**Class 5**

**Forgive as God Forgave You**

We talked quite a bit about Matthew 18 in the last class

Matthew 18 refers to a simple five-step process:

 1 - Overlook Minor Offenses

 2 - Talk in Private

 3 - Take One or Two Others Along

 4 - Tell it to the Ecclesia

 5 - Treat Them as an Unbeliever

We ended on a discussion of Disfellowship

Disfellowship is effectively the Ecclesia saying,

You are doing something that the **ENTIRE ECCLESIA** believes the Bible disagrees with, and if you want to continue to enjoy the benefits of our fellowship, then you must change

This only works if:

 1) Our Fellowship has “benefits”

 2) They have been enjoying the benefits of our Fellowship

 3) The Members of our Ecclesia all agree to DENY that person the benefits of

 our Fellowship

**SLIDE**

This class we would like to turn our attention back to **Forgiveness**

**SLIDE**

We’ll start by reviewing Paul’s commandment of how to act with other members of your

 Ecclesia

Colossians 3:13

 13) **bearing with one another** and, if one has a complaint against another, **forgiving each other**; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Bear with one another

Forgive one another

Forgive, as the Lord forgave you

A great verse to sum up the Christian Life!

We have **ALL** been forgiven a **TREMENDOUS** amount

Therefore, we should all be tremendously forgiving

*Why, then, is it so hard to forgive someone???*

The simple fact is that it is impossible to truly forgive someone with your own

 strength... Especially if they have hurt you or betrayed your trust

You can try not to think about what they did, or bury your feelings deep inside, but unless your heart is changed by God, the memories and feelings will still be lurking in the background - Poisoning your thoughts and preventing you from rebuilding a relationship with that person

To truly forgive, you have to pray to ask God to change your heart about that person

To understand what Forgiveness is, it’s helpful to first talk about what it is **NOT:**

**SLIDE**

Forgiveness is **NOT** a **Feeling**, it’s an act of **Will**

It’s a series of decisions you make, the first of which is to ask God to change your heart

**SLIDE**

Forgiveness is **NOT Forgetting**, it is a **Decision**

It’s an active process involving a conscious choice to stop thinking about what has happened to you

**SLIDE**

Forgiveness is **NOT Excusing**, it is the **Opposite**

The very fact that Forgiveness was needed and was given indicates that someone did something un-excusable

Forgiveness is a Decision

To Forgive someone is to release them from their liability to suffer punishment

Think of it as a Debt

When someone sins against you they create a Debt

You can either take payments on the debt, or make payments

You take payments by dwelling on it, by being cold to them, by giving up on the relationship, by gossiping about them, by lashing out or seeking revenge

OR... You can make payments on the Debt and release them from the penalty

Sometimes you can pay this off in one payment, sometimes it takes years... Fighting

 painful memories, saying nice things when you really don’t want to, tearing down walls instead of building them up...

**SLIDE**

Isaiah 59:2

 2) but **your iniquities** have made a **separation** between you and your God,

 and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.

When we are forgiven by God, it helps to remove some of that separation from Him

**SLIDE**

Psalm 103:12

 12) as far as the east is from the west, so far does He **remove our transgressions** from us.

Through forgiveness God tears down the walls that we have built, and opens the way for a renewed relationship

When we forgive, we must do the same thing - Release the person, tear down the walls that the sin created, and concentrate on rebuilding a healthy relationship

**WHEN** should you Forgive?

**SLIDE**

Forgiveness should be **IMMEDIATE**

**SLIDE**

**EVEN** if the person hasn’t repented yet

**SLIDE**

**IDEALLY**, repentance should precede forgiveness

**Luke 17:3-4**

 3) Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if **he repents, forgive him**,

 4) and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.”

However, minor offenses should be overlooked and put away even if the offender

 doesn’t acknowledge them

When something is too serious to overlook, and the offender has not yet repented, try this:

**SLIDE**

**FORGIVE THEM**

Pray for them, and stand ready to accept them as soon as they repent, just like the

 Prodigal’s Father, but go ahead and forgive them anyway

Once you forgive them, then don’t bring it up again to use it against that person

You haven’t really forgiven them if you use it to support your argument against them

 two years from now

You know that you have really forgiven someone when you wish the best for them

When you honestly hope that they succeed and are happy

Remember, that Forgiveness doesn’t release them from the consequences of their sin

**SLIDE**

Numbers 14:20-23

 20) Then the LORD said, “I have pardoned, according to your word.

 21) But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD,

 22) **none of the men** who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed my voice,

 23) **shall see the land** that I swore to give to their fathers. And none of those who despised me shall see it.

