

Series: **The Scandal of Grace** – week 5 of 11

CDOBC – beginning on 9/10/17

Today's Title: **"Grace and Forgiveness"**

*October 8, 2017 - Matthew 6:12, 14-15*

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**OBJECTIVE:** To help everyone understand the difficulty, but necessity of forgiving - and to explain the role of grace in forgiveness.

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### *Opening Prayer*

From most appearances, Jeffrey Dahmer was a normal suburban kid. In H.S. he enjoyed playing tennis and he played in the school band for a short time. Teachers from his freshman year said he was polite and highly intelligent, and his average grades they attributed to apathy about school. But appearances were wrong, and Jeffrey Dahmer became one of the nation's worst serial killers - raping, murdering and dismembering 17 men and boys - even cannibalizing some of them.

In February 1992, he was found guilty and sent to prison for multiple life sentences.

In May 1994, after receiving a bible he put his faith in Jesus Christ, and a local pastor baptized him in the prison whirlpool. After his baptism, this pastor visited Dahmer every week and disciplined him.

In November of 1994, Dahmer was beaten to death by a fellow inmate, with a 20-inch iron bar.

Many struggle with the idea that Jeffrey Dahmer will be in heaven - fully forgiven of all his sins.

The idea that Dahmer could simply pray and ask for his sins to be forgiven - and God would erase everything and welcome Dahmer as one of His own - forever - doesn't seem right...it doesn't seem fair.

If you think that...if you sense unfairness was at work with Jeffrey Dahmer, then you have a good grasp of God's grace. **The reality is this: if you've put your faith in Jesus Christ - it's not fair that you have been forgiven of your sins either.**

A murderer...a thief...an adulterer...a gossip...an abuser...a racist...a liar - these sins leave a huge wake in their path - but all of them can be covered and overwhelmed by the grace and forgiveness of God.

***Turn to 1 Timothy 1:15*** - as we look at the topic of grace and forgiveness - we will see our first point this morning:

**You need God's grace and forgiveness** *1 Timothy 1:15*

On a human level, we like to quantify or rank the level of evil and sin someone is guilty of.

Jeffrey Dahmer is certainly at the top of the list when it comes to severe evil in this life.

But the Apostle Paul would also rank pretty high on the list.

Arrogance and pride were his in full measure.

He was hateful - a violent man - a false accuser - an abuser of persons - a murderer - these were the sins on Paul's rap sheet.

All of a sudden, in an instant, there was that moment on the road to Damascus. As he was on his way to arrest and probably murder more Christians, he was confronted by Jesus and his entire life changed.

He put his faith in Christ, and he became what he hated so much - a follower of Jesus Christ.

He dedicated his life to bringing the Gospel to the Gentile world - becoming the greatest missionary the Church has ever seen.

By the time Paul writes his 2 letters to Timothy and his letter to Titus, he had been following Christ and an Apostle for more than 20 years. He was faithful to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles, and he had fully committed his life to the grace and truth of Christ.

**1 & 2 Timothy and Titus** were written by Paul to help these two younger pastors in their work of leading the Church.

Paul was a 'superstar' Christian - he wrote in **1 Corinthians 11:1** "Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ."

He was a model Christian - yet he wrote something which is quite revealing about his self-awareness.

**1 Timothy 1:15**

“The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.”

When you read this - and you know Paul’s history of persecuting the Church before his conversion, you naturally think that he’s referring to his sinful past. He might be reflecting on his past, but it’s not his primary thought - because the Greek verb translated as: “I am” - is in the present tense.

He’s not looking back in time - he’s not reflecting on what he was like...he’s thinking about his current state - “of whom **I am** the foremost”.

When we realize this, we think he’s simply overstating for emphasis - a grammatical usage which brings emphasis.

No...I don’t think he’s trying to be grammatically cute. He really thinks the darkness of his soul is unmatched! One pastor said it this way:

*“If the biggest sinner you know isn’t you, then you don’t know yourself very well.”* (Grace is Greater, by Kyle Idleman, p. 27)

Because we go to church and our sins aren’t the kind to make headlines, we may fall for the notion that we’re not that bad, and grace can lose its impact in our life. We give lip service to the grace and forgiveness of God, but if we were truly honest, we would say: *‘I don’t need as much grace and forgiveness as the next guy.’*

But the biblical truth is we are far from God - we are hopelessly lost in our sin, and apart from the grace of God, we would have no chance of heaven - no chance of forgiveness.

*“Our ability to appreciate grace is in direct correlation to the degree to which we acknowledge our need for it.”*

(Grace is Greater, by Kyle Idleman, p. 23)

We tend to downplay our sinfulness - and we would disagree if someone accused us of wickedness.

We put grades and classifications on sin - and the unseen and private sins of the heart usually rank low on the ‘*severity*’ or ‘*wickedness*’ scale. But that’s not the scale God uses.

Like Paul, do you see the darkness of your own soul - the evil in your own heart, or do you compare yourself with others who rank higher on the wickedness scale you have invented?

Do you understand how much you need God’s grace and His forgiveness?

