

Do Gooder

The Right to Forgive Wrongdoers

October 6, 2024

Today we're talking about forgiving the ignorant wrong-doers in our lives!

Three years ago, on sermon #900, I told you I was starting a series called "Last 100". Some of you are curious what I might say today – and a bit confused, thinking I called it, "THE Last 100". But I just called it "Last 100". And we *did!* So, I guess *now* we'll see if we can last *another* 100.



So let's start #1,000 with a 2-part question: **Want to do God's good will?** BUT ... also: **Want to silence the ignorant talk of foolish people?** Well, *good news*, cuz *now you can!*



For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. [So, us do-gooders best be doin' good!] – 1 Peter 2:15 NIV



When we talked about flexing our *faith*, we saw how *Paul* had said:



I am looking for what may be credited to your [spiritual] account ... according to [God's] glorious *riches* in *Christ Jesus*. – Philippians 4:17-19 NIV



Well, before that, *Christ Jesus* challenged His *followers* when *He* said:



"If you love *those* who love you, what credit is that to you? For even *sinners* love those who love *them*. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? ... But *love your enemies*, [which is what it means to] do good ... and your *reward* will be *great* ... [cuz you'll be just like Jesus] For He is kind to the *unthankful [ones]* and [*even to the*] *evil [ones]*. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is *merciful*. – Luke 6:32-36 NKJ

This isn't a suggestion; it's a *Last Supper command* that *Christ* orders every *follower* to *follow*.

"My *commandment* [is] that you love one another as *I* have loved *you*." – John 15:12 ESV

[And] God shows *His* love for us in that *while* we were *still sinners*, *Christ* died for us. ... [For] while we were enemies we were reconciled to God [i.e. *reunited, reconnected, and restored in a right relationship*] by the *death* of His Son ... our Lord *Jesus Christ*, *through* whom we have now *received reconciliation*. – Romans 5:8-11 ESV

He even *died* for the *right to forgive* those *mocking* Him as He died – including that *guy* hanging next to Him! And *all* He demands of His *followers*, is that ***we die to self-centered, self-serving, selfishness, and live to sacrifice love, to reconcile our ignorant enemies to Our Father.*** Know *why?*

"Because He is kind to the *unthankful* and *evil*." – Luke 6:35 NIV

“Therefore, pray: [as Jesus taught the Twelve on the day He deliberately chose a “Judas” as an apprentice] ‘Our Father in heaven ... Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. ... And forgive us [in heaven] our debts, [to You] as we forgive [on earth] our debtors. And do not lead us into [the] temptation, [to trespass against them] but deliver us from the evil one.’ [Who trespassed against us] ... For [as Jesus then adds] if you forgive men [on earth] their trespasses, [against you] your heavenly Father will also forgive you. [Notice how “debts” (what we should’ve done but didn’t) becomes “trespasses” (what we shouldn’t’ve done but did); because our debtors likely owe us remorse or repentance or restitution, having trespassed on our heart] But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” – Matthew 6:9-15 NKJ

Not because He doesn’t desire it – He died for the right – but He can’t, because **unforgiveness is a refusal to follow Christ**. So His hands are tied. Cuz **it’s not optional!**

If a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are *spiritual* [rather than *carnal*, must] restore [rather than resent] such a one in a spirit of gentleness, [all the while] considering yourself [and how you’d like your trespasses handled] lest you also be tempted. [to trespass against those who trespass against us] Bear one another’s [trespassing] burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. [To be “kind to the evil,” to “be merciful, just as your Father is,” and to “love others as I love you”] For if anyone thinks himself to be something, [spiritual] when he is nothing, [more than carnal] he deceives himself. ... For each one [of His followers] shall bear his own load. [Of the burden of the trespasses of others; so] Do not be [self] deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to [please] his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, [i.e. death; destruction] but he who sows to [please] the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And [so] let us [do-gooders] not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. – Galatians 6:1-9 NKJ

From the start, God set a seed-sowing, fruit-producing principle in place, to serve throughout Scripture, again and again, as an analogy for true spirituality. In the beginning God said:



“Let there be trees that grow seed-bearing fruit. The seeds will then produce the kinds of plants and trees from which they came.” – Genesis 1:11 NLT



[And then Jesus said] “You will know [the deceivers] by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.” – Matthew 7:16-17 LSB



It’s a pretty simple yet profound principle. If you plant a carrot seed, in due season you’ll get a bunch of carrots. Sow corn and you’ll reap ears for years. But he who has ears to hear, knows the same goes for life. So, **if you want a life that’s filled with love, you best be planting a lot of love**. And if you want to be flowin’ in the freedom of debt-free forgiveness, you gotta be sowin’ the seeds of forgiveness.



And those who are peacemakers [who sow to please the Spirit] will plant seeds of peace and [in due season] reap a harvest of goodness. – James 3:18 NLT

[Can a *fig tree*] bear olives, or a grapevine bear *figs*? ... Who is *wise* and *understanding* among you? [The *merciful* who bear one another's burdens! As God shows His love] Let him show by *good conduct* [on earth] ... the *wisdom* that is from [heaven] above ... *full of mercy* and *good fruits* ... sown in *peace* by those who *make peace*. – James 3:12-18 NKJ

[So] “If you have *anything* against *anyone*, [down here] *forgive* him, [his trespasses] that your Father in *heaven* may also forgive you *your* trespasses. But if *you* do *not* forgive, neither will your Father in *heaven* forgive *your* trespasses.” – Mark 11:25-26 NKJ

Cuz you haven't yet died to self, to live for Christ, to reconcile your enemies to God.