God forgave the Israelites for rebelling, but he still didn’t let them enter the Promised Land

There are consequences for sin

Sometimes legal

Sometimes personal

It’s not your job to punish someone for sinning

Often the sin brings punishment enough

Sometimes God brings it

**SLIDE**

2nd Samuel 12:13-14

 13) David said to Nathan, **“I have sinned against the LORD.”** And Nathan said to David, “The LORD also has **put away your sin**; you shall not die.

 14) **Nevertheless**, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, **the child who is born to you shall die**.”

God forgave David for his sin with Uriah, but he still had to live with the consequences of his child dying

Don’t think that it is always helpful to remove the consequences of their actions

While you should forgive them, it’s not always the best idea to take steps to remove

 their responsibility for what they have done

If you do that, they may never learn

**SLIDE**

Proverbs 19:19

 19) A man of great wrath will pay the penalty, for **if you deliver him, you will only have to do it again.**

You often have to sit there and watch them suffer through the consequences of what

 they have done, while all the while forgiving them, loving them, and walking with them through it

What if you just can’t bring yourself to forgive them?

You know it’s a clear commandment, but you just can’t take that step

**SLIDE**

If you are feeling **Unforgiving**, here is some help:

**SLIDE**

**1) Confirm Repentance**

If you are having a difficult time forgiving someone, you may need to let them know

This is your problem, not theirs

They may have repented, but you need some more time to get over the hurt

Release them from their pain and don’t hold them hostage by your inability to forgive

Let them know that they have done the right thing but you are stuck in sin

**SLIDE**

**2) Renounce Sinful Expectations**

We sometimes withhold our forgiveness because we unconsciously want them to

 “Earn” or “Deserve” it first

We sinfully want them to “Pay” for what they did

That is unrealistic and wrong!

We are ALL Sinners!

**SLIDE**

Romans 5:8

 8) God shows his love for us in that **while we were still sinners**, Christ died for us.

While we were yet sinners, God forgave us

We can’t wait for them to be perfect before we forgive them

**SLIDE**

**3) Assess your Contributions to the Problem**

You know that you have a problem when you think “I didn’t do anything”

That is a big red flag

Examine your actions a little closer

Even if you didn’t start it, your sinful words and actions may have aggravated the

 situation

Remembering your own faults makes it easier to forgive others

**SLIDE**

**4) Recognize that God is Working for Good**

When someone wrongs you, it is all part of God’s Plan to grow you spiritually

Focus on what you have to learn and let them go

**SLIDE**

**5) Remember God’s Forgiveness**

Focus on how much God has forgiven you

Think about the Unmerciful Servant that we talked about in Matt 18

**$20 Billion Dollars!**

Don’t take God’s forgiveness for granted, and then withhold it from your Brother

**SLIDE**

**6) Draw on God’s Strength**

You can’t do this alone!

You have to pray and ask God to help you through this

**SLIDE**

Let’s talk about **RECONCILIATION**

Being Reconciled doesn’t mean that the other person is going to be your best friend

**SLIDE**

It only means that your relationship is at **LEAST** as good as it was **before** the offense

**SLIDE**

**Forgiveness** is **IMMEDIATE** but **Reconcilation** can take a **WHILE**

This may require patience

Unless a deliberate effort is made to restore and improve a relationship, it will generally

 deteriorate

**SLIDE**

You can help this by pursuing reconciliation on three levels:

**In Thought**

Actually **THINK** about the person differently

You’ve got a mental picture of how you think about that no good, low down, stealing,

 stupid jerk

Change your thoughts, and think of them repenting, saying they were sorry, and asking

 for forgiveness

Remember that this is the person that Jesus died for

**SLIDE**

Philippians 4:8

 8) Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, **think about these things**.

**SLIDE**

**In Word**

Don’t just stop saying mean things, actually start saying kind things!

**SLIDE**

Luke 6:27-28

 27) “But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,

 28) **bless those who curse you**, pray for those who abuse you.

It’s just about being silent when you are around that person

Doing a good job of “biting your tongue”

That doesn’t build good relationships

Replace your negativity with positive words

**SLIDE**

**In Deed**

If you really want to be reconciled, then act that way

Behave like you love someone, and eventually you will

Loving actions do more than just change your feelings about someone, they communicate clearly that you are trying to reconcile and build a new relationship

We have to focus on the interest of others, and not just ourselves

**SLIDE**

Philippians 2:4

 4) Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests

 of others.

So far, we’ve focused mainly on how to resolve personal issues

Conflict sometimes involves material issues

Friends may disagree on the cost of repairing something

Couples may disagree on how to spend their money

Neighbors may disagree on the fence repairs

**SLIDE**

Let’s talk about settling **material issues** in a **faithful manner**

**SLIDE**

Practice **Cooperative** vs. **Competitive** Negotiation

Most people automatically resort to a competitive style of negotiating material issues

They think that if they want to Win, then someone else has to Lose

Interestingly enough, being Competitive often fails to produce the best possible

 solution to a problem

When people work against each other, then tend to focus on surface issues and neglect underlying issues

As a result, they often reach inadequate solutions

They tend to think that for them to get a bigger slice of the pie, the other person has to get a smaller slice... This fails to open their minds up to a bigger pie altogether

AND, it damages personal relationships!

