

Lessons On Forgiveness

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Given in deliverance at
Men's Retreat at
Higher Ground Campground
March 9-10, 2012

Forgiveness - Lesson One

“The Core of Forgiveness”

By Pastor Dr. Ronnie Wolfe - February 8, 2012

INTRODUCTION

The subject of forgiveness is sorrowfully neglected in our preaching today, as are several other subjects. I think we as Baptists are afraid that we will do too much forgiving and somehow compromise with the world and become heretics.

Maybe it is because we don't understand the situation that requires forgiveness, such as this story:

Rabbi David A. Nelson likes to tell the story of two brothers who went to their rabbi to settle a longstanding feud. The rabbi got the two to reconcile their differences and shake hands. As they were about to leave, he asked each one to make a wish for the other in honor of the Jewish New Year. The first brother turned to the other and said, "I wish you what you wish me." At that, the second brother threw up his hands and said, "See, Rabbi, he's starting up again!"

There will be three lessons on this subject. I promise they will be brief, but most importantly I hope that they will be helpful and encouraging to us as believers in Jesus Christ. I pray, first of all, that I will not sound as if I want compromise on any important doctrine of the Bible; but I also pray that these lessons will encourage us to think more about forgiveness so that we can stand on the important points of scripture but give way to differences of opinion on those things that are not so fundamental to the Baptist faith.

The lessons' titles are: (1) The Core of Forgiveness, (2) The Challenge of Forgiveness, and (3) The Cause of Forgiveness

In this lesson on “The Core of Forgiveness” we will consider two things: (1) Why We Need Forgiveness, and (2) What Is Forgiveness?

Why We Need Forgiveness

All of us know, of course, the scripture at Romans 3:23, which states “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” Let us not forget that the word “come short” is a present tense verb. In other words, we are all at all times coming short of the glory of God. We are sinners, then, not simply in our lost condition, but we are sinners in our saved condition, also.

The word “forgive” is used 48 times in one form or another in the New Testament. It is used 50 times in one form or another in the Old Testament. That makes a total of 98 times (and I am sure I missed some). So this subject of forgiveness must be a very important one.

First, then, we must have forgiveness for our own sins. (1) This forgiveness is through the blood of Jesus Christ (remission) – Eph 1:7 *In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;* (2) This forgiveness is through faith in his blood – Ro 3:25 *Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;* Our sins are an offense to God. In Romans 5:18 the scriptures tell us, *Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.* Jesus told the sick man with palsy in Mark 9:2, *Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.* The Psalmist said in Psalm 25:18 *Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and forgive all my sins.*

Second, we need to learn to forgive one another. After salvation, we all are still sinners – 1

John 1:8 *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* We find out through experience that Christians can hurt Christians more than lost people hurt Christians, mainly because we do not expect that hurt to come from our Christian sisters and brothers. So, there is a need for forgiveness among believers. Notice Eph 4:32 *And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.* Also we may notice Colossians 3:13 *Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.*

What Is Forgiveness

Synonyms for forgiveness are: absolution, amnesty, clemency, grace, mercy, benevolence, charity, pardon, and many other words. The Greek word is APHIEMI and is sometimes translated in its noun form as *remission*. The old Oxford English Dictionary defines forgiveness as “to grant free pardon and to give up all claim on account of an offense or debt.” Another dictionary gives this definition: “to renounce anger or resentment against:” or “to cease to blame or hold resentment against (someone or something).” A biblical definition might be found in 2 Cor. 2:8 *Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him.*

One writer insists that we should “focus on forgetting.” Joseph, instead of giving excuses such as “It wasn’t my fault. After all, my father doted on me. My brothers were defective and deceptive. My dreams were divine. None of these were things over which I had any control,” he decided to forgive his brothers. Notice what Joseph did:

1. He remembered the tie he had with them (Genesis 45:1-3)
2. He forgot their taunts toward him, “God meant it for good.” (Gen 50:20)
3. He remembered the testimony that God gave to him (Gen. 39:20-21)

4. He remembered his dreams (Gen. 42:9)

So, we need to “focus on forgetting.” Even though the Bible never says “forgive and forget,” yet I believe that part of forgiving is to focus on forgetting. It may be impossible to literally forget, but it is not impossible to forgive and to leave the past behind us and look forward to a better future, a better fellowship, a better love, a greater work, a greater walk, and a deeper assurance in the things of God.

