

“The Integrity of The Apostle”
(Illustrated in Forgiveness)
1 Corinthians 2:5-11
Jerry Grey WBC 2024
Message 3

Introduction: Wiersbe 2 Corinthians 2:5-11

This section takes us back to 1 Cor 5, where Paul had admonished the church to discipline the man who was living in open sin. Here Paul states that the offender had not only caused him trouble and sorrow, but he had brought trouble to the whole church! He had instructed them to call the church together and dismiss this man from the fellowship. This act of discipline would then bring him to a place of sorrow and repentance. They had done this, but then they went to the opposite extreme! The man had evidenced sorrow for sin, but the church was not willing to receive him back after his confession! Paul addresses that here in our passage.

“Forgive him and take him back,” says the apostle. “If you don't, Satan will overburden him with too much sorrow.” How often Christians confess their sins and yet fail to believe that God will forgive and forget. There is an abnormal sorrow that is not really true repentance; it is remorse, the sorrow of the world. Peter showed repentance; his was a godly sorrow that led him back to Christ. Judas showed remorse; his was a hopeless sorrow, a sorrow of the world, that led him away from Christ into suicide. Satan wants us to believe that we cannot be forgiven (see Zech 3:1-5); yet read Rom 8:31-39. If Satan can accuse us of sin and discourage us with our past failures, he will rob us of our joy and usefulness to Christ.

Zech 3:1-5

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse

him. 2 The Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?"

3 Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. 4 The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes."

Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you."

5 Then I said, "Put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the Lord stood by.

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Rom 8:31-39

31 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? 33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written:

"For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor

anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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Rom 8:1-4

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

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If God forgives a person of sin, we must forgive the person, too (Eph 4:32) (from Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament).

Eph 4:32

³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

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We have three great errors in forgiveness. The first is not forgiving at the proper time. The second is forgiving without proper repentance. I have tried to teach you that Christianity is about **balance**. For example, being too legalistic and then on the other hand being too liberal. We are not to be too weak and we are not to be too forceful. **Balance** is the key. All extremes are harmful. If someone truly repents and changes their behavior, we must forgive. The third condition for forgiveness must come with wisdom. Forgiveness and trust are two different things. There are sins that require time, evaluation,

and trust building before a return to normal can be accomplished. Some of you may not like that but there are sins that you can always be forgiven for, but some sins will hinder you being trusted completely ever again. Molesters are not allowed to work with children, period. Thieves are not allowed to count the offering. We cannot put people into a position to repeat their sin just because we are called to forgive.

Remember this letter is extremely personal and Paul is revealing his heart to us quite openly. Remember the context of the book as a whole... ***“In defense of the apostles heart.”***

Verse 5: These next few verses demonstrate one of the greatest Christian virtues that we need to possess. **The act of forgiveness is one that is most needed.** There was a man in the fellowship who lived an openly wicked lifestyle. Paul had demanded that the man be chastised and put out of the church. Hard it is for us to understand this practice today because there are very few churches that participate in church discipline. This man was removed from the fellowship.

This passage displays the greatness of the apostle in that he says that it is time for the church to forgive this man. This man had basically been a personal enemy of Paul. The forgiveness that we are supposed to render is harder to give when the offender is a personal enemy. Paul says that the grief was not so much a personal grief to him as it was to the church. This takes great maturity to let your attacker off the hook when they have harmed you personally.

Matthew 6:14-15

“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

Barclay (p. 181, in loc.) notes that Paul did not take the criticism personal. This will take you far in life to be able to incorporate this virtue into your thought process. Take criticism and weigh it. Ask God to show you if the criticism is true. If it is not, keep moving. If it is your fault or failure, confess it and then move on. This is the only way to handle the people who continually desire to disrupt the fellowship.

Greek: Pain or grief- lupeo, to grieve, grief, sorrow or to cause heaviness. The situation that had occurred had hurt many people in the congregation (Unforgiveness hurts the entire congregation). I knew a preacher once that had so many enemies because he could not let things go. He carried this pain with him like a badge of courage to prove he was right in how many enemies he had. At some point you must let it go and forgive.

