



TIME OF GRACE®

Forgiveness Is Offensive: I Forgave. Now How Do I Heal?

Study Notes

Summary

Does forgiveness mean you act like sin never happened? What if you don't trust the person who sinned against you? What about consequences? This message discusses the tension between daily forgiveness and healthy boundaries from a biblical perspective.

- **Romans 12:14-21:** ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary: "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." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
- God's goal: "Live at _____ with _____."
- **Colossians 1:22:** But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.
- **Romans 12:18:** If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.
- Smarts & Stones:
 1. They _____.
 2. You look to _____.
 3. You _____.
 4. You _____.
 5. Y'all _____ (if possible).

Points to Ponder

1. Why is it essential to love/serve the person who sinned against you before deciding if it is possible to reconcile with them?
2. **Challenge:** If keeping godly boundaries is a struggle for you, read through the book of Proverbs in the month to come, noting the wisdom of keeping your distance from destructive people.
3. **Read Mark 16:1-8.** How does the resurrected Jesus prove that he longs to reconcile with real sinners?

Homework for Next Week

Read 1 John 1:5-2:2.

Time of Grace Ministry
Forgiveness is Offensive: I Forgave. Now How Do I Heal?
Romans 12:14-21, Colossians 1:22, Romans 12:18 (again)
March 21, 2021

Pastor Mike Novotny

The affair comes to light and it rocks a marriage. You discover pornography on her phone and you feel betrayed. Some kids at the school are very mean, something happens at church or with the pastor, and you don't want to be bitter and you don't want to try to get people back. You're going to forgive but what exactly does forgiveness look like? How do you heal from the deep wounds that people have caused in your past?

Here's the simple truth: God wants you to forgive them.

I might not know you personally and I might not know what those people did to you but I can say with absolute certainty that what God wants you to do is to forgive. Father, forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

But there's a question that we haven't covered just yet and if you haven't asked it out loud, I bet you wondered it in your heart and the question is this: Okay, Pastor, but then what?

Now that's the question in this sinful world all of us are going to have to answer, which is why I'm so grateful the apostle Paul gives us an answer. If you know anything about the Bible, about 2,000 years ago there was this guy named Paul who wrote about half of the New Testament and he had been sinned against many times. In fact, Paul literally had stones thrown at him and he had to decide how to treat people who had hurt him very deeply. And in my opinion, in Romans 12, the apostle Paul writes one of the best sections in the whole Bible on forgiveness. Today, Paul is going to tell you exactly what you should do after you forgive. Now for some of you, it's going to be offensive, for some of you it's going to be surprising, for you black and white Christians, it's going to be nuanced. But I hope for all of us it's powerful and beautiful and helpful as we learn to heal and as we learn to help one another in our sinful and broken world. So if you have a Bible with you or you just want to follow along on the screen, look at Paul's words in Romans 12. He says, "Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil and be careful to do what's right in the eyes of everyone. If it's possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. Now on the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he's 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."

That's what Paul says you should do. Paul's honest, he's realistic, he knows exactly what you're going through. He knows that sometimes people curse you and sometimes they persecute you. Sometimes they become your enemy. Sometimes he even says they do evil against you, really bad stuff, and what should be your response? Well, if you're taking notes, write this down. Here's Paul's big idea. He says as much as it's possible, as much as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

In my Wednesday night old man soccer league, I play on multiple teams and you know what's fascinating about playing on multiple teams? No one thinks they're the bad guy. That when I play with this team, it's always that jerk on the other team. And then I go over and play with that team and they say, "Can you believe the guy on that team?" And you find out that when there's conflict and there's division, when the game gets aggressive, people tend to think very, very little of their own faults and a whole lot about the faults of others. And Paul says be careful, right?