Has a brother or sister hurt you? Have you been offended about something that happened in your church? What is your reaction? Are you ready to cause trouble? Are you ready to leave the church? Are you caught up in revenge? Where is the forgiving spirit in us? Don't have the attitude that “if he can do it, I can do it.” Go on, do what God says to do. We all know that if we do what God says in his book that we will be happier, we will have more joy, and we will grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus. We know that the church will be better and stronger if we forgive.

The human spirit gets in the way of the divine Spirit of God who leads us in our lives. We quench the Spirit of God to make room for our own, rebellious, human spirit. The human spirit and God's Spirit should be in harmony.

There is too much to do; there is too much to consider; there are too many humanistic problems that we must fight together for us to be bickering among ourselves. Paul said to the church at Corinth that there were divisions and contentions among them (1 Cor. 1:10-11). Is it true with us? I am sure it is.

There are even contentions and divisions among churches supposedly of “like faith and order.” Let us be very careful how we treat our fellow churches. The command to “love one another”

should not be taken lightly. Matt 5:44 says, *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 despitefully use you, and persecute you;* We have enough enemies without counting our brothers and sisters as enemies.

We know that Satan is our enemy: he sowed the tares. Paul said to the Galatians in Galatians 4:16 *Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?*

At Corinth some were of Apollos, some of Cephas, some of Paul, and some of Christ. This division among the members of this church was causing contention. Are you a Wellsite, a Hillardite, a Grahamite, a Walkerite, a Carrollite, or whatever? Are you a Christite? Those who were of Christ at Corinth were divisive. Of course, we are Christians, but our dedication is vertical, not horizontal. We serve Christ alone and not simply as a choice among other men.

Down here on earth we are laborers together. We are all bond-servants of Jesus Christ. Our love epitomizes in Him, but we are to “love one another.” Notice 1 Peter 4:8 *And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.*

ILLUSTRATION: In his book entitled “The Last Years,” Charles Flood reports that after the Civil War, Robert E. Lee visited a Kentucky lady who took him to the remains of a grand old tree in front of her house. There she bitterly cried that its limbs and trunk had been destroyed by Federal artillery fire. She looked to Lee for a word of condemning the North or at least sympathizing with her loss. After a brief silence, Lee said, “Cut it down, my dear Madam, and forget it.” It is better to forgive the injustices of the past than to allow them to remain, let bitterness take root and poison the rest of our life.

Not long before she died in 1988, Marghanita Laski, a well known secular humanists and novelists, said, “What I envy most about you Christians is your forgiveness; I have nobody to

forgive me.”

I pray we will not be like this woman, who thought she had no one to forgive her. Forgiveness is very powerful in strengthening our faith among ourselves and bringing glory to God, since the command to forgive comes from God. Notice Matthew Chapter 6. In verse 12, in the Lord’s model prayer, the words are *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*. Then in verse 14 Jesus said, *For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you*. But that is not the end of the matter. Verse 15 continues, *But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses*.

Forgiveness takes a tender heart made of flesh and not stone. It requires love and kindness instead of selfishness. Someone said, ““There is no love without forgiveness, and there is no forgiveness without love” (Bryant H. McGill). Forgiveness requires labor and consideration. Someone said, "Forgiveness is me giving up my right to hurt you for hurting me," (Anonymous).

In closing, let us remember that, even though we forgive others and they forgive us, God’s forgiveness is the most important even in our Christian lives. 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*.