Verse 6: The fact that Paul mentions to whole church or the majority lets us know that discipline should be a church wide matter. The church as a whole, when appropriate, should administer the discipline. This type of punishment was sufficient for Paul. This is why we do church discipline as a body. Church discipline is not an act used for individual vindication or retaliation. Church discipline has as its purpose repentance and love. Discipline should be **hikanos**, sufficient or worthy. The word “**enough**” comes to mind. To over discipline is to crush the spirit.

Verse 7: Barclay notes also that the proper thing to do was forgive this man so that correction would be for the purpose of restoration and not vengeance. Vengeance should never be the motive behind church discipline. The hand of mercy knows when to return mercy and love so that we do not bring excessive sorrow upon the sinner. Remember that you will be disciplined at some point in your life as well. Fact is, if we could see our lives as God sees them we would be less critical than we are. Many times

people simply allow good qualities in their personality to become sin. Over zealousness can be detrimental. **An unguarded strength becomes a double weakness (Extremes).**

Ps 51:17

17 The sacrifices of God are a **broken spirit**;
a broken and **contrite heart**,
O God, you will not **despise**.

David reveals how God disciplines the sinner in Psalm 51. God can use the sorrow of a sinful heart (**Contrition**) to break the spirit (**Change the behavior**) without destroying the repenting soul. God will not despise- **bazah**, to despise, to disdain, or to scorn.

The heart has to be dealt with properly for forgiveness to be successful. Jesus speaks specifically about this in Luke's gospel.

Luke 17:3-4

"If your brother sins, rebuke him, **and if he repents**, forgive him. 4 If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."

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Forgiveness without repentance is condoning the behavior. Unforgiveness with repentance causes division and overwhelming sorrow. If we do not honor repentance we take the place of God in judgment. Unforgiveness hurts both parties. Who are we as sinners to hold sin over another person's head?

When one repents properly then comfort them. **Parakaleo**- to stand beside.

Don't overwhelm the sorrowful soul- **Katapino**, to drink down or to swallow. To devour or gulp down. This is pretty vivid language.

Verse 8: Barclay states that, ***“punishment must never drive the heart out of a man.”*** When punishment pushes a man into the arms of Satan, we need to reevaluate the terms of punishment. Paul tells us to reaffirm our love for the sinner. Once a man has repented and is broken, love will carry him to the place of repentance, which stabilizes his life again. The ultimate goal of chastisement is restoration. We are never to break the spirit of a child or of another person.

It is said of Luther that he could hardly pray *The Lord's Prayer* because the word Father was in it. His father was so punitive that he was overly hard on his son. ***Luther would say of the scripture, “spare the rod and spoil the child,” that we need to keep an apple next to the rod so that we could reward the child with encouragement when he had done well.***

Verse 9: The church had proved their acceptance of Paul's apostolic authority by taking his advice and using discipline. We all do this from time to time. We test those around us to see if they are really on board or not. 2 Corinthians 7:10-12 explains the process. Luke 17:3 is a good proof passage also.

Luke 17:3-4

“So watch yourselves.

*If your brother sins, rebuke him, **and if he repents**, forgive him.”*

2 Cor 7:10-13

10 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. 11 See what this

godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter. 12 So even though I wrote to you, it was not on account of the one who did the wrong or of the injured party, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are. 13 By all this we are encouraged.

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God will test us as well to see if we are really as dedicated as we say we are. We think we have all the Christian virtues until they get tested, and then we realize we are not as spiritual as we thought we were.

Verse 10-11: We are to remember that we are under the watchful eye of Christ. Paul knew that to live as Christ wants us to live is accomplished in forgiving. If **you** have forgiven, then **I** have forgiven says Paul. The watchful eye of Jesus is constantly looking to find mercy and grace on our part. It is a beautiful thing to see the brethren forgiving each other. I believe that this is the greatest area of failure in church relationships. Remember that Paul did not take the criticism personally.

Satan desperately wants to take us all down. The easiest way to do so is from within. The roaring lion wants to split the body and harm young Christians in the process.

