

Ephesians 4:25-32 "Forgive One Another"

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 June 2019

Preacher: Will Spink

[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Thank you, guys. Beautiful song with rich lyrics about forgiveness, which is something that's easy to think about in theory, but really hard to live out in consistent community, isn't it?

Have you felt the rub there with forgiveness? If someone makes fun of you in front of others or makes fun of a group or type of person, not realizing you're one and it stings and you resent her. A pastor neglects to follow up on caring for you in a difficult situation as he promised, and you're frustrated, disappointed, bitter.

Another kid starts leaving your kid out in really hurtful ways. You see the tears and you're so angry with that kid, but you're furious with the other parents.

[1 : 20] They seem to be supporting it. A fellow church member discredits your perspective in a meeting and belittles you in the process, and you want nothing to do with him anymore.

Do I need to keep going to remind us that this is an issue and a struggle and a challenge in our family, too? We need God's word and God's spirit to shape our hearts in our relationships.

So let's read Ephesians 4 this morning. Paul addresses several issues here about how we relate to one another in God's family and finishes with forgiveness.

Kids, that was the first one, by the way, on your list. Your sermon words this morning brought to you by the letter F. Yeah, you might have, yep, pay attention. You got one. Ephesians 4, we'll start reading at verse 25.

Verse 25. Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

[2 : 28] Be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

And then the verses will focus on, let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever.

Let's pray. Father, it's because of that that we come to your word, because we have nowhere else that we can trust. And we ask by your spirit that you would use it in our hearts and in our lives.

[3 : 46] Work in us powerfully, we ask. Change us, make us into what you would have us be. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. The scene of one of the most beautiful stories of forgiveness I've ever heard is a courtroom in post-apartheid South Africa, several years ago.

A frail black woman rises slowly to her feet. She is something over 70 years of age. Facing across the room are several white security police officers, one of whom, Mr. Vanderbrek, has just been tried and found implicated in the murders of both the woman's son and her husband.

How vividly she remembers that evening several years before, going to a place beside a river where she was shown her husband bound and beaten, but still strong in spirit, lying on a pile of wood.

The last words she heard from his lips as the officers poured petrol over his body and set him aflame were, Father, forgive them. Now the woman stands in the courtroom and listens to the confessions offered by Mr. Vanderbrek.

And a member of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission turns to her and asks, So what do you want? How should justice be done to this man who has so brutally destroyed your family?

[5 : 22] I want three things, begins the old woman calmly but confidently. I want first to be taken to the place where my husband's body was burned so that I can gather up the dust and give his remains a decent burial.

She pauses and then continues. My husband and son were my only family. I want secondly, therefore, for Mr. Vanderbrek to become my son.

I would like for him to come twice a month to the ghetto and spend a day with me so that I can pour out on him whatever love I still have remaining in me.

And finally, she says, I want a third thing. This is also the wish of my husband. And so I would kindly ask someone to come to my side and lead me across the courtroom so that I can take Mr.

Vanderbrek in my arms and embrace him and let him know that he is truly forgiven.

As the court assistants come to lead the elderly woman across the room, Mr. Vanderbrek, overwhelmed by what he has just heard, faints. As he does, those in the courtroom, family, friends, and neighbors, all victims of decades of oppression and injustice, begin to sing softly but assuredly, Amazing grace, how sweet the sound.

[6 : 54] Amazing grace. Forgiveness beyond what most of us could even comprehend. She brings her enemy into her arms and into her family.

I want to start there before we talk about forgiving one another. Forgiveness is divine, right?

To err is human. We talked about that last week. Shared sinfulness that we should share about with each other. But to forgive? That's divine.

It's where Paul ends this whole conversation, isn't it? As God in Christ forgave you. Can we just live there for a couple minutes this morning?

As God in Christ forgave you. Amazing grace that moved that elderly woman across the courtroom to her enemy reflects, doesn't it, the amazing grace of our God.

[8 : 04] Like the South African woman, God brings his enemies into his arms and into his family. Forgiveness is about restoring relationship, isn't it?

And that's what we see in God's story throughout the Bible. From the very first sin, people created to be in relationship with him have turned away to trust themselves instead.

And what we deserve from that rebellion is to be cut off. Left away from God. Sent forever away from God. Away from life.

Away from light. Our sin is described as this huge debt that is absolutely unpayable. There's nothing we can do.

