*Introduction*

For many of us, forgiveness is something we struggle with. When someone hurts us, the natural reaction is to want to get even, to take revenge on that person, to hurt them as they have hurt us.

God’s way is different. He calls us all to forgive those who have hurt us, and to go on forgiving, just as He does to us.

Forgiveness is not easy for us, because to forgive means to let go of those emotions which often drive us into yet more pain, which often has become our solace, and let it go.

This morning I want us, God willing to look at the questions:

Why forgive?

How does God deal with our unforgiveness?

What is the key to forgiving?

Throughout the scriptures there is a call for us to forgive. Jesus gave a parable on forgiveness.

Peter asked Jesus one day “How many times must I forgive” “7 times?”, thinking this was far above what was reasonable. But Jesus answered “77 times”.

In other words we are called to keep on forgiving one another.

**Why forgive?**

*Firstly, we are to forgive because God commands it.*

***COL 3:13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.***

There is no clearer expression of God’s command than this. He damands that we forgive. And we are to forgive unilaterally, we are not to wait for an apology.

In fact, with the possible exception of the thief on the cross, there is no biblical record of anyone asking Jesus for forgiveness. Regardless, just as he did with the adulterous woman who was about to be stoned, Jesus continually forgave sinners, always taking the initiative.

Even whilst dying on the cross, he looked upon those who had crucified him and said “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”

*Secondly, we are to forgive because God has forgiven us.*

In the parable that Jesus told, the man with the massive debt, who had been forgiven by the king refused to forgive the man that owed him a small debt. This was the height of ingratitude for him not to pass on the forgiveness that he had received.

The great preacher, Robert E Smith, once said *everything God gives me was on its way to someone else when I received it. My assignment is to make sure that it reaches them.*

God has showered us with love so that we can love others. He has lavished grace upon us in order that we may be gracious. He has forgiven us of our offences against Him to enable us to forgive those who will offend us.

Why does God forgive us:

***PS 51:10 Create in me a pure heart, O God,and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you.***

Even when cleansing us, God’s heart is set toward evangelism.

*Thirdly, we are to forgive or we destroy ourselves.*

Unforgiveness is unhealthy, in fact it is a killer. Our minds are linked to our bodies. Negative emotions result in chemical reactions within us that over time, will trigger sickness and disease.

***PR 14:30 A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.***

Unforgiveness does more to us than it does towards the person to which our attention is turned.

The late Bob Hope who lived to be 100, was asked the secret of his long life, he replied “my first rule is not to bicker with others”.

Churches are filled with people who are over medicated, many of which have no medical problem at all. They are filled with bitterness, resentment, hatred and unforgiveness towards others.

Our mental health clinics are filled with people who have lost their minds for the same reason. Like a cancer, it will ultimately attack and destroy your health.

*Fourthly, we are to forgive to avoid being tormented.*

When someone has done something against us, we want that person to pay. We have a sense of wanting to see justice done and this is why we often do not forgive. It’s not because you and I are bad when we think this way, but because we have been created in God’s image. It is God who said:

***EZEK 18:20 The soul who sins is the one who will die.***

***ROM 6:23 For the wages of sin is death***

So we harbor unforgiveness because we want that person who has hurt us or betrayed us to pay, we don’t want to see them released without seeing justice done. We demand justice, we want payment, just as God does.

Just like you, God hates sin, but here is the issue:

Jesus has already taken the punishment, made the payment, and forever satisfied justice.

When you refuse to forgive, you are denying that the blood of Christ covers that specific offence.

The other thing it does to us is this – If we refuse to forgive others for something they may have done to us, we prevent God from forgiving us.

***MT 6:12 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.***

***MT 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.***

But hang on a minute, there’s more.

In our story that Jesus told, we read:

***MT 18:32-35 "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.***

***“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."***

THIS IS SERIOUS!! We often forget those last words of v35. What this means in practice I do not know, but I do know that we do not want to go there.

If there is anyone, living or dead, against whom we are harboring unforgiveness, resentment or hatred, or the like, then it is probable that you are being tormented. And If you do not do something about it, it will get worse.

Jesus does not want to release the tormentors, but if we sit as judge and jury, sit in judgment, a position reserved for God Himself.

If we, arrogantly attempt to replace God, then He has no option but to release the tormentors in order to discipline us, until we repent and learn to forgive, as we have been forgiven.

You will never be free of the torment of unforgiveness until you forgive.

*Fifthly, we are to forgive because unforgiveness grieves the Holy Spirit.*

The Bible warns us not to grieve the Holy Spririt.

***EPH 4:30-32 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.***

We grieve the Holy Spirit if we do not forgive others. Forgiveness requires the power of God, it is a God thing.

Forgiving is holy, compassionate and kind, it expresses humility, patience and gentleness and faith.

Refusing to forgive is the exact opposite.

Paul and Silas refused to hate those who had accussed them, had them arrested and thrown into jail. Instead they trusted God in their circumstance and praised Him in the midst of it. What resulted was a citywide revival.

*Sixthly, we are to forgive because unforgiveness prevents God from hearing and answering prayer.*

***PS 66:18 If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened;***

***MARK 11:25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."***

***MT 5:23-24 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.***

The Bible makes it very clear that we are to forgive others before we come to God in prayer and with our supplications, because if we do not, He will not hear us.

**Offenses offer us opportunity.**

One thing you can count on is that offenses will come our way. People will rise up against us and malign us, or even physically assault us. Others will cause us emotional hurt and embarrassment, some will unknowingly upset us without any intent whatsoever.

The real issue is: How will we respond to mistreatment? Will you elevate your *rights* above your *responsibilities*. Will you elevate your nedd for *comfort* above your need to *conform* to Christ’s image.

Will you allow your experiences to define you, or will you allow the Lord to mold you.

Jesus told us that in this life we will receive tribulation, but take heart, I have overcome the world.(John 16:3). What Jesus is looking for are those that don’t just say “Jesus Christ is Lord” but for those who live their everyday lives in Him when the heat is on.

**Unforgiveness is unnecessary.**

Resentment is a common result of being offended. Lets take a closer look at the word RESENT.

The prefix re means “again”. The suffix *sent* comes from the latin *sentir* which means “to feel”. Therefore when we resent someone, we are reserving the right to re-feel our anger against that person.

Unforgiveness is claiming the right to punish someone who has offended us, harboring in our hearts the right to “get even”.

In contrast, to honour Christ, we must show mercy to those who have shown us no mercy. We must relinquish our “right” to hurt those who have hurt us.

***ROM 12:20-21"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.***

Unforgiveness is unnecessary because Christ has paid the price for all sin. He died for the sins of the world. No other sacrifice is needed.

*Conclusion*

Have we any unforgiveness in our hearts, to someone in this fellowship, in our families, alive or dead. Are you holding something from years gone by.

Well, no matter what you think of that person(s), let it go, forgive them and repent of your unforgiveness to God.

See what a difference it makes to your life.

Amen