Therefore, from now on, we [who sow to please the Spirit] regard *no one* according to [what pleases] the flesh. [But endeavor to love and restore those who trespass against us; because] ... If anyone is in Christ, he is a *new* [spiritual] creation; old [carnal] things have passed away; behold, *all things* have become *new*. Now [these] *all things* [new] are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself *through Jesus Christ*, and has [now] given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not [counting] their *trespasses* [against] them, and has [now commanded us and] committed to us the *Word of reconciliation*. [Which was? “Father, forgive them.” (Lk 23:34)] Now then, we [who plant seeds of peace] are *ambassadors for Christ*, as though God were pleading [for reconciliation] *through us*: [and so] we [who sow peace] implore you [who trespass against us, and are freely forgiven by us, and in due season restored to us, as far as it depends on us] on Christ's behalf, [in the same way] be reconciled to God. – 2 Corinthians 5:16-20 NKJ

Because, ***forgiveness is our most powerful, forceful, God-glorifying witness.*** Because, from the beginning, ***it was God's plan and purpose to use your love and mercy to represent His.*** So:

Even if *you* should *suffer* for what is *right*, you are blessed. ... [Because] It is *better*, if it is God's will, to suffer for *doing good* than for *doing evil*. For Christ *died* for [the right to forgive] sins once for all, the *righteous* for the *unrighteous*, to bring *you* to God. – 1 Peter 3:14-18 NIV

[So] In everything *set them an example by doing what is good* ... so that those who *oppose* you may be *ashamed* because they have nothing *bad* to say about *us*. – Titus 2:7-8 NIV



When I became senior pastor in '97, I had a few very vocal detractors who despised my speaking and leadership style, and spread a “prophetic word” that I had a “Jezebel spirit” which would *deceive* the church into *false worship*; and a “Prodigal spirit” which would *lead* the church into a *pig sty* of *shame*.

And we *lost* about *600 people*. And it was *fairly devastating*. But *how* could I *argue* or *rebut* their *claims*? “No I'm not! *You* have a *lying* spirit!” So I took the only appropriate stand I could: politely, repeatedly saying: “Time will tell.” And it did. And *each* of them *eventually* – like *years* later – admitted their *mistake* and *regret*, and *confessed* their *trespasses* against me, and *offered sincere apologies*. And we *reconciled*. One *woman* – who I *adore* to this *day* – *confessed* it *loudly*, in *public*, when she *saw* me at the *grocery store*. And then *again*, *months* later, when she *bumped* into me. And *again*, *months* after *that*; but when she *began* her *third* time, I *stopped* her, put my *hands* on her *shoulders*, *looked* her in the *eyes*, and said, “I *forgive* you. I hold *nothing* against you. We're *friends*. So don't *ever* bring this up *again*.” And she *hasn't*.

It's hard to wait for that "due season" to finally come, but it's so satisfying to see what you sow begin to grow in those so-and-sos! So, "set [them] an example by doing what is good". Like our crucified Commander who washed the feet of His betrayer, just before the cross, and said:

"I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." – John 13:15 NIV

[So] Forgive as the Lord forgave you. [Cuz it's not optional] – Colossians 3:13 NIV

For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. [Not to shut 'em up and shut 'em down or shove it in their face; but to free 'em up with mercy, forgiveness, and grace] ... [In fact] To this you were called, [and commanded as a Christian] because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps. ... [Step #1] When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; [Step #2] when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, [Step #3] He entrusted himself to Him who judges justly. – 1 Peter 2:15-23 NIV

So there's forgiveness in a nutshell: don't "retaliate" and don't make "threats" and do "trust" the "Judge". It isn't about downplaying, ignoring, or excusing a wrong; just the opposite. It's about facing and confronting the wrongdoer with compassion. Because, honest to goodness do-gooders don't minimize sin, they neutralize it. To this you were called, cuz to hold a grudge is to judge the Judge. Cuz our struggle to forgive is actually a battle with self-deception and unbelief. And victory can only come if and when we fully put our faith in the only just Judge.



Truth is, **you don't hold a grudge; the grudge holds you.** Talk about a death grip! It robs us of the peace that comes with forgiveness – whether receiving or dispensing it. Cuz there are two big ol' barriers to true and lasting peace. 1) **GUILT**, which comes from the bad that we do, which I compared to a warning light, and said: **the only fix is to receive forgiveness.** And 2) **RESENTMENT**, which comes from the bad that's done to us. And **the only fix is to offer forgiveness.** So the very best way we can ever pray is to sincerely say to the only just Judge: "forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors".

"But how?!" You know how **you rehearse a grudge over and over?** Well, you get rid of it the same way: **you must release a grudge over and over.** "But how do I forgive the intentional, inexcusable wounds of those who are dead to me?" **Turn it into worship.** Don't see it as **your generous gift to jerks.** See it as: **your grateful duty to Jesus.** Your Commander and Savior. After all:

When you were dead [to Him] in [your] trespasses ... God made you alive [forever] together with Him, when He forgave us all our trespasses – Colossians 2:13 NRS

Bring the focus back to the actual battle: **Am I grateful enough to Him to forgive them?** Cuz, just as hurt people hurt people, **forgiven people forgive people.** And so, if you're ready to sow:

As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. [By sowing without growing weary] ... If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. ... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. – Romans 12:18-21 NIV

Cuz haters gotta hate, and do-gooders gotta do gooder!