

Forgiveness is Freedom 5:

Forgiving & Reconciling With God

(preached 6/6/21)

Please turn to *Romans 5*.

LAST WEEK: **Forgiving Ourselves: Cleansing the Conscience.**

- Our conscience was created and programmed by God Himself, Who wrote all His moral Laws upon it: don't steal, don't lie, etc.
- We've also written our own laws & standards on it too, and when we or others violate them, our conscience counts it as sin.
- It's job is to bring all debts to zero and the only payment it accepts is blood.
- Our conscience keeps records of all sins: including ones we've committed against God and others.
- We haven't been able to forgive ourselves because it still holds our debts against us.
- It's the main accuser in our lives...not the Devil!
- We haven't been able to clear our conscience because we ignore, argue with, attempt to silence, rebel against, and even call it the voice of Satan.
- A sober conscience is doing the job God created it to do: quoting God's commandments and urging us to make things right. Our relationship with it is adversarial.
- A "defiled" conscience is drunk on unpaid debt and has completed the process Jesus lays out in Matthew 5: it's delivered us to the judge, who turned us over to the cop, who put us jail where we're being tormented for unpaid debts.
- A drunk conscience torments us by condemning us, call us names like worthless, bad parent, bad person, etc.
- Jesus was clear on the remedy: agree with our adversary quickly and make payment.
- We never agree with a defiled conscience!
- We do agree with our sober one: **[tell story about grandma].**
- Payment is the blood of Christ and our conscience is programmed to receive it.

FOLLOW UP. There's much more I could have preached on both the conscience and how the devil truly influences us, but that will be for another time. One important aspect I didn't have time to get into last week is that we're called upon to live repentant lifestyles. "Agreement" with our sober conscience means we truly recognize that we've done wrong and desire to turn from those ways, which is how the covenant of Grace works. The supernatural power of God lifts us up and helps us to overcome the ways of the flesh so that we're not in perpetual repeat.

TODAY. ***Have you ever been or are you now angry with God?*** I know I have been, many times! Not just a long time ago when I was less mature, either. Unanswered prayers are frustrating, or perhaps we received a prophetic promise years ago that still hasn't happened.

LOVED ONE. Worst of all is when someone we love dearly passes away, despite passionate prayers and pleas with God to save them.

PROBLEM. When other humans sin against us, that's one thing. As Christians we know that sin comes through the flesh, and the person who wronged us was and maybe still is operating that way. People are still flawed and we won't be complete until the resurrection takes place. At the very least another person is here in the physical to deal with or ignore.

GOD IS JUST, LOVING. God is different.

- As Christians we know He doesn't commit sins and we also know that He's perfectly just and therefore never unfair.
- We've heard it preached that He doesn't just have love but IS love, which is the truth.
- We realize that He's all knowing which doesn't just mean He has all the facts, but that He knows the future and how everything is going to work out.
- He knows the right and only way to get there, and that He has a plan in motion that is 100% guaranteed to get us to the Kingdom on earth, as it is in Heaven.

INDEBTED TO US. Knowing all of this, we still get angry with Him and feel He's indebted to us in some way. That He let us down and/or let someone down we care about, and we hold this against Him. We try and console ourselves by saying things like:

- *"Who are we to question God? He doesn't answer to us."*
- *"We just have to trust God's got a greater plan that we don't understand."*

CANNOT RECONCILE.... Yet in our hearts we still cannot reconcile why He allowed _____ to happen and He's still considered good, loving, and just. Atheists will ask hard questions like *"what about all the suffering in the world, including innocent babies and children? How could a good God allow all that?"* What's more is we read end times chapters like Matthew 24 where Jesus tells us evil gets worse everywhere the closer we get to His Second Coming.

MELODY. When my oldest sister Melody was 13 years old she got sick. I was only 7 at the time and didn't think anything of it: people get sick all the time including me. No doubt she would go to the doctor, take some medicine, and get better. Except that didn't happen. I noticed my parents and grandparents were taking her to the doctor on a regular basis, and then the hospital. Whenever I asked what was going on, they reassured me that the doctors were taking good care of her.

TRANSFERRED TO STRONG. When she got transferred from Corning Hos to Strong Memorial, I had more questions and received the same answers. At this point she was at the hospital more than she was at home and we were making frequent trips to Rochester to see her. My parents finally revealed that she had cancer, which I knew very little about at the time. I was in my own little kid bubble—while I was concerned about my sister and knew she was getting chemo and radiation, I was still under the assumption that she would eventually get better.