Never let yourself be used by Satan to split the church or be divisive. We are simply getting outwitted when we allow ourselves to be used in that way.

Pride will keep you from asking for forgiveness and giving forgiveness. We are to be aware of his schemes. If we could really see behind the scenes and see the spiritual warfare, we could see

the true nature of most of the church's problems; Satan is the evil troublemaker.

Closing: The Laws of Forgiveness:

1 Peter 5:8

“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

Mark 11:25

25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

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Luke 6:37-38

37 "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

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Col 3:13-14

13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

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1 John 1:9-10

9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar
and his word has no place in our lives.

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**“The Integrity of The Apostle”
(Illustrated in Forgiveness)**

1 Corinthians 2:5-11

Jerry Grey WBC 2024

Message 4

Introduction: This will be the second message on forgiveness from the same passage. This was first preached about ten years ago. I felt it so important that I have also included it also in my notes on Acts. This is a great problem with the church and is even more characteristic of the world. Two sermons on forgiveness will not be out of line. I am pretty sure we can use both. The first message is theological and the second will be practical.

The most desired **weapon** today in government, politics, world dominance, business, relationships, organizations, and in more entities than I have time to mention, is power. Unspiritual power is hellish and evil. It destroys and it brings misery upon all who are involved in it.

The opposite of this natural and evil power is spiritual power. We all possess a form of spiritual power. This power lives in you and in me! You may not even be aware that you have this power. In every day terms, we could call this power we have, **“Nuclear Spiritual Supremacy.”** What is it!?

This is the power that God has given you to forgive.

Quote: One theologian said this, “Never does a human soul appear so strong as when it forgoes revenge, and dares to forgive an injury.”

Quote: CHS, “When you bury a mad dog, don’t leave his tail above the ground. Forgive and Forget.”

Prov 19:11

11 A man's wisdom gives him patience;
it is to his glory to overlook an offense.

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Prov 24:17-18

17 Do not gloat when your enemy falls;
when he stumbles, do not let your heart rejoice,
18 or the Lord will see and disapprove
and turn his wrath away from him.

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Matt 6:12-15

12 Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
13 And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.'

14 For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

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Context: Forgiveness in the body of Christ, church discipline, and restoration is our context.

Chapter 1 spoke of comforting others and here is an example of how we are to do it. One, in the body, had hurt the church. This

soul had been disciplined, repented, and now needed restoration. Maybe this was the occasion of which Paul speaks in chapter 5 concerning the ministry of reconciliation.

It is quite clear that sin hurts the body of Christ, and having to discipline a church member hurts the entire body, so also does unforgiveness. When people repent of their sins, we need to show mercy and give them forgiveness.

I. The Cause of Grief: Verse 5:

In verse five we see the power Paul had spiritually. He acknowledges there had been an offence and the impact that it had on the church.

Greek: λυπεω, **lupeo.** To bring heaviness, sorrow, or to grieve. To cause pain. (Perfect active participle).

Points To Note:

- People do grieve the body of Christ. It happens frequently.
- We are not told what the sin was. There are reasons for that.
- We would compare if we knew exactly what happened.
- Sin affects the body. Known sin and unknown sin hurt the body.
- Your private sin does hurt all of us in this fellowship.
- We walked together as a body. This is a walk of faith. We are inclined today to accept anyone into the church, but not so here at Woodlake. You have to be presented to the body for approval. Why? Because we have to protect the body from sin
- Woodlake Baptist Church is a family; we are not an organization. You would never let someone rent the basement of your home without checking them out first, would you?

- Unfortunately, at some point, we all grieve the body of Christ.
- At some point, we all will need forgiveness.
- At some point, we must all give forgiveness.

Now listen to me very carefully- Paul teaches us one of the most powerful aspects of forgiveness and spiritual maturity. Paul says that the sinful man, “had not so much grieved him, as he has grieved all of them.” Paul says don’t exaggerate this, the man has not so much hurt me as he has hurt you. Paul was only hurt in some measure. In 2 Corinthians 12:10 we see what was going on.