There's some situations in life like the abuse of a child where all the sin happens on one side. But most of the time in life, you and I have a part of it. You know, in the argument she said that scathing, ugly thing but maybe, maybe, maybe we raised our voice and brought up the past and weren't very respectful, too. You know, maybe that guy at work is so critical and, you know, you're never good enough, all the work that you do and he's such a jerk but maybe I haven't been walking into the workplace and bringing them joy and serving them and letting my light shine. Maybe she threw the massive stone of infidelity in the marriage and maybe you have to step back and think if you threw a thousand of these sized stones first? Paul says this offensive thing to people who had been hurt in this word: Be careful. Don't be proud. It's so hard but humble yourself because being humble leads to healing. So don't be proud, Paul says. And then here's the other even more offensive thing. He says do good to that person! Paul doesn't just say forgive them, let the stone alone. Did you catch how many times he said it? He said bless those who persecute you, rejoice with those who rejoice, mourn with those who mourn. If your enemy's hungry, don't say ha, told you so! No, feed him. If he's thirsty, don't say serves you right! Give him something to drink. Don't be overcome by evil, Paul says, but overcome evil with what? With good.

Unless you're in a really dangerous situation like going back to that person who abused you and put you in danger, what Paul wants you to do with that person that really annoys you and hurts you and bothers you is to serve them. Because here's what God knows: God knows when this stone hits you and you're trying to leave it alone, if you don't occupy your hands with good, it will be almost impossible not to hold onto the past. And Paul says as soon as that stone hits, as fast as you can, you need to use those hands to bless people and to pray for people and to serve people who hurt you. Healing rarely happens just with waiting it out. The holy and hard way that God heals your hurts is by having you serve your enemies.

That's a little bit like physical therapy. Quick show of hands: How many of you have been through PT before? Yeah, dozens of you; lots of you. You know, you go through this surgery, you hurt maybe more than you've ever hurt before, and you go to the physical therapist and what do they do to you? They make you hurt even more! And you kind of want sympathy like, oh my goodness, my body was just cut open and now you want me to do what with my leg? And every

bit of it is agonizing but why do they do it? Well, because if you don't do the painful thing right now that part of you will never heal.

And it's the exact same with God. You want to play the pity card and say, God, after what they said to me and what they did to me, I don't want to pray for them! I don't want to serve them. I don't want to go back to my spouse or to my ex or to that guy at work and just like - they don't deserve that. But God knows that if you don't you're never going to heal. But when you start praying for someone, that God would bless them, when you reach out to them to serve them in confusing and maybe offensive ways, that slowly, slowly, slowly your heart finally starts to heal.

I've been a pastor for almost 13 years now and I've got to tell you, when a huge stone hits a couple in their marriage, where I see people get stuck is where the victim refuses to serve. Here's what happens: Let's say he sins, she's hurt by his sin, he feels totally unworthy of her love and affection. He's not complaining that she's not doing much and she's just watching and waiting for him to do good works to make it up to her. But when that dynamic happens, guess what never happens? Right. And so, Paul says this shocking stuff. He says be humble and do good.

Just a couple days ago, I got an email from a guy here at our church. He's been listening to this series on forgiveness and he gave me permission anonymously to share this email with you. Here's what he said. He said, "Pastor Mike, last week I started to pray that God would reach my ex-wife and bring good to her. Since I've done that, my attitude towards her has changed to the point where I'm no longer holding that stone ready to throw it at her if needed. I put the stone down. So Pastor, here's to stones down, heads up, and moving forward in freedom." I love that!

So not to offend those of you who are hurting but what could you do in the next 24 hours? How could you start to pray for God to bless that person even if they don't deserve it? What email could you send them honestly wishing them well in their next relationship? What comment could you leave on their Instagram or Facebook that would make the people who were on your side drastically offended? What could you do that would confuse the world because it looked a whole lot like Jesus?

It says, "But now God has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight without blemish and free from accusation." I love that line: Reconciled. You know, that means to make peace with people. That when Jesus died on the cross, he didn't just cancel your debt. He brought you back to God so that today, no matter what you've done, how many times you've done it, when you come to Jesus and trust in him, you get God! Every single day, you have God and look what God says about you: You're holy in his sight. Like, thinking about you makes him happy! There's no more accusations, no stones in his back pocket to throw at you when you mess up. The greatest gift we could ever imagine to have God, we do because of what Jesus did. Because he was so humble that when people hurt him, when you and I hurt him, he turned around and loved us. He served us. He brought us back to God. So let me ask you one more time: What would it look like to imitate that kind of love and to love the people who didn't love you first?