These lessons were developed for
Mens Retreat
Sponsored by Addyston Baptist Church
Addyston, Ohio
March 9-10, 2012

Forgiveness - Lesson Two

The Challenge of Forgiveness

Dr. Ronnie Wolfe – March 5, 2012
Developed for Mens Retreat March 9-10, 2012

I. MATTHEW 18:21-35

A. Lumps in the mashed potatoes

1. I remember when I was young that my mother would mash potatoes with an old hand potato masher. Sometimes she would be in a hurry to get the meal ready, so she would not spend very much time mashing. Then there were lumps in the potatoes. Actually, I did not mind the lumps, but many people do not like lumpy mashed potatoes.
2. Some restaurants have what they call “smashed taters,” and these have lumps on purpose. I like them; some other people do not like them.
3. Bill Cosby tells a story about the lumps in his mother’s oatmeal. He says that she would put raisins in the oatmeal to hide the lumps.
4. Sometimes we put raisins in our forgiveness to hide the lumps, the excuses for not forgiving people, or for being good Christians even though we may not want to forgive.
 - a. First we may say, “Look at all the things that I do for the Lord and for the church.” This is supposed to excuse our lack of forgiveness.
 - b. Next, we may not be able to forgive someone in the church, so we say “I feel that the Lord is leading me to another church.” Sometimes this is to hide the hurt and the guilt of not forgiving.
 - c. Sometimes people say that the offense against them is so grave and serious that God does not expect them to forgive.
 - d. Some may say that the person is constantly doing the same thing over and over again, and how can one forgive a person who does the same thing over and over again? But Jesus said in Luke 17:4 *And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.*
 - e. Others say that, if they went to the other person to forgive them, they would say, “What? Forgive me? For what? I didn’t do anything to be forgiven.”
 - f. These are raisins in our oatmeal.
5. But forgiveness is not just for the offender but also for the one who is offended. We need to forgive upon principle, the principle that God teaches us to do so, and the satisfaction that we have done what God has instructed us to do.

B. Jesus’ Principle

1. Forgiving 70 x 7
 - a. Gen, 4:24 *If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and*

sevenfold.

- b. Matt 18:22 *Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.*
 - c. This means that we should take every occasion (innumerable) to forgive those who sin against us. This, of course, is not a strict, literal number such as 490. It is a principle.
2. The Parable
- a. Servants stood before the king for the accounting of their money.
 - b. One owed 10,000 talents, which we shall call dollars.
 - c. He had nothing to pay, and this, as you know, makes a very good sermon.
 - d. The servant begged his lord to forgive him the debt.
 - e. The king had compassion upon him and forgave him the debt.
 - f. If you have never had a debt forgiven, you do not know how this man felt. I have had a debt forgiven me, and it really feels good to get the debt from your responsibility with no demand to pay from your creditor.
 - g. The same servant went out to his fellow servants to one who owed him \$100.
 - h. The fellow servant begged forgiveness, but the first servant would not forgive but called for his fellow servant to be put in jail until the whole bill was paid.
 - i. The other servants knew of it, and they told their lord what was done.
 - j. His lord called him a wicked servant; that is not a very good name for a believer.
 - k. The wicked servant, then, owed the Lord all; and there was no forgiveness for him.
 - l. Now the lesson is in Matt 18:35 *So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*
3. The Principle
- a. Look at Mt 6:12 *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.* Now look at verse 15 *But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*
 - b. Now, we are not talking about losing salvation here; we are talking about losing fellowship with God and having to face Jesus Christ at his judgment seat with sins that have not been forgiven, simply for the reason that we have not forgiven others.
 - c. This may very well be one of the greatest surprises in heaven: that the sin of not forgiving will perhaps be paramount among believers at the judgement seat more than any other sin.
 - d. This principle is stated again in Mark 11:25 *And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.*
 - e. Again in Luke 6:37 *Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:*
 - f. Again in Luke 17:3 *Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.*
 - g. In 2 Corinthians Paul is asking that church to forgive a brother, and in 2 Cor 2:10 he says, *To whom ye forgive any thing, I [forgive] also: for if I forgave any*

thing, to whom I forgave [it], for your sakes [forgave I it] in the person of Christ;

- h. One of the greatest challenges in our Christian life is to forgive those who trespass against us. We need to meet that challenge.