2 Cor 12:10

10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

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In 1 Corinthians 1:12; 3:4 we see that the church was offended when Paul was publicly maligned and attacked.

1 Cor 1:12

12 What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ."

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1 Cor 3:4

4 For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men?

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Let me put it in simple terms. Paul refused to take the offender’s sin personally. He would not allow personal injury to create a

platform for the church to crucify the offender. Paul wanted to soften the blow.

“Don't discipline too long on my account, I have not been offended.” Paul was saying, “don't use me as a battering ram.” This is the spiritual character of forgiveness. Don't put it too severely, the Greek actually says, “don't charge him too much.”

II. The Punishment: Verse 6

The word for punishment is used only once in the NT and it is here in this text. The word is **epitimia**, which refers to an official disciplinary action. It is also used the same way in extrabiblical material.

Church discipline is not popular today and is rarely talked about; however, it is biblical.

Matt 18:15-18

15 "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. 16 But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

18 "I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

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1 Cor 5:4-5

4 When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present,

5 hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.

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2 Thess 3:6

6 In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us.

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2 Thess 3:14-15

14 If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. 15 Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

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The church had formerly disciplined this person and Paul says, “that’s enough, good.” The discipline had worked and now it was time for restoration.

Points to note:

1. Godly sorrow works repentance- 2 Cor 7:10-12

10 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. 11 See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.

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2. Not many people deliberately start out to hurt the body of Christ with sinful behavior.

Gal 6:1-5

Brothers, if someone is **caught** in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. 2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. 3 If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4 Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, 5 for each one should carry his own load.
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Actually, most times, because of Galatians 6:1-5, we let sin go on way too long and go way too far. We are all aware of our own weaknesses, but we must never sidestep calling sin, sin! We have to weigh the cost. No one is worth disruption in the body due to open sinfulness.

The reason your pastor, and staff, and deacons, and leaders, and yes, the entire body of Christ, must maintain holiness- is because we cannot discipline if we are not living in a state of repentance ourselves. Leaders must be clean so that they can discipline.

We usually grieve as a body when we have to discipline a backslider because we know ourselves and our own flesh quite intimately.

III. The Rules of Forgiveness: Verses 7-11

Paul says, “now instead, turn, or contrarywise,” forgive **(tounantion)**.

Rule 1: Charizomai- Instead of doing what the world does, we do what God says. We *graciously forgive*. We give favor, pardon, rescue. We release the power to forgive. Forgiveness is powerful. Anytime we do what God does it is powerful.

Rule 2: We comfort- parakaleo. This is giving the comforter. This word means to come along side of another. **When we do this it means, “I am not ashamed of you.”**

Illustration: After you discipline a child there needs to be a time that you embrace them and reassure them of your love.

Rule 3: The goal is restoration- Perissoteros, this means super-abundant, over, much, or greater than necessary. Do not bring excessive sorrow or break the spirit. We do not want the sinner to be swallowed up by excessive sorrow.

** no one can stand excessive sorrow. Our goal is to restore not destroy.

Eph 4:32

32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you.

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Quote: Henry Ward Beecher- *“God pardons like a mother, who kisses the offense into everlasting forgiveness.”*

Rule 4: Keep the offense quiet- If the sin is done publicly, confess it publicly. If the sin is committed in private, confess privately. We tend to like to put people on display and punish them openly, this smacks of revenge and is not necessary.

The forgiveness, comfort, and discreetness should all be given to the repentant, which will in turn give them power and victory over their sin and make their lives better.

Quote: JRG- “Forgiveness may be the most powerful spiritual tool that we have.”

Rule 5: Reaffirm love. Love covers a multitude of sin. However, they must repent. If true repentance takes place, and behavior changes, kill the fatted calf and get out the robe of joy.

Rule 6: Verse 9- Accountability must accompany love, comfort, and acceptance. Paul holds the Corinthians accountable for the sinner's actions. Paul held the church accountable in discipline and in forgiveness. Make sure the sinner was protected, trained, counseled, grown, and given spiritual help with the grace that was given. However, demand obedience.

