we sin against God, it's like a disobedient child who sins against his father. Sin disrupts the relationship between Parent and child; it doesn't destroy the nature of that relationship. We're still God's children; he's still our father. As the Apostle John assures us in 1 John 3:2, "Beloved, we are God's children now." Now we are God's children. I love that word, now! Because our sin has been fully paid for, we're never in danger of losing God's forgiveness, never in danger of being cast out of the family. "Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ," Romans 8:39. But our sin does disrupt the fellowship, it does fracture the unity and it does destroy the harmony in our relationship with God the Father, not, not from his end, from our end. When we realize it, when we really understand the insolent nature of our sin against our beloved father, its ingratitude, its ugliness, its self-centeredness, its rebellion. Our sin against our loving Father breaks our heart, that's what it should do.

Look, when we're not sensitive to our sins, when we are dull spiritually, and when we have failed to notice our sins, God will sometimes allow us to suffer the consequences of our sins, and sometimes he'll even punish us for our sins. But even

in our punishment, even in his punishment against us, it's not the wrath of an implacable judge. Rather, God's punishment comes from jealous love, love! Our loving Father wants us to repent, to turn away from idolatry, to be reconciled, restored in a relationship to him and him alone. He wants us to learn to walk in all of his ways. When we obey the father, particularly in this issue of forgiving others, we find that this is the path to joy and satisfaction. We find it's the way of peace and full contentment. So look, when we sense our guilt before God our Father, it's to produce remorse over our sin. It's to produce a repentance that leads to life. When we confess our sins to him, we confess like a child confesses to his father, and of course, as any loving father would, God embraces us immediately, instantly. He snatches us up into his arms, we're restored in security and the joy of that loving relationship.

So when we come to God for the first time, as back when we were unredeemed sinners, repenting of our sin, seeking forgiveness, we want to enter into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. God stood there at that time ready to forgive. And he demonstrated that forgiveness in that transaction by actually forgiving us. The judge became our

father; the enemy became our friend. Thereafter though, every time we sin against him, it's in the way that a child sins against his father. When we come to him confessing our sins, asking for forgiveness, he stands ready to forgive. He demonstrates that in that transaction by actually forgiving us. He lovingly, quickly, restores us back into full fellowship like a loving parent would with a beloved child.

What does that have to do with us? Everything. The example of God's readiness to forgive, the immediacy with which he forgives, that example isn't just something for us to observe and to sing songs about. It's for us to follow. His example becomes our mandate. We read earlier how God described himself to Moses as "merciful, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." He is a God who's ready to forgive, and he actually forgives whenever we come. We learn from God's heart to reconcile when we're first reconciled to him, when by his grace we hear that appeal of the Apostle Paul, "Be reconciled to God" when we draw near to him. Then and only then could we experience his heart to reconcile, and that transaction of reconciliation, it's not merely for the sake of principle. It's for the sake of experiencing his love and

forgiveness. Why? So we might worship and rejoice. So because of God's magnanimous compassion, his tender mercy, he's quick to forgive each and every one of us. We need to have the same heart toward one another. Paul said Ephesians 4:32, "Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another." How, Paul? Well, "as God in Christ forgave you." Fuller expression of that same principle, Colossians 3:12-13, "Put on then as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, bearing with one another, if anyone has a complaint against another forgiving each other. As the Lord has forgiven you, you also must forgive." Like God we need to have that same heart of compassion toward sinners. They're people just like you and me, standing in need of God's forgiveness.

Any offense that people have committed against us, it's petty in comparison to the offenses they've committed against God. That's why it's actually sinful to withhold forgiveness from others when they ask. In fact, to refuse to forgive somebody it may be evidence that there is no relationship with the father. That's what Jesus explained when he taught his disciples to pray. He said in Matthew 6:12, he told them ask

God, "Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors." Did you get that comparison? "Forgive us father when we sin against you in the same way as I forgive everybody else." If you withhold forgiveness, are you asking God also to withhold forgiveness? That implies that everybody who belongs to God's family, they all bear the same forgiving nature of the father of that family right? Like father, like children. Jesus unpacked it further, "If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your father forgive your trespasses."

The only person that God withholds forgiveness from are those who do not come to him to seek his forgiveness. That is, unbelievers. Jesus is saying, if you don't forgive, you are not a forgiving person, that means you are not one of his children. It's such a clear family trait, that if you don't forgive at all, it's evidence you are not in the family. We need to be ready to forgive. We need to be eager to forgive and then actually forgive those who come to us, even if they're not using the right words, you know they're fumbling through in their confession, they're inaccurate, they say words like sorry and I

apologize. It's okay, you forgive. You forgive. The readiness of the father to forgive us, I mean how imperfect are we in our asking forgiveness of him? That's the heart we need to express toward other people as well.

So if somebody has confessed a sin to you as a Christian, what's the only response? I forgive you, right? That's the only response. Maybe you need a little time to pray it through because of our weakness. Sometimes the hurt goes deep. We need to ask God to help us to see clearly through the matter to help us to see his nature, what he's done for us. But beloved, we must forgive. We who have been forgiven an eternal, unpayable debt, we have no right to withhold a temporal debt against somebody else. Some minor infraction against us; I mean, who are we, right?