II. DOCTRINAL FORGIVENESS

A. Denominational Forgiveness

1. Most denominations do not believe much of what Baptists believe, and sometimes we stand in awe at what they do teach.
2. But what they believe and teach is their business; we believe in religious liberty.
3. If we do not believe in religious liberty, then we are not very good Americans, are we?
4. One type of forgiveness in a sense is to leave those who may offend our doctrine to their own destruction. It is not our job to go to their churches, disrupt their worship no matter how right or wrong it may be, to argue or condemn personally the religious leaders who may teach their doctrines.
5. When I was working in the bank in Lexington, Kentucky, they taught all of the tellers a very important lesson, and that was to never touch a counterfeit bill. They counted only genuine money, not counterfeit money. That way, when the counterfeit money came through their hands, they would know immediately that it was not the real thing.
6. The same thing goes with doctrine. If we teach true Bible doctrine, then when false doctrine comes along, we will immediately be able to detect it. It is not our job to upset the religious patterns of the denominations to justify what may be our harsh attitude against them.
7. Our purpose in preaching is to “preach the word.”
8. Yes, this is a type of forgiveness. We forgive them for offending our God in their baptismal or works regeneration, in their church polity, in their erroneous bible exegesis, etc.
9. But this is a great challenge for us to perform.
10. Now, if they challenge us with their words, or if they try to steal away our members, that is quite another thing; and we are to guard the word, guard our people, and keep the traditions handed down by God’s apostles.

B. Baptist Forgiveness

1. In Doctrine
 - a. But I suppose that the greatest challenge to forgiveness is Baptist forgiveness. It is one thing to forgive an atheist for being one, or forgiving a particular denomination for having some error, but it is quite another thing to forgive a Baptist who may not agree with us in our doctrine or practice.
 - b. We must remember, though, that each local church is autonomous; and it is not our business what other churches believe or practice.
 - c. The exception to that would be when the occasion comes when a person may want to transfer a letter to or from one of these churches, and then we must deal with the truth and/or error of the situation. But until then, it really is none of our business what another Baptist church does or believes.
 - d. We may decide in our wisdom not to fellowship with that church, but it is not our

business to get involved with the correction unless it is a personal confrontation between two pastors.

(1) The situation should be kept between the “offending” church and any other one church that may be offended by something in the so-called “offending” church.

- e. There are some things that we are to forgive among ourselves.
 - (1) The elements in the Lord’s Supper.
 - (2) The Bride of Christ
 - (3) The second coming of the Lord.
 - (4) Contemporary Music
 - (5) Using Puppets and having plays
 - (6) Songs shown on a movie screen
 - (7) Movies in the church
 - (8) Having a nursery
 - (9) Having a kitchen in the church, etc.
 - f. If I am wrong, you forgive me of that (and attempt, if you like, to teach me).
 - g. If you are wrong, I must forgive you (and attempt perhaps to teach you).
 - h. This is Baptist forgiveness.
2. In Practice
- a. You as a pastor may sin a sin that brings shame upon your church and upon the testimony of Baptists.
 - b. It is, then, my job to forgive you of that sin upon your repentance of it.
 - c. Notice in closing this verse:
 - d. Gal. 6:1 *Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*
3. Our Example
- a. When Christ came to earth from heaven, he emptied himself of much of his deity in order to live as a man in the world.
 - b. This is a great example for us to empty ourselves of self and to take up completely the cause of Christ, thinking of things above and not on the things on the earth (Col. 3:2).
 - c. When Jesus died on the cross, he emptied himself even further, and he did this that he might forgive us of our sins.
 - d. If we are to forgive, we must empty ourselves of self and think of the other person. Phil. 2:5 says, *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.*
 - e. This our mind of self denial and caring for others in order that we may properly forgive others.