But there's one more thing I need to say today. It's that I love how honest the apostle Paul is. Paul says love people, bless people, serve people. But I wonder if you caught what Paul said in Romans 12:18? Look once more at his words. Paul said, "If," circle that word in your Bibles or in your brains - "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." It's about that person, too, and so we have to ask the honest question: How does that person feel about the way that they hurt you? Are they sorry for it? Here's a good counseling question: What kind of sorry are they? Are they just sorry that they messed up their own life? Which seems like remorse but it's actually very selfish or are they deeply sorry that they sinned against God and they hurt you, once of his children? Is the person willing to change, willing to get the help that they need, willing to accept the consequence of their actions? Because if not - this might offend you or surprise some of you - Jesus says be careful and stay away. Jesus said that Christians should be as shrewd as snakes. They should be smart when it comes to people. Some people are not good; they're dangerous, foolish, manipulators and your job is to not go back to them. Some people want to use you for selfish gain and they want to hurt you so as far as it depends on you, live at peace, but don't forget about them.

The Old Testament book of Proverbs says that foolish people cause destruction and those who hang out with them will be destroyed. So if someone makes a mistake, that's one thing. But if they look like they're going to keep making that mistake and have no plans to change - I say this in love - stay far, far, far away. It's one thing to forgive the stone of the past; it's another thing to put your face in the target of someone who's surely going to throw that stone in the future. And so Paul agrees with Jesus in realistic love. Sometimes you have to have boundaries and brains as a believer. Be smart because it doesn't just depend on you. Sometimes a person needs to feel the relational pain of a separation, of someone who will not bail them out of their addiction. They need to know that God wants them to change because sin hurts people that he loves.

And second, the apostle Paul says, if it's possible. I just love his wisdom there. If it's possible. Sometimes, they are sorry and you're willing to forgive and you're willing to serve but it's just not possible to go back to the way things were. I'm a distance runner. Imagine if this week I was running on the streets of Appleton and I got hit by a truck. You know, I can crank out a good seven-minute mile on a solid day but I just get smashed by an 18-wheeler and I do all the work and I try the best I can and I go through physical therapy but maybe I can't run as fast as I used to. Maybe that accident and that hurt changed the way that things are. And sometimes that happens in life. You were such close friends but then they betrayed you and they shared your secrets. And you can forgive them and they can be very, very sorry but trust takes a long time to grow. It's like a tree and betrayal can cut that tree down and you don't always go back to the way things were. You can love and serve and pray and forgive but you might not open up like you did in the past. If it's possible, Paul says.

Or my favorite example is actually about divorce. Did you know in Matthew 5, Jesus spoke some incredible words about reconciliation? In my Bible they're right there. Jesus actually said, get this, that if you're sitting in church right now and you remember that someone has something against you, that there's some conflict that you haven't dealt with, do you know what Jesus wants you to do? Leave. Just get up, go, take your offering with you. Don't worry about that. God cares so much about living at peace with people. He said if you have to leave in the middle of

the service, offend a preacher, walk out and go fix it. God cares about that. He said that right here. But do you know what he said right here? He said a column later that sometimes you can't fix it. He's talking about marriage in this section and divorce and he talked about some of the bigger stones that can be thrown and how even if you forgive, even if you love your enemy, sometimes a marriage just doesn't make it. And it's not cause anyone is bitter or we're trying to pay each other back. Sometimes things happen, sin happens, that just hurt so deeply that we can't go back to the way things were before.

And so you put all these things together and you have the Bible's incredibly wise, nuanced, challenging, and offensive teaching about what you should do. You should humbly do all that you can to live at peace with people. You should read their behavior and see if they're the kind of person you should go back to and reconcile with. And you should recognize that sometimes when you do everything you can, it's still not possible and we then trust that God will bless us as we do our best.