SPECIAL MASS. We were members of St. Catherine's Catholic Church and a special Mass was held to pray and ask God to heal my sister. It seemed like everyone in Addison gathered to be there—even the non-Catholics came and prayed. Hundreds of people filled the Sanctuary and cried out to God to deliver my sister from cancer. After the service was over, we were loved on by the whole community who was there for us. Melody's classmates and their parents played an active role in everything, and they were all there.

MOOD SHIFT/PHONE CALL. Right around January 1977 I noticed my parents & grandparents moods shift. They seemed upset and depressed, yet whenever I asked questions they would redirect me away. On June 23rd, 1977 at 7:30 AM the unthinkable happened. I woke up at 7:15 AM and remember looking at the grandfather clock in our house, and the phone rang 15 minutes later telling us that Melody had passed away. I was 9 years old.

SHOCK! I hadn't seen her in 6 months. I never saw her after the chemo and radiation caused her hair to fall out and reduced her body to a whisp. My parents and grandparents shielded me from that. All I can remember for the longest time was shock. My sister had been an active person excelling in both sports and academics. She was always out and about doing something. My bedroom was past hers and every morning I would get up and walk by it, looking in the open door and seeing all the familiar sights and smells there...along with the empty bed. She was no longer at the breakfast table, the bathroom getting ready for school, or anything.

“WHOLE LIFE AHEAD OF HER”. Then I heard the adults began to talk and say things like “I can't believe this happened. She was so young and vibrant, why did God let this happen? Why did God take her? She had her whole life ahead of her. It's such a shame.”

ANGRY WITH GOD. The more I chewed on us, the angrier at the Lord I got. I began to speak up at the sky and demand to know why He took her! One song I really hated back then was “Only the Good Die Young” by Billy Joel. If that started playing on the radio, I would start to cry. “Where was the justice?” I remembered thinking. There were killers and criminals galore, why couldn't it have been one of them who got cancer and died instead of my sister? I held this against God and, by the time I was teenager, I left the Church and said I would never be back again.

I didn't stop believing in His existence, but I did stop believing in His goodness. His love. His mercy. His plan.

UNFAIR. I didn't want anything to do with a God Who allowed 15 year old girls to die and for murders and robbers to live.

GOD DEALS WITH ME. It was years later, after being Saved believe it or not!—that God finally confronted me on this issue which I'd never truly resolved. Let me say one more thing before I continue: ***having unforgiveness against God for my sister made it a lot easier to take offense and build up more debt toward Him every other time I felt like He let me down.*** It was like the wound was opened all over again, although the follow up offenses weren't nearly as great as not healing my sister.

“WHAT SHOULD...” So after I was Saved, God finally asked me a question: “what should I have done?”

HEAL HER! I was ready! “You should have healed her!” I said. “She should still be alive today! She should be married, have kids, pursue a career, have a home! She should be part of our family gatherings at Easter, Christmas, birthdays! She should still be here!”

ATHEIST. Did you know that even before she got cancer, Melody said she was an atheist? She didn't believe in God for many of the same reasons I stated earlier. She looked at all the evil and suffering in the world from other nations to people she knew, and said that no good God would ever allow this...so she renounced Him. Her and mom would fight on Sunday mornings about going to church, and one day the fight lasted all the way into the pew and I remember Melody storming out! I was mad because I wanted to leave too.... She never went back after and maintained her own anger toward God.

EXHAUSTING PATH. Back to God asking me His question and me answering, He led me down an exhausting path so I could finally decide what true justice would have been. My goal at this point is to have the same thing happen to you, in your heart and mind, that happened to me.

My goal is confuse and overwhelm you...at first.

ASK QUESTIONS. I'm about to ask you a series of questions and I don't want the doctrinally correct answer, I want honesty. Brutal honesty.

FAIR SHARE. Have any of you gotten frustrated when you hear people say that, as far as taxes are concerned, that the rich need to pay their fair share? The implication being that they're not. Have you ever asked critical thinking questions like: “define what the ‘fair share’ is? How much is fair? Percentage wise?”

NO ANSWER? Isn't it equally annoying when they don't have answer?

- They're just operating on feelings and passion, but have no concrete answers or solutions?
- That they've never considered the critical thinking questions that I posed which might challenge some of their convictions and, at the very least, try and nail down what they believe?

Perhaps we treat God the same way when it comes to injustice?