No hope that we can restore the relationship. We should be cut off forever. But God.

[9 : 04] Right? But God is full of grace. Rich in mercy. Abundant in forgiveness. Forgiveness. What does he do? What God does is change the entire basis of our relationship.

He doesn't relate to us on the basis of our sin and rebellion as our sins deserve, does he? He doesn't hold our debt over us.

No, he doesn't relate to us on that basis. Not to us. He relates to Jesus that way.

He sends his son away. He sends his son away to pay the great cost, the huge debt that we owe.

And as he does that, he removes our sins from us.

Where? As far as the east is from the west. Psalm 103. They're not attached to us anymore.

They're on Jesus.

[10 : 04] In Jeremiah, his promise is to remember our sins no more. Does that mean God forgets them?

That he just tries hard but he can't come up with anything bad you've ever done? No. It means he does not count it against us. 2 Corinthians 5 says that's how he reconciles us in our relationship with him.

That in Christ, our sins are not counted against us. Why? Because they are counted against him. When God thinks of us then, our sins no longer in the picture.

That's not what he's thinking of. In fact, as he forgives our sins, he transfers us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his beloved son, Colossians 1.

He welcomes us into his family. This is where you belong, he says. Here's your status. Here's the basis of our relationship.

[11 : 12] You're treated as my beloved son. Because Jesus' perfect record, not your rebellious one, is the basis of our relationship.

Can you believe that? That's how God in Christ forgave you. After all we've done, after all the debt we accumulated, after all the ways we grieved his heart, God refuses to see our relationship with him remain broken, doesn't he?

But he sends his son to the cross to pay our debt, to forgive our sins, to restore our relationship with him forever. Amen? Amen? That's what God does.

That's how he loves us. It's how God in Christ forgave you. At great cost to himself, he moved towards you to remove the sin that was keeping you from him, to restore relationship with you. Praise the Lord that he forgives like that. Without his forgiveness, we would be crushed under the weight of our own failure.

[12 : 27] We would be cast out from his good presence, the thing we were most created for, to be with him who is goodness itself. And we would be away from that forever.

But because of his forgiveness, because of Jesus, we stand instead of far away and no hope to come near, we stand embraced and beloved in the glorious presence of God who lavishes his grace on us, not just in one moment, but over and over again forever.

Hallelujah. Hallelujah. That's our hope. That's our joy. That's how God in Christ forgives us. That's what it means for God to forgive you.

So forgive one another. See, it is to be that grace that God pours into us, that overflows from us to others.

That's the idea. That's why we say we're here to experience and express grace, that we show undeserved favor to others because God has shown undeserved favor to us, right?

[13 : 44] That's how life works. The word used for forgiving here in verse 32 actually is from the word for grace. It simply means acting with grace.

You could translate gracing one another. It's the essence of Christianity, really. As C.S. Lewis said, to be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.

That sounds easy, doesn't it? But it's really hard, isn't it? Some of you have been deeply hurt or mistreated by a brother or sister, maybe by a leader in a church, by someone else.

You know how hard this is. Sometimes that person never apologizes. Sometimes we feel that forgiveness would mean condoning something terribly wrong that has been done to us, perhaps even repeatedly done to us.

If you're feeling that, just two things this morning. First, if that's your experience with the impact of sin on your life in these devastating ways, please come talk to me or to someone else so that we can weep with you over that.

[15 : 17] And so that we can walk with you to find healing in the only place that it can truly be found, and that's in Jesus. We want that for you.

And also, know that forgiveness doesn't mean that the sin done to you is okay. It's not. Forgiveness actually means calling sin, sin, and saying what it really is.

And in saying the blood of Jesus must be shed to cover that, that's forgiveness. Lewis, again, real forgiveness means looking steadily at the sin, the sin that is left over without any excuse after all allowances have been made, and seeing it in all its horror, dirt, meanness, and malice.

Really seeing it like that. And nevertheless, being wholly reconciled to the man who has done it.

Now that's not easy. When you face something awful, really hurtful, restored relationship in the face of honestly calling unthinkable evil, evil.

Takes you back to the courtroom in South Africa, doesn't it? But for most of us, actually, forgiving one another is much less dramatic than scenes like that, isn't it?

[16 : 50] It's an everyday kind of thing. The child being left out. The comment in small group that still stings.