In closing, I'd like to illustrate this by having you turn to Matthew 18. Matthew 18, because this really lays it out here. The whole chapter is about Jesus helping us to understand how to think about sin among believers, reconciling within the fellowship of the church. Jesus describes in Matthew 18:15-20

how to restore a sinning brother back into the fellowship. Peter follows that by asking a rather pointed, astute question. He knows forgiveness is required for a repenting brother who confesses sin and asks for forgiveness, but he's wondering just how far does this go. Look at verse 21. Peter came up and said to Jesus, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him, as many as seven times?" He thinks he's being rather magnanimous here, maybe even going a bit overboard with this seven times of forgiving offenses. I mean how, how far does this go, come on? Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times but seventy times seven." Peter's doing a little math, okay? Seven times seven, forty-nine, seven times, drop the zero down, that equals 490 times. Four hundred and ninety times!?

The Lord's not asking Peter to do some quick arithmetic here; he's calling Peter to be ready to forgive to have an attitude of eagerness to forgive and then to actually forgive and to forgive repeatedly. And that's the way of the father who has forgiven each and every one of us, and listen beloved, far beyond the 490 sin limit. I'm so thankful, aren't you? I don't know how long ago I crossed that limit. In case Peter misses the point, Jesus reinforced it with another story. Look at verse 23.

Jesus said, "Therefore, the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. And when he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents." I won't do the math on that; let's just say you need to know that is an unpayable debt, a thousand lifetimes, he could not pay that debt. For him it might as well have been infinite money. It's an eternal debt, he cannot pay this, and Jesus, he's telling the story and has the right to put as many talents as he wants in there. He's saying it's unpayable. He owed him ten thousand talents in verse 25, "Since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made." It's not to make him repay the ten thousand talents. It's just to get something out of this worthless slave. "So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.'" No he won't, "but he's says 'I will pay you everything.' Out of pity for him," not because he's fooled into thinking he's going to be repaid, but "out of pity for him the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out," isn't that interesting, right out of the, the courtroom, right? "when that same servant went out he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, seizing him, began to choke him,

saying, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed." Knowing they probably owed him money, too. "So they were greatly distressed and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. And then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' In anger his master delivered him over to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt." Need I remind you he'll never be able to repay it, especially when he's jailed. How's he going to make any money there? "So also my heavenly father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother," look at that last prepositional phrase, "from your heart."

That's powerful, that's penetrating, that's convicting, isn't it? Those who do not forgive, doesn't matter if they call themselves Christians, doesn't matter if they walked the aisle when they were young, doesn't matter if they signed the card, if they got baptized. It doesn't matter what they say about

themselves. If they don't forgive, they are not members of the family. Because God forgives those who belong to him, and those who belong to God demonstrates the nature of the father by forgiving in the same manner as he does, and they do it from the heart. So if you've confessed your sin to God, the other person you've offended, you've sought forgiveness, granted forgiveness, all that process there is called the transaction of forgiveness. That's what it is, that's biblical reconciliation in a nutshell. This is the basis of reconciliation. This provides the platform for growing and maturing in our relationships with one another. This is how we fulfill James 5:16, "Confess our sins to one another and pray for one another that we may be healed." This is how we, beloved, as a church, as a family, as Christians, this is how we protect, we maintain our unity, which promises all the benefits of the harmony, which are joy, fruitfulness, safety, security in the body of Christ.

But back to Peter's question, what about that person who, they're getting close to their seventy times seven with me? If they're truly sinning against you seven times a day, and they're coming back to you seven times a day saying, I repent, Jesus said you must forgive him. But let's be honest, I mean, should

that behavior continue indefinitely? Do we just keep getting hit in the face and just, thank you, sir, may I have another? Thank you, sir, may I have another? No. Is that, is that, is that what Jesus is saying here? Thankfully there are other texts, which we will get into next week. What about the sin that results in some significant hurt? What about sin that represents a significant breach of trust, as in the case of many sexual sins, as in the case of adultery? Perhaps in the case of physical violence, and what if that breach of trust is due to repeated behavior, what then? We're going to talk about some of those things next week. I think we've got enough to practice for now, don't you? So let's close in a word of prayer.

Heavenly Father, we are convicted by a message like this because we realize that all of us fall short of the standard. And yet for all of us who do belong to you are reminded of your magnanimous, full, and complete forgiveness of our sins. From the heart we want to forgive other people the same way. So I pray, father, for every single one of us here who belong to you. I pray that you would help us to have a heart like that, that our attitude is to be eager and quick and immediate in granting forgiveness whenever anybody offends us. If we're the offending



party, Father, I pray that you bring us to our senses and help us to confess our sins and seek forgiveness, that this transaction of forgiveness might be completed by the granting of forgiveness. And father, I pray that you help us do this more fully, more completely, more accurately as the days, weeks, months, and years go by. We want to please you in this thing, first and foremost, and we want to see unity and harmony maintained in our fellowship. Thank you for what you've done in our midst already through your Word. We ask you continue doing it by the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name we pray.