Rule 7: Verse 10- Forgive like God does. Forgive as God does because we are in the sight of Christ. Forgive like Jesus... completely and like He is watching you. There is *De Juric and De Facto Forgiveness*. In other words, let your heart keep up with the law.

Notice that Paul says, “I have done this for your sake.” Paul was saying that his forgiveness was done so that the church would forgive. Forgiveness *helps* the church. It *grows* the church. Then forgiveness *protects* the church. Why is this true? Because forgiveness is the spiritual business that we are supposed to be in!

Rule 8: Forgiveness releases the power of the cross. If we do not forgive those who repent, we allow Satan to take away the power of the cross. The power of the cross is forgiveness. Satan is scheming to produce unforgiveness in us. Unforgiveness is one of Satan's best tools.

John MacArthur says this:

“But the price of refusing to forgive is high. Unforgiveness produces hatred, bitterness, animosity, anger, and retribution. It not only clogs up the arteries but also the courts with thousands of vengeful lawsuits. Refusing to forgive imprisons people in their past. Unforgiven people keep their pain alive by constantly picking at the open wound and keeping it from healing. Bitterness takes root in their hearts and defiles them (Heb. 12:15). Anger rages out of control and negative emotions run unchecked. Life is filled with turmoil and strife instead of joy and peace. Now on the other hand, forgiveness frees people from the past. It is liberating, exhilarating, and healthy. Forgiveness relieves tension, brings peace and joy, and restores relationships. In addition to its personal and societal benefits, there are at least 10 biblical reasons for forgiving others: In Location- The MacArthur New Testament Commentary.

Ten Biblical Reasons to Forgive Gen 45:1-15; Gen 50:15-21

Gen 45:1-15

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. 2 And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

3 Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! 5 And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. 6 For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will

not be plowing and reaping. 7 But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

8 "So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. 9 Now hurry back to my father and say to him, 'This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay. 10 You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me — you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. 11 I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.'

12 "You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you. 13 Tell my father about all the honor accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly."

14 Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. 15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.

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Gen 50:15-21

15 When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" 16 So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: 17 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.'

Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

18 His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said.

19 But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? 20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. 21 So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

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1. First, believers are never more like God than when they forgive. God is "a God of forgiveness" (Neh. 9:17), "a forgiving God" (Ps 99:8), to whom "belong compassion and forgiveness" (Dan 9:9). The prophet Micah asked rhetorically, "Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession?" (Mic 7:18). The parable of the prodigal son aptly illustrates God's forgiveness (Luke 15:11-32). Like the father in the parable, who watched for his wayward son and ran to meet him, God eagerly forgives repentant sinners. God's forgiveness means that He will not hold believers' sins against them as requiring punishment (cf. Isa 43:25; 44:22; Jer 31:34); He has cast them behind His back (Isa 38:17) and buried them in the depths of the sea (Mic 7:19). Believers are never more like God than when they eagerly and passionately forgive. In Matt 5:44-45 Jesus said, "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."

2. Second, the sixth commandment, "You shall not murder" (Ex 20:13), does not just forbid murder but also anger, malice, lack of forgiveness, and desire for revenge. In Matt 5:21-22 Jesus declared, You have heard that the ancients were told, "You shall not commit murder" and "Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court." "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, "You good-for-nothing,"

shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, "You fool," shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell."

The apostle John added, "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer" (1 John 3:15). Those who refuse to forgive others, but are bitter, hateful, and full of animosity are guilty of violating the sixth commandment.

3. Third, whoever offends another person offends God more, because all sin is ultimately against Him. David committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her husband Uriah. Yet he acknowledged to God in Ps 51:4, "Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight" (cf. 2 Sam 12:9). Any wrong done against believers is insignificant compared to the wrong done to God. How then can they refuse to forgive?