Christian - do you understand how blessed you are to have received His grace and be forgiven from your sins?

I stand before you as a testament to the grace and forgiveness of God. Nothing good in my life can I take credit for. Everything I have is due to God’s grace.

The only thing greater than the evil and darkness which resides in my heart is the grace of God which covers my entire life. The closer I get to the Lord, the more clearly His light shines in the dark recesses of my heart, shining on the evil which is deep down inside.

This is why Paul saw himself as the worst of sinners - it wasn't false humility...it was an honest reflection of a sinful man drawing closer to a holy God.

You need God's grace and forgiveness!

**You need to give grace and forgive others.**

Giving grace...and forgiving others is costly.

Giving grace and forgiving someone who has wronged you takes part of your heart - it takes something deep in your soul - and it can feel like you're giving it away to that person - and you might not get it back.

In the book of Genesis, when Joseph forgave his brothers, it says he wept so loudly that his weeping was heard outside the house. I don't think these were *only* tears of joy - I think there was so much emotion - so much of his heart was involved.

I want you to see from Scripture that for the Christian - for the follower of Christ, we need to give grace and forgive others.

Let's look at the Sermon on the Mount - to the end of The Lord's Prayer.

**Matthew 6:12**

“...and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”

This should cause us considerable pause.

What is Jesus saying? Is our salvation dependent upon how we forgive those who have wronged us?

Is the forgiveness of our sins “debts” - dependent on the forgiveness we have given to those who have sinned against us?

No. Not in a justification sense. Salvation cannot be earned, and this is not some exception to the rule.

Two possible interpretations with this...

1) Jesus is not referring to judicial forgiveness (justification), but He’s referring to God’s fatherly forgiveness (sanctification). If this is true, then Jesus is saying, *‘If you want to maintain a close relationship to God, you need to forgive others, so God will forgive your ongoing sins.’*

2) Forgiving others is proof of our forgiveness. This is Martyn Lloyd-Jones’ position. He states, *“If we think that our sins are forgiven by God and we refuse to forgive somebody else, we are making a mistake; we have never been forgiven. The man who knows he has been forgiven, only in and through the shed blood of Christ, is a man who must forgive others...He cannot help himself...True forgiveness breaks a man, and he must forgive.”* (Studies in the

Sermon on the Mount, by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, p. 348-349)

It's difficult to know which of these is the correct interpretation. Both have their strong points.

However, I side with #1, and the reason is both theological and experiential.

***Theologically***, I don't know of any passages where the forgiveness we receive at conversion, creates some sort of spiritual reflex in us where we can't help but forgive. As in many obedience issues, it's a matter of bending my human will by the grace and power of Christ, which is why the Scriptures have so many passages which tell us to forgive - encourage us to resist the temptation to hold grudges, get even or to get angry when we are sinned against. Forgiveness is not one of the Fruits of the Spirit - and I don't see it as an automatic behavior and attitude for everyone who believes in Jesus Christ as their Savior.

***Experientially***, I see too many Christians refusing to forgive - and I'm convinced they are Christians. Their refusal to forgive does not negate their faith - it violates their faith, it goes against their faith, it's contrary to their own experience and faith - but it doesn't negate their faith.

The Greek word translated "forgive" means: *to hurl away*. So, when we forgive, we are '*hurling away*' the offense against us - we are removing it from our space.



Just as Jesus has separated us from our sins - “as far as the east is from the west” (Psalm 103:12)

**Ephesians 4:32**

“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

But forgiving others presents us with some dilemmas. We are called to forgive others when they sin against us - when it's personal for us - when we've been hurt deeply, we're called to forgive. Not vengeance...not to dole out justice...but to forgive.

This is problematic on 2 fronts:

- **My pain is still intense and I don't feel like forgiving.**

This is a huge obstacle to forgiveness, because pain cannot be explained away - and it often takes a long time to heal from painful events.

But forgiveness helps heal pain.

Non-forgiveness increases the pain as the event is replayed over and over again.

On June 17, 2015, Dylann Roof murdered 9 people who were attending a Bible study in Charleston, SC at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church. When Roof was sentenced, family members of the murder victims forgave Roof - despite the great pain they still have. *Video (1:46)* - <https://youtu.be/cIRcGwBrdbE>

Forgiveness breaks the cycle of pain - it brings healing to your pain - it brings God's comfort to your pain.

In marriages, a painful event lives on year after year - the pain staying constant and maybe even increasing - because neither side is willing to make the first move and ask for forgiveness...or give forgiveness. I heard of one marriage where the wife was blamed for not putting a new bar of soap into the shower when the old one was used up. Accusations...blame...anger...exaggeration...all over a stupid bar of soap! For 7 months they slept in separate rooms and ate in silence...over a bar of soap!

Even in their old age they could never bring up the topic because the pain never went away - it was always lurking right under the surface, ready to make them bleed again if the opportunity arose!

(What's So Amazing About Grace, by Philip Yancey, p. 97-98)

Lewis Smedes says: *“The first and often the only person to be healed by forgiveness is the person who does the forgiveness...”* (What's So Amazing About Grace, by Philip Yancey, p. 99)

Forgiveness doesn't cause pain - it will begin to heal the pain.