IS IT POSSIBLE THAT WE'VE MADE STATEMENTS BASED COMPLETELY ON PASSION AND WHAT WE'RE FEELING AT THE MOMENT, BUT TRULY DON'T HAVE A CONCRETE ANSWER OR BELIEF ABOUT GOD'S GOODNESS AND JUSTICE?

ROCKY ROAD. Let's go all the way down this rocky road and try to define what's fair and how God should have acted: *a good and merciful God would have healed my sister of cancer!*

DONE MORE? Yet couldn't He have done more? She went through 2 years of constant sickness and pain in her treatments! My grandma used to tell the story of how they would have her sleeping on a bed of ice to keep her temp down, and that Melody literally begged to have it removed saying she would rather die than endure even one more day of it.

MODIFICATION #1. So upon further reflection, I now need to modify my statement about what justice looks like: *God should have healed her soon after her diagnoses so she didn't endure all the pain and suffering, and lose 2 years of her life.*

EVEN MORE? Wait! Would a truly merciful God have ever allowed her to get cancer in the first place?! Cancer is a horrible disease.

MODIFICATION #2. So now I must change my view again: *a loving God would never have allowed a 15 year old girl to get cancer in the first place.*

OLD PERSON? What about an 85 year old? Aren't we different, less offended with God or perhaps not offended at all—when someone that age passes away? Don't we say things like "he lived a full life"? Or "he was in a lot of pain and it was a mercy for God to take him?"

DIFFERENT STANDARD? Whereas when it came to my 15 year old sister, the sayings were "she had her whole life ahead of her and I can't believe that God took her!"

OK FOR 85 AND NOT 15? So is it OK for an 85 year old to get cancer and not the 15 year old? Perhaps it's just "more" OK because of the advanced age and the fact they got to experience life?

CUT OFF POINT? If it is OK then what's the cut off age where it's not OK and where someone hasn't lived a "full life"? 80? 75? 70? 65?

DAVID. My older brother David was 65 when he passed very suddenly...he had a heart attack in the vet's office while bringing his dog in for a check-up. He left behind 2 grown kids and a passel of young grandkids all of whom loved him and miss him.

HOW DID I FEEL? Did I feel less badly at my brother's passing at 65 than I did my sisters at 15?

- What if one person's cut off age is different than another person's...whose right?
- Who gets to decide?

RICH PAY TAXES. Even people who feel that the rich don't pay their fair share of taxes disagree on what percentage they should be paying...so who is right and who gets to decide?

- What happens to all the people who didn't get their way: do they continue to say the system remains unjust and unfair?

OTHER PEOPLE WITH CANCER HEALED? Back to my sister: if God had healed her, whether in the beginning or toward the end, what of all the other people in the world with cancer...shouldn't they be healed too?

CUT OFF AGE? Should there be a cut off age limit of the people God heals? Only people "with their whole life ahead of them" should be healed?

OTHER DISEASES? What of people with other diseases? Shouldn't God heal all them too?

- He can't just play favorites with cancer, can He?
- Again: should there be an age limit or should people of all ages be healed of all diseases, even if they were to die of old age the next day?

OLD AGE DISEASE. What about old age? I remember a middle school science teacher telling me that aging, in and of itself, is a disease for which there's no cure. So that begs the question of *why we age in the first place?*

MODIFICATION #3. So now let's bring these questions back even further. ***A truly good and just God would never have allowed any sort of sickness or disease to enter into humanity in the first place: whether cancer, heart disease, or aging.***

- He should have created a world that was just like it is in Heaven: pure and undefiled where His creations lived forever with no sickness, disease, accidents, or death.

LONG UNCOMFORTABLE PAUSE

GARDEN WAS THAT. He did. That was the world He created and Adam & Eve were free of everything I just mentioned...but you all know what happened. Serpent, forbidden fruit....

MODIFICATION #4. So now, in our quest to finally decide what God should have done to qualify, in our eyes, as being good and just, we have to go back even further: ***a truly good God Who wants the best for His creations would have created a world and humanity without the possibility of sin, death, and evil.***

ANGELIC REBELLION. Blast...the rebellion of Satan and his angels happened before the Garden of Eden, and likely before the creation of earth. Now we have to go back even further!

MODIFICATION #5: *A good and just God would have created the angels without the ability to rebel.*

OVERWHELMING? I hope all of this is overwhelming you. If you walked in here today angry with God and certain in your convictions that He should have done _____ or prevented _____ from happening, I hope you're doubting those convictions.