4. Fourth, those who have been forgiven of great sin against God must forgive the lesser sin of others against them. At salvation, God forgives believers' staggering, unpayable debt of sin because of Christ's substitutionary death on their behalf. For them to refuse to forgive other people is utterly unthinkable. Jesus graphically illustrated that incongruity in a parable recorded in Matt 18:21-35. A king's servant (probably a regional governor who embezzled tax revenue) owed him ten thousand talents (Possibly millions)—a vast sum that the servant could never have repaid. The king felt compassion for him and released him from his debt. But inexplicably, unbelievably, the servant refused to forgive his fellow servant who owed him a small amount of money (A few dollars). The point of the illustration is simple. God freely forgives believers' massive debt to His holiness—a debt they could never repay even if they spent eternity in hell. Therefore they must readily forgive the sins by which others offend them. To refuse to do so is reprehensible, insensitive ingratitude that makes a mockery of God's forgiveness of them.

5. Fifth, believers who refuse to forgive forfeit the blessing of fellowship with other Christians. In the Lord's parable, it was the unforgiving servant's outrage against fellow servants who reported him to his lord (Matt 18:31), an act symbolizing church discipline. Those who refuse to forgive can cause rifts in the church fellowship and destroy its unity. They must be brought before the Lord for chastening, and if impenitent are thereby alienated from the church fellowship. Like Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim 1:20) and the incestuous man at Corinth (1 Cor 5:5), they are delivered to Satan and forfeit the blessings of associating with God's people.

6. Sixth, failing to forgive results in divine chastening. In addition to their separation from the church fellowship, God brings suffering into the lives of those who refuse to repent. God reacts with holy anger against unforgiving believers and chastens them (Matt 18:32-34). His goal is to bring them to repentance, so they will willingly pay what they owe (v. 34); in other words, be willing to forgive others. Otherwise, **"Judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy" (James 2:13).**

James 2:13

13 because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

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7. Seventh, God will not forgive believers who refuse to forgive others. Jesus stated this truth plainly in the Sermon on the Mount: "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (Matt 6:14-15). The Lord was not, of course, referring to the eternal forgiveness of justification (Acts 10:43; Rom 3:23-24; Col 1:14; 2:13; Eph 1:7; 4:32; Titus 2:14; Heb 7:25; 1 Peter 2:24) but to the temporal forgiveness of sanctification. Believers who fail to

forgive others do not cease to be God's children, but they will face their heavenly Father's chastening. They will not forfeit their eternal blessings in heaven, but they will forfeit their temporal blessings in this life.

8. Eighth, failing to forgive others renders believers unfit to worship. In the familiar words of the Lord Jesus Christ in Matt 5:23-24, "Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering." God does not want the hypocritical worship of those who refuse to forgive others. Reconciliation must precede worship. I have seen people with unforgiveness and a need for repentance trying to worship. The obvious and proverbial black cloud is blocking their worship. They worship in vain.

9. Ninth, to refuse to forgive is to usurp God's authority. It is to set oneself up as a higher court, with higher standards, than God. Paul forbade such arrogant pride in Rom 12:19: "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (cf. Prov 24:29). Only God can righteously deal with sin, since He alone is omniscient, just, and always acts in perfect holiness. When we retaliate it is called revenge; when God retaliates it is called vengeance.

10. Finally, offenses against believers must be recognized and embraced as the trials that mature them. Jesus commanded believers who face criticism, injustice, and mistreatment, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matt 5:44-45).

A proper response of forgiveness leads to spiritual maturity (James 1:2-4).

The perfect model of forgiveness is the Lord Jesus Christ, who while on the cross prayed for His tormentors, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Peter called on believers to follow the Lord's example in 1 Peter 2:19-23:

19 For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. 20 But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. 21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 22 "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." 23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

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The apostle Paul understood the importance of forgiveness. In this passage he urged the Corinthians to forgive one of their number. This individual (his identity hidden by the terms "any" in verse 5 and "such a one" in verse 6) had apparently verbally and publicly assaulted Paul during the apostle's "painful visit" to Corinth (see 2:1). Following Paul's instructions, the Corinthian church disciplined the sinning member and put him out of the fellowship. He had since repented, and now, not only did Paul forgive him, but he also instructed the Corinthians to do so too. From this passage seven motives emerge that enrich the New Testament teaching on forgiveness. Believers are to forgive to deflect pride, show mercy, restore joy, affirm love, prove obedience, restore fellowship, and thwart Satan.

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