The pastor who neglected us. The friend who belittled us. Daily sins that still break relationship in devastating ways too, don't they?

It doesn't have to be this huge thing. And as Paul talks about in this passage, what he's talking about is living in community in Christ's church in terms, if I could use the analogy of a garden.

There are five areas Paul walks through, and every one of them where there are weeds that need to be pulled up, and then new plants planted in their place. And in this last area that he gets to, the

one we're talking about this morning, the weeds are the things in our hearts and in our actions that destroy relationship.

Look at verse 31. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you along with all malice.

[18:07] These are the weeds in our hearts. We need to slow down and consider them for a second. Let me walk briefly with you. Bitterness that harbors resentment against the person who hurt me.

Wrath that lashes out in rage that you would think to treat me that way. Anger, similar but often seething below the surface because I'm left out.

Clamor, that is noisy divisiveness, being combative with one another rather than listening to each other well. Slander that takes the battle behind your back to tear someone down.

Malice, perhaps being the summary word here, that sets you against a brother or sister for any of these reasons, that you no longer desire their good, what's best for them.

There's something else that you feel towards them in your heart. Do you see any of those weeds in your heart?

[19:20] In any relationship? See, these weeds choke out healthy relationship, don't they? Flourishing gospel community like we're praying for God to grow and develop here.

These will choke them out quickly. It's just like we said last week when we were talking about confessing sins to one another. And we said confessing our sins to one another removes loneliness in both of us, doesn't it?

The one who confesses and the one who hears have loneliness removed and enter into relationship. Just so, unforgiveness destroys relationship.

It isolates both people, doesn't it? The offender and the offended, both isolated in this unforgiveness, away from relationship with each other.

We've told ourselves that's okay. I think a lot of times we have. It's alright. The relationship can just stay cold or distant.

[20:32] I mean, that's not really that bad, is it? I'm not doing anything terrible. We do tell ourselves that's okay, don't we? We do over and over. We come up with all sorts of excuses.

And we allow brothers or sisters to become enemies. And maybe you wouldn't use that word, but either actively or passively, they're treated as enemies, not someone welcomed in.

Forgiving one another often begins with pulling up the weeds of bitterness or malice in our hearts. See, forgiveness is actually just one piece of learning to live out love with each other.

If you remember a few weeks ago, we said that love is this deeply felt value moving toward another in sacrificial action.

Well, forgiveness is just applying that reality of love in a particular situation when you've been sinned against. It's love when you've been sinned against. So forgiveness then is deeply felt value moving toward another who has offended you.

[21:47] In sacrificial action. That's what God did toward us when we sinned against Him, right? Not staying distant. Oh, well, it's okay if this relationship cools.

No. Moving toward the other sacrificially. It costs us something. Because we see the debt that they owe us. And yet we determine to stop demanding payment.

To stop holding that over their heads. It's costly. Ken Sandy, the director of Peacemakers, writes, Forgiveness can be a costly activity.

When you cancel a debt, it does not just simply disappear. Instead, you absorb a liability that someone else deserves to pay.

Similarly, forgiveness requires that you absorb certain effects of another person's sins. And you release that person from liability to punishment.

[22:50] This is precisely what Christ accomplished on Calvary. See, when someone sins against you, you have a right to be upset, don't you?

It's a right. Something wrong has been done. And many of us have high justice bones in us. And we see that there's a right that we have to be upset.

And to see that is wrong. And you know what we really struggle with? Giving up anything that we consider to be a right. We don't like giving up our rights, do we? And yet, who did?

Jesus. Jesus gave up his rights. And many of them. In order to forgive us. And so, we're called to give up our rights to forgive one another.

We pay that sometimes high price. Listen, there may be consequences that the offender needs to deal with as a result of his sin.

[23 : 56] Which is first and foremost and ultimately sin against God. But as for our relationship with them. Forgiveness says, I'm not going to keep demanding payment.

Because God is not demanding further payment from me for my sin. God paid that debt. My huge debt.

Now, I'll absorb the cost of this one as it pertains to our relationship. It may take time to rebuild trust. But I'm not going to hold my husband's failings over him day by day to keep him down. And beneath me. You may need to work on your sensitivity.

But I'm not going to use your carelessness as an excuse to keep me from loving you. Yeah, Johnny may need to learn to play with others.

[24 : 55] But we're not skipping your kid's party to remind you how hurtful what he said to my kid was. There's a cost there in each of those.