Forgiveness - Lesson Three

“The Cause of Forgiveness”

By Pastor Dr. Ronnie Wolfe – Prepared March 6, 201

1. THE CAUSE IS GOD

If there is forgiveness, there is a reason (or a cause) for forgiveness. We know that all things come from God and that he is the primary and first cause of all things; so he must be the first cause of man’s forgiveness.

I looked up the phrase “God is all” in the Bible, and I noticed three particular references. Jeremiah 32:27 says that God is the God of all flesh; in 2 Cor. 1:3 we find that God is the God of all comfort; in 1 Peter 5:12 we find that God is the God of all grace. Now we know that the forgiveness that we receive for salvation is from God: Eph 1:7 *In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;* So we are not straying far from this when we intimate that our forgiveness, given to us to forgive one another, comes by way of the grace of God.

Let’s read a few verses in

2 Peter 1:4-9 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. 5 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; 6 And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; 7 And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. 8 For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath

forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

So, from our first faith in Christ, we are to grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18) by adding to our faith these things mentioned in these verses. The last two things mentioned are “brotherly kindness” and “charity.” The word forgiveness is not mentioned here, but I believe that it is very strongly implied. The cause of forgiveness is also very strongly implied in the last part of this set of verses, verses 8-9.

The first thing we notice is “if these things be in you.” Grace must first have had its beginning work in you in regenerating you from your old sins and your old man. You must, then, be dead to sin and alive unto God (Rom. 6:11).

The second thing is that these things must abound, which means “to increase or to exist in abundance.” When we are saved, we have as a part of our divine nature (2 Peter 1:4) faith, to which we are to add the things mentioned here. They are there latent in our existence as God’s child, but we must add them in abundance so that we may be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But the warning here is that if these things do not abound in any man, then he is blind and cannot see afar off (MUOPAZO), which is where we get our word myopic. It is not that we are mentally or spiritually blind; it is that we are myopic: we cannot see very far. We are so self-centered that our vision for others is dimmed, and we cannot see to others in our church, to others in the community, to others in our state, our country; we cannot see those in Jerusalem, in Judea, in Samaria, and in the uttermost part of the earth.

If you do not have an abundance of these things added to your faith, then you are living in your own little world with no concern for others. Phil. 2:4 says, *Look not every man on his own*

things, but every man also on the things of others. Notice Jude 1:21-23 Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. 22 And of some have compassion, making a difference: 23 And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

2. THE CAUSE IS LOVE

The first cause of our forgiveness is God, since he is the primary and first cause of everything. But there is a secondary cause of forgiveness, and that is the cause of love. We read in 1 John 4:7 *Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.* We also read in Romans 13:10 *Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love [is] the fulfilling of the law.* Now let us consider 1 John 4:12 *No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.*

Luke 7:40 And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. 41 There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. 42 And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? 43 Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. 44 And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. 45 Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. 46 My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. 47 Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: *but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.* 48 And he said unto her, *Thy sins are forgiven.*

So, our forgiveness is measured by our love. If we really love the Lord, we will genuinely

forgive others. We love him because he forgave us of our sins, but do we realize the seriousness of our sins? Do we understand that our sins were against a holy, divine, and eternal God? Do we understand that our sins are great? Paul said in Romans 5:20 *Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound.* God wants our sins (offence) to abound. He wants us to know how deep we were in sins when he saved us; but some of us do not realize that. Peter was as much a sinner as this woman was, but this woman with the alabaster box realized how real her forgiveness was. God had forgiven her of all of her sins, which were many, and she had been humbled by the very presence of Jesus Christ. Peter, no doubt, had not sinned openly and was not known for his sin as this woman was; but he was still a sinner, and he needed forgiveness. The problem was that he did not recognize how great his sin was, and he had not been forgiven for sins quite as noticeable or deep as the sins of the woman.

Peter's sins had been forgiven, but he loved little. That may be the reason for the Lord's question in John 21:15 where it says, *So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.*

So, love and forgiveness go together. The Bible says in Mt 22:37-39 *Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second [commandment] is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* If our love for God prompts us to love our neighbor as ourselves, then loving our neighbor is what prompts us to forgive our neighbor, or those who trespass against us. Therefore, we must forgive our brothers and sisters in Christ, since we are to love them as we love ourselves.

