

**“Practicing Forgiveness” Luke 17:1-4, Sermon Notes**  
**Pastor Marc Wragg**  
**Saving Grace Bible Church**  
**October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017**  
**Morning Worship Service**

**Text**

“And He said to His disciples, “It is inevitable that stumbling blocks should come, but woe to him through whom they come!<sup>2</sup> “It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble.<sup>3</sup> “Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.<sup>4</sup> “And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.” (Luke 17:1-4 NAS)

**Textual Proposition**

We protect purity by making sure we do not act in a way that causes others to stumble, by confronting others when they sin, and by forgiving others of their sin

**Sermonic Proposition**

To protect purity in the church we seek to walk carefully, confront sin, and forgive sinners

**Sermon Purpose**

The purpose of this sermon is to teach us how to forgive

**Introduction**

“To be a Christian means to *forgive* the inexcusable in others because God has *forgiven* the inexcusable in you.” -CS Lewis

People do inexcusable things

- The heart of man is desperately sick and wicked
- He is selfish
- He is lawless
- His acts are unrighteous

Like the events that occurred on Monday October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2006 in Nickel Mines

- At 7:30 that morning a group of 26 school aged children were heading to school. The kids age ranged from 6 to 13 years old
- Their teacher, Emma, was 20 years old, having taught at the school for two years
- On this morning Emma had family visiting her at the school house. Her mother, sister, and two sisters in law

That morning 32-year-old Charles Carl Roberts IV had finished gathering all the supplies he determined he needed

- He had gathered his 9mm
- His 12-gauge Shotgun
- 30-06 rifle
- Stun Gun
- 600 rounds of ammunition
- A lubricant
- Hammer, nails, wrenches, binoculars, earplugs, batteries, a flashlight, a candle, tape, two-by-four and two-by-six wood planks
- Extra clothing
- And zip ties

After the morning recess had ended, around 10:15 am, Roberts set his plan in motion

Angry at God for the death of a new born child a few years earlier, Roberts sought to spurn God by acting out his lusts and anger upon the school children

- He entered into the school under the guise of having lost something
- As he entered into the school he pulled out his gun and forced everyone to the ground

In the chaos a child escaped and ran to the nearest neighbor's house

Roberts as shocked to find other adults in the one room school house

Upon brandishing the gun Emma and her mother escaped and ran a quarter mile to the neighbor's house for help

At 10:35 911 received a frantic phone call for help

- Roberts zip tied some of the legs and hands of the girls together
- He gathered the supplies from his truck
- He barricaded himself in the school house and closed all the blinds except for one, which had fallen from the widow and broke when Roberts tried to close it
- He sent all the boys out and the remaining adults

At one point during this ruckus he said to the girls, "I am angry at God and I need to punish some Christian girls to get even with him."<sup>1</sup>

At 10:44 am, 9 mins after the 911 call, police showed up at the school house. Initially 3 state troopers. Over the next few minutes 7 more arrived and surrounded the school house

- The police began to entreat Roberts to put down the guns and come out

At 10:55 a frustrated and agitated Roberts called 911 to tell them to have the police back down

- Unable to harm the girls as he planned he lined them up and shot them

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<sup>1</sup> Amish Grace, pg 25.

At 11:05am the shots rang out and the police stormed the school building

- The killer turned the gun upon himself and died
- In that room was 10 young girls from 7 to 13
- “Five would die. The other five, critically injured, had survived by rolling around and burying their heads in their arms.”<sup>2</sup>
- The youngest victim was 7 and the oldest was 13

The account and the aftermath with the lessons learned about the events can be read in the book Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy

Evil and vile things happen. Even as this week we heard news about a shooter who took the lives of 59 and injured another 527

Now be clear we cannot forgive sin committed against others. We are only able to forgive sin committed against us. But assuming this was your daughter killed

The question is how do we forgive someone like this? Can we even forgive someone who does this? Should we forgive someone who acts like this?

Responses have ranged from, “No, we cannot we would be dishonoring the death of these little girls” or, “We can’t because he is not repentant and now being dead unable to repent” or, “Yes, we must forgive him.”