The alternative to forgiveness is not peace, but more pain!

- **Forgiveness seems to violate justice**

*But what if they haven't apologized...confessed...or repented?*

*What if they are still harboring ill-feelings toward me?*

*Am I still obligated to forgive?*

It is true...forgiving the unrepentant may seem like  
“...a capitulation, a leap from hard logic to mushy sentiment.”

(What's So Amazing About Grace, by Philip Yancey, p. 97)

Remember that forgiveness is not the same as a pardon. Forgiving them does not mean there are no consequences from the incident.

In our own salvation, God's forgiveness of us is a total and complete pardon for us - but Jesus took the penalty in our place.

In our human relationships, we may forgive someone, but there may be implications in the court system, with their employment, or in the way the relationship operates in the future.

Sometimes there will never be repentance - never an apology or an admittance of guilt. In that case, when you withhold forgiveness, you are hurting yourself - creating the soil for bitterness, hatred and resentment to take root in your heart.

In reality, forgiveness has power to:

- Soften the unrepentant heart...

- To loosen the stranglehold of guilt in the perpetrator...
  - To transform the heart in the guilty party...
- Besides... “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the LORD.” (Rom. 12:19)

Jesus intensifies His statement in vs. 12 with what He says in vs. 14-15:

**Matthew 6:14-15**

“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, **15** but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

Our *forgiveness* depends on our *forgiving*.

The forgiveness we give others is vital to our own spiritual health.

If we only take the grace and forgiveness of God for ourselves...but refuse to give the same to our fellow man - then we are spiritually stuck - spiritually sick.

Keeping a short account of your sin with God - this is the challenge of the Christian life. Living in a way where we sin less, and when we do sin, confessing those sins to God.

**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.”

I can agree on my need to confess my sins in order to maintain a healthy and growing relationship with God.

*But the idea of forgiving others - even if they haven't changed...they haven't apologized or asked for forgiveness - this doesn't feel right.*

If this is in-line with your thinking...good...you're understanding that grace does not fit into your human sense of justice or vengeance.

This is why I've repeated the truth: Grace is not of human origin - it is divine in its origin.

Forgiveness is an unnatural act in our humanness.

Forgiveness is difficult...costly...and goes against our sense of justice.

Forgiveness is never easy - and it is rarely satisfying because the injustices often remain without remedy.

This is where grace comes into the picture.

Grace is in the space between our pain - and forgiveness. It's in the space between the offense and the forgiveness we offer.

It's because of grace that we can forgive.

It's not because of justice...but because of grace!

It's due to the grace we have received from God - that we can forgive others.

God forgives us - even though we haven't made things right.

We haven't righted the wrongs we have caused - we haven't stopped lusting - lying - controlled our anger or tongue - we haven't stopped hating or coveting...but God still forgives us.

And we are called to do to others...what God has done for us!

In the human mind and spirit is a battle of dominance...a battle for the heart. It's a battle where *fairness*, *retribution* and *deservedness* stand tall and make their demands. We withhold forgiveness, until the other person deserves to be forgiven. We withhold forgiveness until they have made an effort at repentance. But grace demands we go against *fairness*, *retribution* and *deservedness*.

**It's in the space between justice and forgiveness that we find grace.**  
The only way to get to the point of forgiveness, is through grace.

**Proverbs 19:11 (NIV)**

"A person's wisdom yields patience; it is to one's glory to overlook an offense."

(See also: Matthew 5:23-24 & Matthew 18:21-35 - vs. 32-35)

*"In some mysterious way, divine forgiveness depends on us."* (What's So Amazing About Grace, by Philip Yancey, p. 88)

**Apply it...**

Seek God's grace and forgiveness...daily!

You're not 'beyond' the need for God's grace.  
Every believer needs God's grace and forgiveness  
each and every day.

Justification - when we first put our faith in Christ -  
is not the only time we need God's grace and  
forgiveness - we need them all the time!

Who do you need to forgive?

Who do you need to grace?

Learning / knowing about the forgiveness and grace  
of God is necessary, but we're not complete until  
we're a forgiving and gracious Christian.

Have you been arguing about the soap in the  
shower? Ask for forgiveness.

Is there anyone you know where the relationship  
was damaged or hampered by some offense?

- A family member?
- A co-worker?
- Someone here at church?

Then make the first move and seek forgiveness.

Not your fault...you didn't commit 'the wrong'?

Doesn't matter. There's normally a % of the blame  
that you are responsible for - even if it's 95% - 5%.

If you truly are a victim - like those shot by Dylan  
Roof - then give forgiveness.

Make the first move - be humble - seek love and unity more than prideful self-righteousness.

They may not respond by asking forgiveness...they may respond negatively - but you can't control that.

You are responsible for your side of the issue:

"...so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."

**Romans 12:18**

The world craves and needs the grace of God.

As His Church - let's commit to giving the grace and forgiveness we have been blessed to receive.

Close in prayer