I hope you're beginning to see the true problem that this world is a fallen, wicked, and evil place in desperate need of redemption.

CHINA OPPRESSION/FAITH IN HUMANITY. Just yesterday a friend of mine from China posted pictures of the Chinese government is using Covid to impose draconian restrictions on the people, even to the point of deploying the military to quell protests. She wrote above her photos: "I'm losing faith in humanity."

We were never meant to have faith in humanity, which is also falling further away from God and His righteousness. Humanity, even more so than creation, desperately needs someone to save us from ourselves.

PURPOSE OF SUFFERING. **All these wars, starvation, sickness, disease, lying, cheating, and death is supposed to show us that we cannot work ourselves out of this mess.**

It's to bring us to end of our ability to create a brave new world where none of these things exist.

Wouldn't it be great if there was Someone Who could?

- Wouldn't it be great if Someone like that would finally take some action to make things right?
- We could put our faith and hope in Him instead of ourselves.

ANIMALS. Animals aren't made in the image of God which means many things. They don't know the difference between good and evil and any opinions otherwise are us projecting things onto them that don't exist. Nothing an animal does is moral or immoral and you animal lovers don't want it that way and here's why: if animals can commit sins, then they need Salvation and forgiveness and can go to Hell. No creature in the animal kingdom ever ate the FF so that they know both good and evil.

NO FREE WILL. Animals don't have free will in the sense we do: they don't make rational choices, have internal conflicting opinions and feelings, nor do they think about the future. Being in a pre-FF state, they just make right now "decisions" based on food and safety.

The only beings who know good and evil and have free will are those made in the image of God, which is humanity and angels.

God having "kids" isn't about Him being lonely and wanting company, it's about an astounding willingness on His part to share His divine nature.

- We can't be made in God's likeness and not know what it means to be good, and what it means to be evil.
- We can't be made in the image of God and not have the free will to choose between the two.

LUCIFER REBELS. ADAM REBELS. The angels were first called the sons of God in Genesis 6 and Lucifer chose to rebel and go his own way, taking a third of the angels with him. Then he came here, appeared in the garden, and deceived Eve. *Adam was not deceived*...did you know that? 1 Timothy 2:14 says Adam knew what he was doing when he disobeyed God which means he rebelled.

"NO FREE WILL!" Maybe you're thinking—or wishing—that God should never have given anyone free will...not the angels and not humankind. Then we wouldn't be his kids. We wouldn't be like Him. There would be no Jesus, no Kingdom, no nothing...we would just be animals...like the evolutionists say.

EVOLUTION. Evolution is religion without God and therefore without good or evil, without everlasting life, without purpose, without a plan or direction, and without hope. The lie of evolution is that humanity has the 2 aforementioned things that no animal has: free will and the ability to discern good and evil.

NO FLESH, NOT BORN IN SIN. Lucifer chose evil as did the angels who sided with him, even though they didn't have the flesh like we have. Adam chose evil and thus cursed all of humanity and creation itself with sin and death, even though he wasn't created fallen like you and I are.

Wouldn't it be great if, way back in the beginning before God had created anyone and anything, God had planned all this out?

FIGURE OUT HOW.... In other words, *if He could some how figure out a way for humanity to have both free will and knowledge of good and evil, but be redeemed forever?*

- Have everlasting life?
- Never grow old, get sick, have accidents, or anything of the sort? Never die? Never know sorrow again?

BEST OF EVERYTHING? Wouldn't that be the best of all worlds?

- Wouldn't that be a plan far more brilliant and free than to create us to be like animals, or to make us mindless robots without the ability to have fellowship with Him? And each other?
- What if His plan is to re-create humanity brand new so that we're like this?
- What if His plan is to re-create all creation itself, and make all things new?
- Then to put redeemed humanity together with redeemed creation, then come Himself and live there among us forever?

Would we not look back from that standpoint to now and say it was all worth it, a billion times over?

Romans 5:12-21 (ESV)

¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—

¹³ for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law.

¹⁴ Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.

¹⁶ And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification.

¹⁷ For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men.

¹⁹ For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

²⁰ Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,

²¹ so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

- My sister got cancer and died at 15 because of Adam's rebellion.
- We have aging, pain, sickness, disease, sorrow, and death because of Adam.
- Jesus replaced Adam.

That means Jesus replaced everything Adam did.

LUCIFER WANTS TO BE GOD. Lucifer rebelled because he wanted to be god, even to the point of creating his own race. He wanted to make the whole world his kingdom and rule over it.