3. CAUSES FOR NOT FORGIVING

Now we must consider, in order to press this doctrine with force, what is the cause for our not forgiving our neighbors. We have noticed some practical causes; now we need to notice some theological causes.

Since our love of God increases with his forgiveness toward us, then our lack of forgiving others must come from our lack of love for him. Perhaps we have not asked forgiveness for our sins, and perhaps that is the reason that our love is not what it should be toward God.

Another reason for not forgiving is that we still have our old nature. We need here to turn to Romans Chapter seven.

Romans 6 :16-25 If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. 17 Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. 18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. 19 For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. 20 Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. 21 I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. 22 For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: 23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. 24 O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? 25 I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.

We are definitely sinners in the flesh. 1 John 1:8 *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* It is this sin that causes us to lose the joy of God's salvation and to do things we should not and refuse to do things that we should. Now if we sin after we have been saved, we have an advocate with the Father says 1 John 2:1 *My little children, these*

things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: Should n't we, then, work on getting our sins advocated, bringing them to our lawyer so that he can plead the case before the Great Judge, the Heavenly Father, and forgive our sins so that we can forgive others their sins against us?

Notice now 1 Peter 1:22 *Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:* If we really love one another with a pure heart, then we will forgive one another. In our churches, and among our brethren and sisters, we are to forgive one another. Let us notice two scriptures: Eph 4:32 *And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.* AND Col 3:13 *Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.* Sometimes Christians have quarrels with Christians.

Churches have quarrels and divisions within them, and that should not be; but when that does happen, we need to forgive the quarrels and fix the divisions. The divisions must sometimes be healed by separation from certain people; that is, if there is no remedy for the division. Truth will make this separation, and the church will go on. But if this is just a quarrel, there needs to be forgiveness, and God will be honored.

3. A TESTIMONY OF OUR SALVATION

Our testimony of forgiveness, as well as other good works, will be a testimony of our true salvation in Jesus Christ. Notice Matt 5:16 *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.* Forgiveness is a good work, and

the Bible says in Eph 2:10 *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*

So, forgiveness is not just for the local church; it is for a testimony of the grace and the love that we have from our Father in heaven. It is a manifest token of our birth from above, an estimation in practice of our heavenly citizenship and the hope that we have in Jesus Christ.

We should walk in forgiveness. We should forgive seventy times seven. We should look for occasions to forgive. We should not hold grudges or be offended unnecessarily by our brothers and sisters in Christ. We should all with human and heavenly love be lead in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. We should fear no evil, for he is with us. We should have confidence, but not having confidence in the flesh (Phil. 3:4) but in our Lord.

Doctrinal error is the only thing that should come between us. That is, if a person is in error and will not learn the truth, he must be shunned, for the Bible says in Titus 3:10 *A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject;* Otherwise, we should work together for the kingdom of God and the churches of God.

Let us be a help one to another in any area that we can. If you can do something for me, be available to do so, and be diligent to do it. If I can do anything for you, I will do my best to be diligent to do it for you. If I am wrong, come to me, and we can talk about it. Please do not go to someone else about something that you may hear about me. Let's love one another, help one another, and forgive one another; and, as it says in Rom. 14:1 *Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.*

There is one more thing that I would like to mention about this. If you see me helping

someone in some way to get a message to everyone, to announce a resignation of a pastor, the coming in of a new pastor, or some other thing, do not immediately put me into a “group” or a “clique.” Just because I help a brother in Christ does not mean that I am taking sides with him in a certain quarrel he may be having with a church or an individual. Too many times we put people into groups when we should not. Someone said to me once, “What do the Bluegrass Boys believe about this?” I said, “The Bluegrass boys don’t believe anything. We each believe what we believe, and sometimes we disagree.”

The only group that I am in right now is First Baptist Church of Harrison, Ohio.

