

Forgiving Love  
Colossians 1:11-22; 1 John 1:5-9  
February 13, 2011

Tomorrow is an interesting day in our American culture. It's Valentine's Day – a day to celebrate love. This ought to be a particularly special day for those of us who call ourselves by the name of Christ, because the God we serve is a God of love. We can love others because we were loved first by God. You may be sitting here this morning trying to figure out what you are going to do on Valentine's Day to demonstrate your love to someone special, and that's very nice. God has already demonstrated His love for you in a very tangible way. He has forgiven you for your sin through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus. God's love for you is a holy forgiving love. It is a love that has a goal in mind – reconciliation.

This morning I want to share with you something about *forgiving love* as it can be lived out in the context of human relationships. For if we want our person to person relationship to mirror our relationship with God, then we must begin with love that is marked by forgiveness.

Everyone who is married or who has been in a love relationship has been burned, hurt, mistreated or lied to at one point or another by the other person. But before you say to yourself, "Yea, I sure know what that's like," remember that most of us have not just been on the receiving end...but on the giving end as well. We have all hurt others.

The question is, then, how do you deal with these offenses?

Lots of folks don't know how to deal with offenses, so they end up with unresolved conflict that just promotes a pain-producing pattern: Offense → Hurt → Anger.

However, instead of entering into this destructive cycle of unresolved conflict, there is another option – to resolve the problem. Enter Forgiving Love.

#### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FORGIVE?

The New Testament uses a few different words that get translated as *forgive* in English. Those words actual meanings are:

- *Send away or dismiss;*
- *Let loose or release;*
- *Bestow favor unconditionally.*

Forgiveness does not mean that we say or feel things like, "It didn't hurt me," or "It didn't really matter." The truth is offenses *do* matter.

As we look to God for our model surrounding the idea of how to handle offenses we find that our careless acts do matter – especially those committed against the Lord. So how does *God* react to

our thoughtlessness? Well, He decided to give of Himself, so through Jesus we have forgiveness; yet as I said before, it is a forgiveness that is meant to be restorative to our relationship with Him. Therefore forgiveness is accompanied by:

- Rescuing us from darkness (Colossians 1:13);
- Redeeming us (Colossians 1:14);
- Reconciling us with God (Colossians 1:22);
- Clearing us of all accusations (Colossians 1:22);
- Cleansing us from every wrong (1 John 1:9).

#### WHAT DOES FORGIVENESS COST YOU?

As we think about the forgiveness that God offers to us, we realize it cost a great deal. If you've forgotten how much it cost God, just look up at a cross and remember. In order for forgiveness to truly take place there are costs.

The offended person gives up:

- Revenge;
- Retribution;
- Holding the offense over their head;

If you caused the offense, forgiveness means:

- Surrendering your pride;
- Admitting guilt;
- Actively seeking restoration.

Admittedly, the above are difficult to put into practice. However, if we truly desire healthy loving, Christ-centered marriages we must put aside any barriers we have to full forgiveness.

While there are costs associated with forgiveness, sometimes we attach costs that aren't valid.

Next weekend Sarah and I will celebrate 22 years of marriage. Over that time in that relationship, by listening to others, and by reading, I've found some myths people sometime believe about forgiveness that represent invalid costs. I want to share 6 with you.

Myth #1: "When I forgive, I must forget." The Bible assures us that God forgives and forgets, but you are not God. While we don't want to hold past offenses over our loved one's head, God did create us in such a way that we are to learn from our past. If there is a pattern of behavior present, then we must ask the Lord what we are to learn from it. But let's be clear, not forgetting *doesn't* mean that you store just up the other person's past faults for use as artillery in some future argument.

Myth #2: “The hurt is too great. It is impossible for me to forgive.” A given situation may be truly painful, but forgiveness is always possible. God would never command us to do the impossible.

*Then Peter came to him and asked, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?"*

*"No, not seven times," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven!" (Matt 18:21-22)*

You may have to forgive the same person and offense over and over again.

Myth #3: “I don’t feel like forgiving, so my forgiveness can’t be genuine.” Forgiveness isn’t really about feelings. It’s a choice, an act of the will. Sometimes we just need to ask the Holy Spirit to help us move forward beyond our feelings for the sake of the relationship. Remember, as we forgive, so also will we be forgiven.

Myth #4: “I can’t forgive until the other person asks for it.” In the midst of your pain you may truly desire to have your loved one come back groveling and begging for forgiveness. The truth is that for some of you, that’s going to mean waiting a very, very long time! It’s a good thing that forgiveness is actually an act of grace – unmerited undeserved love. Your loved one shouldn’t have to jump through hoops to get it. After all, you didn’t have to jump through any hoops to get it from God. *Ephesians 4:32 Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.*

Myth #5: “In order to forgive, I must pretend that nothing bad happened.” True forgiveness is at its best when it is offered in recognition of the full reality of an offense. *Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Myth #6: “I must forgive right away, or it doesn’t count.” Often this myth is based on Paul’s admonition, *Ephesians 4:26 In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry....* Forgiveness is an act of the will, and it may take some time for you to come to be able to forgive. Perhaps a helpful way to read this verse would center on the first part of it. Keep mindful that it is important to enter into the process of forgiveness, for to withhold it would be sin.

One of the greatest acts of love is the act of forgiving. When you forgive, you say to the other person, “This relationship is more important to me than your offense.”

So, prepare your heart, then forgive. Only then can you begin to walk together down the road that leads to a rebuilding of trust and a restoration of your relationship.

May the Lord bless each of you as you strive to keep Him at the center of your relationships by offering forgiving love all those in your life whom you love...whether they be family or friend.