Indeed the words of CS Lewis ring more profound than ever here: “To be a Christian means to *forgive* the inexcusable in others because God has *forgiven* the inexcusable in you.” -CS Lewis

There are many reasons why people are opposed to showing Charles Roberts forgiveness

- His sins were too atrocious to be forgiven
- He took his own life so he cannot be forgiven
- He never demonstrated repentance so we must not forgive
- He never confessed his sin other than to say he knew what he was about to do was wrong
- His acts were so vile there is no way we can be expected to forgive him. To forgive him would be an injustice on those who died

We know we cannot withhold forgiveness

- We know God calls us to forgive others
- We know that our conscience burdens us when we do not obey the commands of God
- We just don’t understand how or when we should forgive in light of the other person’s actions and lack of repentance
- Matt 6:14, 15

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<sup>2</sup> Amish Grace, pg 26.

"For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.<sup>15</sup> "But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions." (Matthew 6:14-15 NAS)

- One who says I have never murdered anyone, so why should I forgive a murderer?
- Oh really, you have never murdered anyone? Did you yell at someone? Were you ever angry with someone? Read Matthew 5, you broke the law of God
- If you called your brother a fool you are guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.
- "So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart." (Matthew 18:35 NAS)

We are expected to forgive sin. Even great sin. If we will not forgive sin, God will not forgive our sin

So the begging question is, how do we forgive?

- To answer this question some have turned to Luke 17:3, 4 as help to understand how to forgive

"Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.<sup>4</sup> "And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him." (Luke 17:3-4 NAS)

This same group has also gone to Eph 4:32

"And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." (Ephesians 4:32 NAS)

- Taking the "just as" to mean in the exact same way

"Bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you." (Colossians 3:13 NAS)

- Again taking the "just as" to mean in the exact same way
- This view is known as conditional or transactional forgiveness

This view of forgiveness is taught by Jay Adams, or more recently Christ Brauns. As I have said before, it is the predominate view among Christian counseling circles

The idea is this: forgiveness is the releasing of the debt of sin based on the condition of it being freely offered to an offender who confesses his sin and turns from it

- Forgiveness is then based on the condition of having received the offer
- Having confessed sin
- And having repented
- When these conditions are met then forgiveness takes place

Chris Brauns wrote a book called *Unpacking Forgiveness* in which he wrote this:

Brauns "God's forgiveness is conditional." Pg 21

- He makes this assertion throughout his book
- He even concludes the book in the final appendix in the last paragraph of the book he states "Biblical forgiveness is conditioned on repentance and results in the elimination of guilt." Pg 218

Ppg 36 "How we believe God forgives us shapes how we forgive others."

"God expects believers to forgive others in the way that he forgave them. That is, we should define forgiveness between ourselves and other people *the way God defined it in forgiving us.*" Brauns pg 44

- You see then God's example or God's pattern is how we are to forgive

"Christians are to forgive others as God forgave them. Graciously, willingly, and freely, they should offer a costly present to any who offended them. Those who do repent and unwrap the offered package will find forgiveness and reconciliation inside." Pg 61 Brauns

The definition then of forgiveness:

"God's Forgiveness: A commitment by the one true God to pardon graciously those who repent and believe so that they are reconciled to him, although this commitment does not eliminate all consequences." Pg 51 Brauns

Our forgiveness then:

"Forgiveness: A commitment by the offended to pardon graciously the repentant from moral liability and to be reconciled to that person, although not all consequences are necessarily eliminated." Pg 55 Brauns

You see then we are told that we have to forgive others in the exact same way

- IE you were not saved, and thus forgiven, until you asked for forgiveness and then you received it

Therefore, in Brauns' view, Charles Roberts IV would not be forgiven by the victims because he never repented

- Some may take Braun's view because it satisfies their emotions
- The dude does not deserve to be forgiven and since he has not repented, he will not be forgiven
- The problem is the dude is not around so the bitterness is then going to be directed to his family. But I will let Braun's address that to his devotees

The proof that "just as" should mean in like manner is the teaching here in Luke 17:3-4

- The text says "If" giving the conditional statement
- "He sins" which is fulfillment of the conditional statement
- He should be rebuked
- Then If he repents

- We should forgive him
- RIGHT? Well not so fast

But there are significant problems with this view which need to be considered so let me name a few and then purpose to you how one should forgive, even the heinous acts of Mr. Roberts if he had sinned against us

Problems with Conditional Forgiveness:

### **1. It starts with a theological assumption**

That is that forgiveness is based on God's work of redemption

- But friends that indeed is an assumption
- If this is the time that we are forgiven, and indeed we are forgiven at salvation, then what about the other times God forgives us? Or does God only forgive us one time?
  - If God only forgives us one time and we only ask for the forgiveness leading to salvation 1x then what is Jesus teaching in Luke 17:4 7x a day our brother comes asking for forgiveness?
  - Do we ask for forgiveness after salvation?

