**FORGIVE YOUR BROTHER OR SISTER FROM YOUR HEART**

February 24, 2019

Matthew 18:15-35

Key Verse 18:35 “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

In the movie, “The Lord of the Rings; The Fellowship of the Ring,” Frodo and 8 others formed the fellowship of the ring to bring the ring to the Mount Doom to destroy it. But at the end of the movie, Boromir was overcome by greed and tries to steal the ring. Then everybody suspects one another and the fellowship is broken. Everyone goes running off in different directions. Gimli and Legolas run one way; Sam another, Merry and Pippin go off in a third direction. They could not proceed with the plan to destroy the ring. Likewise, in a Christian community, conflicts arise because of our sins. Sin breaks our relationship with God and with one another. When the fellowship is broken, church cannot function as salt and light of the world. Church cannot testify to the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. When the fellowship is broken, church cannot be a loving community. But forgiveness heals our broken relationship with God and one another. In a relationship, no one is righteous. Only God is perfect. Even if one person is 1% at fault and the other person is 99% at fault, we need to forgive one another and restore the relationship so that church may be a loving community, and testify to the forgiving grace of Jesus Christ.

**First**, if your brother sins against you (15‑20). Look at verse 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.” We usually want those who did wrong to us first to come and apologize to be forgiven for their wrongdoing. But that does not usually happen. People rationalize their wrongdoing. They harden their hearts and firmly believe that they are right and others are wrong. If the matter is trivial, it is better to ignore it and let time heal the matter. But people are easily offended by trivial and petty matters. When we are offended by others’ wrongdoing, it becomes an interpersonal conflict that breaks our relationship with others. It burdens our hearts and makes us frustrated, unhappy and even angry. We harden our hearts, and let the resentment and anger fester in our hearts. We let others know of our displeasure in terms of giving silent treatment. In order to vent our frustration, we gossip about it with others and talk about them behind their backs, usually exaggerate, until everybody else knows about the conflict. But we should not act like this.

Jesus gives us wisdom: “go and show him his fault, just between the two of you.” We want to wait for the other person to come and apologize to us, begging for our forgiveness. Instead, we must take the initiative and visit the person and have a personal one-to-one conversation with him. Next, we must show him his fault. This does not mean that we must accuse him for wrongdoing like a prosecutor, presenting evidence and pronouncing guilt. It means to show him the word of God and walk him through the situation so that he can understand his own wrongdoing and be convicted of his sins before God. We need to do this quickly. Otherwise anger and resentment take root in our hearts and grow.

What should we do if the person does not acknowledge his wrongdoing? Look at verses 16-17. “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.’ 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.” The second step is to invite others to witness the conflict resolution process. Jesus uses Deuteronomy 19:15 as his scriptural basis, which says, “One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.” When two persons cannot agree on which of the two had wronged, a third person can listen to two versions of the story and make a more objective judgment. The third step is to refer the conflict to the church leaders. If the person who has sinned would not listen to the church leaders’ counseling, then we must treat him like a pagan or a tax collector. This sounds a little bit harsh. But the goal is not to punish the person but to bring him to repentance. In verse 18 Jesus put a final authority on the church’s ability to make decisions in times of conflict. It says, “I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will bebound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will beloosed in heaven.” When we are united in love, church can exercise a great authority.

**Second**, forgive up to seventy-seven times (21-22). Look at verse 21. “Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?’” In baseball, you are out after getting three strikes. How many times should we forgive others? Like us, the top disciple Peter also felt difficulty in forgiving his fellow disciples. Forgiving even one time is indeed a remarkable achievement. How did Jesus answer? Look at verse 22. It says, “Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy‑seven times.’” The footnote tells us that seventy-seven may be interpreted as seventy times seven—that is—490 times! The point is not that we count up to seventy-seven times or 490 times. This means that we should not count at all. We are to forgive, not to count. Jesus commands us to forgive others countless times. Some people cannot forgive others even while they were dying. “Et tu, Brute!”—“You Too, Brutus!” was the dying word of Julius Caesar when he was assassinated in 44 B.C. He could not forgive Brutus who betrayed his trust. But Jesus forgave even those who were crucifying him. He prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Lk 23:34) Forgiveness is a great virtue. It is the key to the unity of the church. It is the key to love. It is the key to meaningful relationships. Proverbs 19:11 says, “It is to one’s glory to overlook an offense.” In other words, if you want to see man at his best, look at his ability to forgive, in overlooking an offense, in forgetting sin and evil. Ephesians 4:32 takes the thought even a step further for Christians and it says that we are to be “forgiving one another, just as in Christ God forgave you.” Even if others do not admit their wrongdoing and refuse to apologize, instead of holding grudges, bring it to God and let God deal with it so that God may heal our hearts.