But friends, it doesn't mean that you have to be bitter. In fact, I was reminded of that at a wedding that I did a couple years ago. I was watching as the photographer was taking pictures of the bride and groom and all of them were laughing and posing for pictures and during one of the breaks, I asked the photographer, "How do you know the couple?" And she said, "Well Pastor, the bride is one of my closest friends and the groom is my ex-husband." This is the face I made for about a minute. What? Now, say that again? She must have read the expression like, no, no, no, that's your ex-husband that you're laughing and joking with? She's like, "Yeah! We sometimes go on vacation together." What? I never - I was sure that I heard it wrong. I asked her again and again and she told me the story. She said even though there was sin and it didn't make it, they both were humble enough to forgive, to serve, and to live at peace. And it wasn't possible for them to make it work but it was possible for them to live with the kind of love that God called them to do. And I love the potential of that. It doesn't always go back to the way it was before but by the grace of God, it can be so good, so unique, so surprising, that one day someone might hear your story and say, "Wait, what?" And your light will shine so brightly in a dark world.

So if you have your pens in hand, let me summarize everything I just told you today. Here's what God wants you to do. Number one, they sinned against you, they throw some stone, it hurts. Immediately, number two, you look to God, you humbly remember your own sin, that it's way more, way worse, way more frequent than what they did to you. Number three, you forgive. You make the choice day after day after day to let that stone alone. Number four, we learned today you love, you serve, you bless, you feed, you give something to drink, you overcome evil with good. And number five, you all reconcile. If it's possible, as much as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

So friends, it means you and I have some good work to do. It's going to be some spiritual therapy this week. It's going to hurt, it's going to be hard, you're going to just want to wait around until seven days from now and hopefully I move on but I'm not going to move on. I'm going to pray for you and I'm going to ask you to do what Jesus did for you first. But before I say amen, let me leave you with one last word of comfort. Doesn't all of this make you love

Jesus? Relationships on earth are so complicated. We do our best to make them work. Sometimes we mess up, sometimes they mess up, sometimes the past is too much for the present but don't you love the fact that with Jesus, we don't have to worry about it. That Jesus' love is so amazing that his forgiveness is so complete that at the end of the day, you never have to wonder if you're going to make it with him. Earlier in the book of Romans, the apostle Paul said there's nothing - not the past, the present, the future, not angels, demons - there is nothing in all of creation that can separate us from the love of Jesus. And friends, I want that to be your rock this week. I want you to work at that strained relationship but no matter what happens, no matter what your dad says, no matter what your sister texts back, at the end of the day, know this: That you are reconciled to God. Holy in his sight. Blameless and free from accusation by the blood of Christ. Let that comfort you as you do the offensive and beautiful work of forgiveness.

Let's pray.

Dear Father, I haven't been through that much in life just yet but I know many of the people here have. How many divorces are coming to mind right now, how many arguments and strained relationships? How many faces can we picture? God, sometimes the hurt is real but you are greater than all of it. I thank you, Jesus, for your forgiveness. You forgive us even when we struggle to forgive. You smile upon us even though we've been often bitter in our past. You're so good to us and we don't deserve it but we love you for it. We really need your Holy Spirit. You say that the fruit of the spirit is love and patience and kindness and gentleness and peace and self-control and we need that so badly. We need you to empower us and strengthen us, work miracles through us, put words in our mouth that we never thought we could speak. God, you've already been doing it. Like I saw at that wedding, like that man emailed me just a few days ago, if we make this choice to serve, we can do things we never thought possible. So free us, God, from every temptation and help us to love with such passion that the world just simply couldn't understand how things could change through our love. We pray this with confidence, God, because we know who we are. Everyone who trusts in Jesus knows that we are completely forgiven; that there's freedom from all of it. And so God, we say goodbye to yesterday and we look into your face today knowing that we are forgiven.

And every forgiven child of God who agreed, they joined their voices and they said, "Amen."