This view fails to see that God also forgives us regularly in sanctification. The begging question is, if God forgives me in salvation and in sanctification, which one is the model for our forgiveness of others? Why would we assume just the cross when Jesus tells us to pray daily for forgiveness? Matt 6:12

- Recently I pressed someone who held to the conditional view on God's regular and continual forgiveness of us, IE that which we experience in sanctification and asked, "Does God forgive us while we are being sanctified?"
- The answer has to be yes. This person would not answer
- Matt 6:12
- 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.' (Matthew 6:12 NAS)
- Comes as part of the Lord's prayer which also asks in the previous verse:
  - 'Give us this day our daily bread. (Matthew 6:11 NAS)
- When asked about this the person simply replied well vs 11 applies to us now while verse 12 applies to us at salvation.
- Their theological tradition determines what the text must be saying

### **2. Conditional Forgiveness forces texts to conform to its view point rather than having its viewpoint shaped by the text**

This is seen in Matt 6:12 by making verse 11 apply to us now – give us this day our daily bread – while verse 12 applies to us only at salvation "forgive us our debts"

Or Mark 11:25 we have to assume the process of reconciliation took place first before there was the seeking of forgiveness

Or Matt 18:21-35 is said to teach that it only applies when the person asks for forgiveness even though neither servant asked for forgiveness. They were granted it because they needed it. Both servants asked for time. Look at the text again

Even our text before us here in Luke 17:3-4

"Be on your guard! **If** your brother sins, rebuke him; and **if** he repents, forgive him.<sup>4</sup> "And **if** he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him." (Luke 17:3-4 NAS)

- There is a conditional clause used here
- 3 of them to be precise
- The assumption is that these conditional statements are telling us how to act in different events
- But that is not the case

There are different kinds of conditional statements

- You know this
- So for examples programmers write programs revolving around conditional statements
  - If you click on this button then perform this routine
  - This is the way that the conditional forgiveness view translates and understands the conditional statements in this text

But there are other kinds of conditional statements

- I don't know if I want a sweater or a coat
  - This kind of conditional statement reflects making a decision between two real options
- Or "If you are ever between a ninja and watermelon, duck"
  - This kind of conditional statement reflects what you should do in a hypothetical situation

My point is that there are different kinds of conditional statements

- The same is true in the Greek Language
  - The Greek has 4 classes of conditional statements

The first illustration I gave you reflects the 1<sup>st</sup> class conditional statement

- That is like a programmer writes "if you click on this button then perform this function" is equivalent to the first class conditional statement in the Greek
- When you have an if clause followed by an indicative mood verb then you have a first class conditional statement in the Greek text
  - The indicative mood is the mood of reality
  - It is the mood of certainty
  - When in reality or when certainly this condition is met then perform this task
- BUT that is not what you have here in this text
- The grammar does not support the 1<sup>st</sup> class conditional statement

Here the text is a third class conditional statement

- Here you have the “if” statement followed by a subjunctive mood verb
- The subjunctive is a mood of uncertainty
- Whenever something like this might happen
- The emphasis here is not on how to respond to events but that we are to or should respond when they occur

So we can say it like this, this text gives us a description of what we are to do, rather than a prescription for how we do it

- The description is to protect the holiness of the church by confronting sin and forgiving sinners
- There is no script how

So the point is that the conditional forgiveness view presses the text to try to say more than what it intends

- Jesus could have easily used the indicative mood verb if His intention was to teach how we forgive sin
- The fact that he did not, as is plain by the grammar of the text, should tell us there is something more at play than to tell us how to forgive
  - See last week’s sermon for the answer

The point here is that the conditional forgiveness view presses normal and plain exegesis to make the text appear to mean something it is not intending to teach. They do this by using the ambiguity of the English translation or the subjectivity of a Theological Hermeneutic to shape the text to support its view

- The view cannot do this and consistently handle the scriptures
- Some texts are handled plainly and others are front loaded with assumptions and qualifiers which cannot be found in the immediate context