JESUS IS GOD. Jesus IS God and all the kingdoms of the world belong to Him because Father gave them to Him. We have Jesus as our God instead of Lucifer.

1 Corinthians 15:20-26 (ESV)

²⁰ But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead.

²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.

²³ But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

²⁴ Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power.

²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

OUR RESURRECTION. Our resurrection is coming and when it does, it's forever. No going back. Then comes the Kingdom on earth as it is in Heaven.

- Look at verse 24: all the enemies I've listed today will be destroyed, put under the feet of Jesus, including death.

This is the Plan and it's in motion. Jesus has already done something about it when He died on the Cross, shed His blood, then walked out of the tomb 3 days later. He's not coming back soon enough for you or I, but He will return and set everything right.

MAINTAIN FREE WILL AND KNOWLEDGE. After you and I—and the loved one you're grieving about—is raised from the dead, we'll maintain free will and knowledge of good and evil, yet never fall again. The plan of God, the will of God, the justice of God, and the love of God are brilliant, unfailing, and unwavering.

FUTURE SECURE. Your future together with the person you lost will be forever. Nothing will threaten or challenge it because God has seen to it. No more separation, conflict, or loss. Only joy and fellowship.

Let today be the day you forgive God. As the splendor of His plan sinks deeper into your heart and lifts the terrible burden you've been carrying there, cancel all the debts you have against Him.

“WHERE’S MY SISTER?” When I was in my mid 30’s I began to be in torment over my sister, who’d been gone from this world for 25 years at that point. I cried out to God and asked Him for something I thought was forbidden: I wanted to know where my sister was. As far as I knew she had died an atheist, in anger and rebellion against God. I approached the throne of grace on tears and asked God for the truth, whatever it was. I heard nothing.

SPENCER. 6 months later a man about 20 years older than me named Spencer walked into my TKD class to pick up his wife who was taking the class. He had tears in his eyes...I had never met him before in my life. He told me the most amazing story: back in the late 70’s he was part of evangelistic team who visited hospitals and preached the Gospel. He was with his youth pastor at the time when they approached a man standing at the door of one of the rooms. They asked the man if he wanted to hear about Christ and he said no. Just as they turned to go, he said a female voice from within the room said “I would like to hear.” They walked past the man at the door, went to the girl’s bedside, and led her to the Lord.

BROUGHT MEMORY BACK. Spencer went on to tell me that all of sudden, 6 months prior to him approaching me, the Lord brought this memory back to him vividly despite having shared the Gospel with many people since then. One aspect of his memory was blocked, though: the girl’s name. So he called his former youth pastor who was now an old man and said: “pastor, do you remember when we went to Strong Memorial back in the 70’s and led a teenage girl to the Lord?”

REMEMBERED NAMED. Spencer went on to tell me his old pastor burst into tears and couldn’t believe he’d called, because God had brought the same memory back to him, the same day, before Spencer called. They both wept as they realized that, for some odd reason, God had stirred up their memories at the exact same time. They didn’t know why. “Do you remember her name?” Spencer asked. His old pastor did: Melody Towner.

WIFE TAKING CLASSES. Then it dawned on Spencer: his wife had just began taking my TKD classes and now he knew why God caused him to remember.

TIMING! MY PRAYER MATCHED HIS REVELATION. What Spencer didn’t know was that I had prayed to know exactly this and I made that request on the same day God brought the memory back to both him and his old pastor.

God. Has. A. Plan.

God did NOT give my sister cancer and I already told you what did: the rebellion of Adam.

I WOULD RATHER. Yet I would far rather have my sister brought low by cancer to the point where she realized that she couldn't save herself...no human could. No human love would deliver her, no human smarts heal her, no human support extend her life. After 2 years of suffering and pain and knowing she was losing the battle to this horrible disease, Melody was ready to receive the One and only Savior of mankind: Jesus. She died 3 days after Spencer shared the Gospel with her in 1977...but her spirit ascended to Heaven is walking the golden streets of the NJ as we speak.

TRUMP SOUNDS. When the trumpet sounds she'll be resurrected into a new immortal body and my reunification with her will be forever.

TEMPORAL VS. ETERNAL. I wanted a temporal life with her, as an avowed atheist in rebellion against God, and to live to a ripe old age and possibly to pass without ever knowing Jesus. Yet God's loving and just plan was better than mine: He's secured an eternal future for her that can never be threatened. He's ensured that next time I see her it will be forever.

It's time to forgive God.