**Third**, the parable of the unmerciful servant (23-35). This parable illustrates why we must forgive others unconditionally. Look at verses 23‑27. “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. Then the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,' he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’” “The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.” One talent is equal to 6,000 denarii, which would take an ordinary laborer 6,000 days (16 years) to earn. If a day’s wage is $100, ten thousand talents would be 6 billion dollars. It was impossible for the servant to pay the money back. It was customary for the creditor to sell the debtor, his wife and children as slaves and liquidate his property. That was what the master ordered to be done. But the servant begged the master’s mercy, saying, “Be patient with me and I will pay back everything.” This man had an illusion that he could pay back the debt if only he had time. How could he pay back? It is impossible. The master had the full right to answer, “No.” To our amazement, the master took pity on him, and did far more than he asked. He canceled the servant’s entire debt freely.

Here debt refers to our sin. We owe God a huge amount of sin. Sometimes we think in our illusion that we can pay it back through our good deeds. But we cannot pay it back, for the wages of sin is death. We have to pay it back with our own lives. But God forgave all our sins freely through his Son Jesus. In order to forgive all our sins, Jesus, the Sinless Son of God, died on the cross, shed his precious blood in our places and paid in full the wages of our sins. Jesus said on the cross, “It is finished.” It means our sins are paid in full. Our sins are forgiven. Romans 8:1 says, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” This grace is indeed amazing. This is eternal grace. This is the grace we must remember all our days. Once John Newton was a captain of slave trade ship. On returning to England across the Atlantic, he met a storm and in his desperation, he cried out to God, “Lord, have mercy on us!” Then his own words startled him. “Mercy! What mercy can there be for me, a slave dealer?” He sought mercy and found it in Jesus. He wrote the famous hymn, Amazing Grace, “Amazing grace! How sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me.” This song should be on our lips each and every day of our lives on earth.

Probably this servant whose debt of ten thousand talents were canceled went out to the street, singing, “Amazing Grace! How sweet the sound.” But look at verses 28-30. “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. It is about $10,000. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’ But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.” How could he act like this? He should have shown generosity, saying, “You know, today our master canceled all my debt. Your debt of a hundred denarii is nothing compared with my debt of ten thousand talents. I will also gladly cancel your debt. Let us rejoice and celebrate.” But he threw his fellow servant into prison until he could pay the debt. He quickly forgot the amazing grace of the forgiveness of sins. Look at verse 32-34. "Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.” Wow! This unmerciful servant wanted to squeeze the debt of a hundred denarii out of his poor fellow servant and ended up recovering his huge debt.

In conclusion, Jesus said in verse 35. “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.” Here “from our heart” is important. We must forgive others’ sins not grudgingly but willingly. Are you willing to forgive others’ sins? You may answer, “Well, it depends on the degree or the frequency of their sins.” But Jesus commands us to forgive others unconditionally. When we remember Jesus’ amazing grace, we can forgive others. A traveler in Burma, after crossing a river, found his body covered all over by a swarm of small leeches busily sucking his blood. His first impulse was to tear the tormentors from his flesh, but his servant warned him that to pull them off by force would expose his life to danger. They must not be torn off, lest portions remain in the wounds and become a poison. They must drop off spontaneously and so they will be harmless. The servant prepared a bath for his master by the mixture of some herbs and directed him to lie down in it. As soon as he had bathed in the balsam bath, the leeches dropped off. Each unforgiven sin, festering in the heart, is like a leech sucking the life blood. Mere human determination to get rid of it will not work. We must bathe our whole being in God’s pardoning mercy and these venomous creatures will instantly let go their hold and we will be free. We must bathe our whole being in God’s pardoning love. In order to forgive others, we must see how much we have been forgiven.

Now, when you forgive, it doesn’t mean that you forget. It doesn’t mean that you excuse the sin or the wrong. It does mean that you end the cycle of pain and you restore the relationship. That is what Jesus means. Here let’s clarify one thing. This passage is about Christians. When it says that God will not forgive our sins, it does not mean that God will take back his forgiveness. If you don’t forgive someone else as a Christian, two things take place. Firstly, you cannot know the forgiveness of God in terms of communion, fellowship, joy, all that ought to be there between you and God. Secondly, you will receive God’s rebuke. When you don’t forgive someone else, you don’t experience the full joy of your salvation. So examine your life. Are you looking at your life and saying, “I don’t see the kind of joy I should see in my life? I don’t have the kind of fulfillment spiritually. I don’t seem to have the power of God in my life. On the other hand, it seems as though I’m always being rebuked. I’m always struggling. There’s always stress in my life.” Then examine whether there is somewhere in your heart something for which you have never forgiven a person. Some grudge you hold, some bitterness there, because if you can’t forgive, you’ll never experience the forgiveness of God. It is like a leech sucking your blood.

As long as we live in this world of sin, we cannot escape the problem of sin. Sin breaks our relationship with God and with one another. Once our relationship is broken, it seems that there is no way to heal our broken relationship with God and one another. But there is a way. It is through forgiveness. God forgives all of our sins freely through his Son Jesus. God also wants us to forgive others’ sins as he forgave all our sins. Through forgiveness, God wants to heal our broken relationship. Through forgiveness, God wants us to experience the joy and happiness of the kingdom of heaven while on earth.