### **3. It makes our ability to obey the scripture contingent upon another’s response**

- a. To be fair, this view would say no, we are not obligated to forgive unless the person repents so we are not violating any passage and we are not withholding forgiveness
- b. Again, see problem view 2 – There is no way this can possibly reconcile with Mark 11:25
- c. "And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions. (Mark 11:25 NAS)
- d. If you have anything against someone forgive
- e. All this view can say is “well it is assumed that they came and repented beforehand”
- f. But they cannot obey the direct commands or follow our Lord’s example if they hold this view

#### 4. The view forces us to keep a record of wrongs

- a. Since we cannot forgive until we are asked, we are forced to hold on to debts and keep track of them
- b. Mind you they will say you can't be bitter so put off bitterness. But you have to hold on to the debts until the offender asks for forgiveness
- c. But we cannot release those debts until there is repentance
  - i. So if the person dies we cannot release it
  - ii. If they don't agree with our assessment you cannot release it
  - iii. If they will not repent you cannot release it

This view forces us to violate 1 Cor 13:5

“does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*,” (1 Corinthians 13:5 NAS)

- Because we are left holding accounts until there is repentance

It is not uncommon for this view to have followers remembering unconfessed sins from 10 to 20 years previous, still seeking the repentance of the sinner so that they can forgive

#### 5. The Conditional view cannot consistently be practiced

Jay Adams who taught in *From Forgiven to Forgiving* says that we should just drop small matters

- Overlook them
- Let them go
- Forget about them

That is wonderful, I would say the same. It is the only way we keep relationships sane. But mind you, that is forgiveness. Adams must borrow from my view. For I believe it is clear “Love covers a multitude of transgressions.” (Prov. 10:12; 1 Pet. 4:8)

Chris Brauns says you might just have to drop a matter

- If an elder comes along in your life and tells you to drop it then you just need to drop it
- Again this is not forgiveness it is just leaving it

Thanks Chris this is the definition of **ἀφίημι** in the NT. To release or drop a debt. Thanks for practicing unconditional forgiveness

In another case a friend said, “If someone is not mature or wise enough to walk through the process of seeing their sin, confessing it, and repenting, but they demonstrate that they are sorrowful, then I forgive.”

- So if they do not go through the process of actually meeting the conditions necessary for forgiveness you can still forgive? Yes! Then how can you hold to a conditional forgiveness view when you by practice operate with unconditional forgiveness? Well it happens sometimes not all the time

The conditional forgiveness view cannot be practiced consistently

## **6. It is not the normal view of the Church**

- It has not been taught primarily in the Church
- Philip Schlamp – taught a series of very passionate sermons defending the “Conditional Forgiveness view”
- <http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=312111340201>
- 10 of them. (See how nice I am to let you off with only 9 sermons on forgiveness)
- He states many times in his series that he does not have many supporters in his view though he is not alone in his view

The point is that you will not simply land here on this view normally

- You come to this view after looking at the scripture through a particular lens

This is clear by the emphasis in Church history

- Relatively new developments of historical characters who present the Conditional Forgiveness View

## **7. It makes forgiveness a status rather than an attribute practiced**

- a. That is to say we give people forgiveness like we give people Justification or we give them freedom
- b. It is something they receive after going through a process
- c. I see forgiveness as a moral attribute stemming from love
- d. You see if forgiveness is an attribute expressed then
  - i. It is shown in many different ways
  - ii. It is moral and to be reflected in us as it is in God
  - iii. Is part of the nature of God irrespective of man’s response
  - iv. Can be expressed no matter how the other person responds

These are problems I see with the “Conditional Forgiveness” view and why

How do we forgive a shooter that kills our children and then takes his life?

- How do we accuse a rapist who will not acknowledge his sin?
- How do we forgive someone who has violated the highest and most profound positions of trust?