**SLIDE**

If one person has to **LOSE** they **don’t feel good** about that

**SLIDE**

If one person **“WINS”,** they tend to **lose respect** for the other person

Like in all parts of our life, when you focus on Material Issues and not Spiritual Issues, the quality of your life is cheapened

Your friend gets the message that your relationship isn’t that important to them

**INSTEAD** negotiate in a **cooperative** manner

Seek a solution that benefits both of you

**SLIDE**

Work with them instead of against them to put your heads together and think of a solution that is a **Win-Win**

It generally is more efficient and most importantly, preserves the relationship

**SLIDE**

Matthew 7:12

 12) “So **whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them**, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

This doesn’t mean giving in to the other person

Philippians 2:4 says that you should look to your own interests, as well as the interests of others

There is an easy way to remember the best process to follow

**SLIDE**

Pause before your Negotiate

**- P - A - U - S - E**

**SLIDE**

**- P - Prepare**

Before you negotiate with them, prepare yourself

 - Pray

 - Get all the facts together

 - Clearly identify what the problem is based on the research that you’ve done

 - Study the Bible to see if there is any guidance on what you should do

 - Think about some possible options to solve it

 - Anticipate their reactions to your suggestions

 - Select an appropriate time and place

 - Plan your opening remarks carefully

**SLIDE**

**- A - Affirm** Relationships

A conflict involves two basic ingredients: **People** and a **Problem**

Don’t just focus on all of your attention on the problem and ignore the feelings and concern of the person

A good way to avoid this is to affirm your love and concern for the other person

 *“You are a good friend of mine, and I appreciate all that you have done for me. It’s because you are so important to me that I want to find a solution to this problem.”*

Obviously, nice words have to be backed up with comparable actions

So, during the negotiations be sure to:

 - Be polite and courteous

 - Spend time on personal issues and not just problem

 - Honestly seek to understand their side of it

 - Look out for their interests

 - Be gracious!

 - Allow for them to save face - No backing into corners

 - Give praise and thanks to them

**SLIDE**

**- U - Understand** Interests

If you really want to look to the interests of others, you have to understand what their

 interests are

- An Issue - is an identifiable question that must be addressed in order to reach an agreement

- A Position - is someone’s definable perspective on an issue

- An Interest - is what motivates people - a concern, desire, need, or something that

 someone values - Interests provide the basis for Positions

We are both facing the same problem, but due to our own personal interests we are going to come to different positions

Positions are often incompatible

Interestingly, though, Interests are often the same

We both want the same thing, but that makes us take different positions on the problem

**SLIDE**

1st Samuel 25:32-35

 32) And David said to Abigail, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who

 sent you this day to meet me!

 33) **Blessed be your discretion,** and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodguilt and from working salvation with my own hand!

**SLIDE**

 34) For as surely as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, who has restrained me from hurting you, unless you had hurried and come to meet me, truly by morning there had not been left to Nabal so much as one male.”

 35) Then David received from her hand what she had brought him. And he said to her, “Go up in peace to your house. See**, I have obeyed your voice**, and I have granted your petition.”

Abigail shows her respect for David, and talks to him politely

She focuses on keeping his best interests in mind

*You don’t want to disobey God...*

So, if you focus on the other person’s interests, you will probably find things in common

**SLIDE**

**- S - Search** for Creative Solutions

Get creative! Think about how to satisfy both of your interests

Brainstorm! Everyone should be encouraged to mention any solution that comes to mind

Avoid the assumption that there is only one solution to your problem

Focus on expanding the pie instead of slicing it up

**SLIDE**

**- E - Evaluate** Options Objectively and Reasonably

Evaluate possible solutions objectively

I know that objectivity can be awfully hard in the middle of a Conflict

Your own personal desires want to rule the decision making

When you get to the very end, things can still tend to fall apart

Be sure to evaluate the options before you based on objective criteria instead of personal opinions

Objective means visible, measurable things that we can both agree on, not someone’s opinion of something

Be polite

Be reasonable

Listen Carefully

Try to figure out the hidden causes behind the actions

If it gets too personal, move it back to the objective

Treat them like you would want to be treated

If it results in an agreement, it’s a good idea to put it in writing

 - What was resolved

 - What actions were taken

 - Who is responsible

 - When it will be completed by

If you are unable to resolve it, don’t give up too quickly

Return to one of the earlier steps and see what you missed

With lots of love, patience and careful listening you should have greater success at

 resolving conflicts with your Brothers and Sisters

It’s all about overcoming Evil with Good – That is what our Exhortation is about