CONCLUSION

We have a lot of work to do. The kingdom of God is at hand; it is functioning in its proper order, and no one can stay God’s hand or say to him “What doest thou?” The work of God must continue, and it will continue; but we can make his work to be more prosperous, more glorious, more effective by attending to those things that are important regarding our duties as members of his kingdom and especially members of his churches.

Churches cannot function without people, and the effectiveness of our churches will depend to a large degree upon how purely we keep Christ’s commandments. We must be diligent. We must be faithful. We must be worshipful. We must be settled in our doctrine. But we must also be forgiving, forgiving toward one another in our own local church, and forgiving to our brothers and sisters in other churches. We cannot compromise truth, but we can forgive or at least bear with those who have not learned the truth.

I have seen in my short ministry of 49 years several students of the word of God, young men

especially, who have been scorned for their inability to learn a certain doctrine or a certain set of doctrines to the detriment of their learning from us. So, many of these young men went to other men who would love them, be patient with them, and teach them, men of other persuasions, men who took them down the road of interdenominationalism or into Protestant thinking. Many times this was the fault of not having patience with a weak brother. I fear that this has happened many more times than I know. This should not happen among us. God teaches people by his grace according to his own time, not ours. Let us show patience to weak brothers. Perhaps we may even learn from the weak brother who may ask a child-like question that may spur our own minds to rethink a position we have—it has happened, you know.

So in concluding my remarks, I would like to ask everyone here today to think about forgiveness as a serious matter. It seems such an insignificant matter to us in our daily walk with God, but it is not an insignificant matter. The subject is one with great possibilities for those who practice forgiveness and great failures and disappoints for those who do not practice it.

May God be with us. Let us have the mind of Christ, who forgave us of ALL of our sins, translated us into his kingdom, who secures us by his grace, and who is yet to take us into his heaven where we shall give an answer for everything done in this life, whether it be for Christ or not, whether it be right or wrong, whether it be for the benefit of his kingdom or not.

Faithful Forgiveness

By Ronnie Wolfe - February 14, 1987

My brother has fallen, I said to a friend.
He's broken and heartsick from the error of sin.
His wife and his children seem lonely and cold,
Since each accusation comes firmly and bold.

Now my heart is broken from seeing his life
Being shattered to pieces by hatred and strife.
I want to be bold and rebuke him for sin,
But how can I do it and still not offend?

Others have done it and left him in tears,
Leaving him feelings to last him for years.
What shall I do? I want to do right.
I am perplexed both morning and night.

My friend reassured me of his earnest care.
And that if I needed him he would be there,
But as he was leaving he then turned around,
Studied a bit and sat on the ground.

He glanced and then looked at me straight in the eyes
As if he were going to give a surprise.
Your friend, he said, is not out on a limb.
You and I can be a help to him.

You see, God has made us as wise as can be:
He made us in perfectly good symmetry.
I looked at him strangely, I'm sure that I did,
Wondering what in the world he had said.

He stared again and said, Don't you see?
It's as plain as the leaves on my apple tree.
God gave us two of several parts
To remind us how we use our hearts.

He gave us two eyes to see two things at once;
His divine judgment and His providence.
We have two ears for two wonderful things:
Hearing the gossip while not listening.

He gave us two hands to work in two ways:
To work in the mill and to carry our babes.
So the heart of the matter is simple to know.
Your heart need not break for your poor brother's woe.

Take to yourself this wonderful task:
To comfort your friend with love that will last.
Rebuke him in love, and don't compromise,
But forgive, forgive, and you will be wise.

The Father forgave us of sin, don't you know,
And with this our thankful hearts overflow.
But the Father forgives us as we forgive those
Who trespass against us, as everyone knows.

Seventy times over we are to forgive;
But be sure the Father forgives us, and live
In harmony with the Father above:
That is, to walk in brotherly love.

To say we forgive is just not enough.
Sometimes love has to be tough.
We tell our brother that sin we can't take,
But faithful forgiveness is done for his sake.

So with a two-sided heart we do what is right,
We rebuke him in love and consider he might
Have to spend some time to retribute sin,
And faithful forgiveness wins him again.