Whatever the cost is between you. You pay the cost in order to restore the relationship with a brother or a sister. And that's part of what it means to forgive one another as God and Christ forgave you.

You. We can do that only as we realize the basis for our relationship, right? Remember what God does? He changes the basis of our relationship.

God relates to us on the basis of Jesus' record and not ours. So to forgive one another in God's family means relating to brothers or sisters on the basis of their family status.

Not their sin. Brother, sister, you're loved by the Father. You know who you are? You're purchased by Jesus.

[26 : 02] You know what's true of you? You're indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Spirit, I must live that reality out. Loving and forgiving you.

I don't forgive you because you performed well. No, you didn't. You sinned. It was terrible. You sinned against me.

I forgive you not because you performed well but because Jesus did. And because Jesus performed well, we're in his family together. That's the basis of our relationship.

And if I don't let that matter here when it's hard and when I don't want to, then it never will. And community can never grow because there's way too much sin to go around.

It's gospel community, y'all. That we love each other and forgive each other for Jesus' sake. He makes the difference. Not because you root for my football team.

[27 : 04] Not because you have my same personality and I kind of would like to get along. Not because you might be advantageous to me or because you're in my income bracket. No. Because Jesus has brought us into a family together.

Forgiveness is important in all our relationships but especially within God's family. It's like I tell my three girls on a regular basis. Listen, all of your relationships are important but you got sisters forever.

You better learn how to love and forgive these two even if you don't figure it out with anybody else. Right? Have you said something like that to your kids? You better figure out how to work with each other. Listen, on the authority of God's word, your relationships with the people sitting next to you, with the people in your small group, with the people you'll run into in the hallway this morning, will last forever, even beyond your biological family relationships perhaps.

Because of Jesus. Who's in your family forever and needs your forgiveness? What relationship has grown cold, distant, or antagonistic because you're focusing on their performance more than on their family status?

What brother or sister whom your father has forgiven already are you unwilling to forgive? I don't know about you but by this time of year and after this weekend, I'm quite clear on the fact that the weeds in my garden grow a lot faster than the flowers do.

[28 : 49] Now over and over and over I have to keep pulling them up. I mean you pull them up one weekend, the next weekend they've outgrown every plant around them and they're starting to choke other things out.

They just seem to grow more easily, don't they? Man, do I feel that in my heart too. You feel that? It is so much easier to let the garden of my heart go, not to tend to the relationships, there's just too many of them.

And left alone, I promise the weeds, the bitterness, the anger, the slander, grow so much more easily. But God has called us to plant a community garden, if you will, that shares the beauty of his love, his grace, his forgiveness with all who see it.

And so one relationship at a time, he calls us to pull up a weed and plant a flower. In fact, he pours his beautiful forgiveness into our lives over and over.

It's this uniquely powerful solution. His forgiveness, the only thing that both kills the weeds and grows the flowers at the same time.

[30 : 12] He pours that into us so that we will have the resources that we don't feel like we have to forgive. How else could the elderly woman have any love left to pour into the man who killed her only family?

And yet she asks that he be her son, that I can pour on him whatever love I have remaining.

What a beautiful relationship that is, that exalts the grace of God. It's such a beautiful thing, isn't it, when broken relationships are restored by grace through forgiveness.

That relationship broken by unforgiveness, that doesn't seem to matter to you. It's the place God's calling you to tend the community garden.

To stop by today with the failing spouse, with the hurtful friend, and let the gospel pull up the weed in your heart.

[31 : 19] And replace it in God's time with a beautiful, healing relationship that will be part of the garden, that the whole community will enjoy.

As they savor with us the glories of the incredible grace of our great God, who has loved us and forgiven us that we might do the same with one another.

Let's pray. God, we marvel again at your love and forgiveness.

It is by definition well beyond what we deserve. And that's why we call it grace. And we thank you for it. And we ask that you would astonish us with it again today.

That it would not just pour into us, but that it would flow from us. That you might make our relationships rich, rich soil of forgiveness.

[32 : 20] Places where beautiful, restored relationships grow. That testify to the power of your grace.

The power of your spirit. Would you come and pour that into us? Amen. Amen. Amen. Even as we've sung this morning, how deep your love is for us.

How vast, beyond all measure. Give us love that is beyond us, Father. But that is exactly like you. For each other and for others.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.