## **1. We begin to forgive by taking the person before God in prayer**

- a. Mark 11:25 - "And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions." (Mark 11:25 NAS)

- b. You release the person before God privately before God
- c. You purpose in your heart to release the sinner Matt 18:35 “forgive, from the heart”
- d. You pray in faith for God to work on the sinner
- e. You pray in faith for God to help you forgive as you should
- f. You ask God to change the sinner and work in the sinner just as Jesus does in Luke 23:34

You start demonstrating the inward disposition of the heart of releasing the sinner from his debt by going to God and turning the sinner over to God

## **2. You regularly pray for the person**

- a. Matt 6:12 – You forgive them regularly before God – daily – just as you pray for your daily needs
- b. You show your forgiveness as you are regularly releasing the person before God
- c. Continually praying for the person demonstrates a heart of forgiveness
- d. You love the sinner enough to pursue his best

## **3. You confront their sin and call them to repentance**

- a. You seek to demonstrate publicly what you have already declared privately. That is your forgiveness of them
- b. Luke 17:3 – If he sins rebuke him
- c. Matt 5:23-24 if you brother comes to his senses and knows he has sinned and comes to you asking for forgiveness give it to him
- d. You know you have truly forgiven someone when you can reconcile with them. You can only reconcile with them when they have repented and you have forgiven

You see the offended pursues reconciliation to demonstrate his forgiveness while the offender pursues reconciliation to demonstrate his repentance

## **4. You actively love them and show them the love of God**

- a. Like Luke 7 – you are demonstrating a lavish love for God by seeking the best for the other person at the expense of yourself
- b. Not putting yourself back under their sin but calling them to repentance and faith and obedience to God
- c. You speak truth to them
- d. You build them up in the faith
- e. You make sure you are not adding to their burden by heaping guilt on them
- f. You care for them more than you care for yourself

**5. When they have confessed their sin, repented and sought reconciliation, you walk with them in love and unity of the truth**

- a. Luke 24:46-47 and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; <sup>47</sup> and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem." (Luke 24:46-47 NAS)
- b. Like all brothers and sisters in the faith we stand together in unity having our sins forgiven by God
- c. When we can stand with and love those who have sinned against us then we know we have truly forgiven someone
- d. Forgiveness is love applied. Many want forgiveness as a result of an exchange. No forgiveness is the evidence of a selfless and sacrificial love on display

What I have sought to demonstrate here is that we forgive in small ways and in significant ways

1. At the moment we are sinned against we start praying to God to release the sin. At that moment you have started to forgive
2. If you overlook the offense and never bring it up again you have forgiven
3. If the person comes to you seeking reconciliation and repents you forgive

These are all expressions of forgiveness. Some small and private. Some expressions are public. Some are small and need to mature. But forgiveness is the releasing of a sin debt and it can be released privately in prayer, personally before God, and publicly in reconciliation

**Amish Grace**

- The Amish were so forgiving towards Charles Carl Roberts IV that as they were receiving outpouring of love from the community they turned their attention to Robert's wife Marie, and his kids
- They set up funds for her and the kids

Chris Brauns addresses this in his book and cannot call what they did forgiveness. He says they showed Mercy, Love, and Grace

- No friend they showed forgiveness
- They did not hold the debt over his head and cared for his family

They forgave so freely, so unconditionally, so much from the heart that the wife of Mr. Roberts faith was transformed and encouraged

She wrote a book in 2013

One Light Still Shines

Here is the prescript to the book:

"Marie Roberts Monville, the wife of the man who created such horror, tells her story for the very first time. It is a story of sorrow and destruction, but also one of majestic deliverance, unending compassion, breathtaking forgiveness, and grace-filled redemption."

“Within a solitary moment, Marie Monville realized that life, as she knew it, was over. What she never anticipated was a tangible encounter with God reaching into her circumstances, through them rewriting all she believed about herself, her faith, and the God she thought she knew. *One Light Still Shines* reveals three love stories: the innocent love of a devoted wife for a husband in pain, the incomprehensible love of God in the aftermath of massacre and destruction, and the redemptive love of Christ, waiting to unfold in the life of every person [who turns to Him].”

In this book Marie describes how God showed her grace and mercy in the midst of her misery. Like the afternoon of the shooting the fathers of the young girls who died walked to her parents’ house where she was staying to express that they had forgiven Charles and they wanted to care for Marie and the family

The book describes the day of the funeral and how the Amish created a wall of bodies by standing around the grave site so the media would not broadcast the family

The book describes how the Amish prayed regularly for the family of the man who murdered their kids

Here is what people should receive from us: They should receive an unconquerable and inextinguishable love which releases inexcusable debt because God has shown us an unconquerable and inextinguishable love through Jesus Christ and released us from our debts

To forgive others is to live out gospel love practically before sinners. Until we demonstrate this kind of unconditional love we will not see the great power of God’s redemptive work

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