

# Dartmouth

## Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Forgiveness (lesson 4)

Scripture: Galatians 2:11-21

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## The Process of Forgiving

### Galatians 2:11-21 (NASB)

<sup>11</sup> But when Cephas [Peter] came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. <sup>12</sup> For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he *began* to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. <sup>13</sup> And the rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. <sup>14</sup> But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how *is it that* you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews? <sup>15</sup> "We *are* Jews by nature, and not sinners from among the Gentiles; <sup>16</sup> nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified. <sup>17</sup> "But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be! <sup>18</sup> "For if I rebuild what I have *once* destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. <sup>19</sup> "For through the Law I died to the Law, that I might live to God. <sup>20</sup> "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me. <sup>21</sup> "I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Christ died needlessly."

**Introduction** I often wonder what it was like to be a first century Christian. None of the things-Christian that we take for granted, was in place. There were no church buildings, no Bibles, no seminaries, no denominations, no chapels, no theological writings, no commentaries, no Christian radio, no mission boards, no Christian counseling centers and no Christian conferences. But the apostles were *far more* important than ANY of our Christian leaders today. They were more important than a fellow like WILLIAM BREWSTER of Plimoth Plantation. They were more important than LUTHER AND CALVIN together. They were, as Paul refers to them the pillars—at least James and Peter and John. Paul comes along, a mystery to himself but fully confident that God had added him to the small troupe of the apostles,

Galatians 2:6-10 (NASB)

<sup>6</sup> *But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no*

*difference to me; God shows no partiality)—well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me. <sup>7</sup> But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised <sup>8</sup> (for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), <sup>9</sup> and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we might go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. <sup>10</sup> They only asked us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do.*

Can you imagine the two most important guys in the early church, **not** getting along? We don't have a lot of information on this but we have what Paul wrote to the Galatians, and what Peter wrote near the end of his life:

*2 Peter 3:15-16 ... and regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, <sup>16</sup> as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.*

These two men were very different. Paul was educated, empowered, had travelled and was a leader within Judaism. Peter was rough, a fisherman, had not travelled insofar as we know, and had no education whatsoever except what the Lord Jesus had taught him personally over three years.

But these two men shared:

- the same doctrine and theology,
- the same basic views of how to get along with the government,
- both were raised as Jews,
- both had heard the voice of the Son of God and had received personal “marching orders” to take the Gospel out, away from Palestine, to begin to get the news to people everywhere.

*Imagining* the relationship between Peter and Paul is intriguing. In Rome there is a church, over an ancient prison—**THE MAMERTINE**—where the lives of each of Peter and Paul drew to a close—Paul apparently died right there by beheading, and Peter was apparently taken from there outside, and crucified upside down. And we wish we had more information about this earliest of “leadership teams” of the early church, but we must content ourselves on the few things that the New Testament gives us...

One thing I imagine strongly, is the need for forgiveness between these two men. I wish to use this speculative tension (which I think was likely) as a

illustration of the process of forgiveness. I do not think that the reconciliation between Peter and Paul was a simple, one-time, snap decision for either of them.

**First**, I think Peter clearly needed to forgive Paul—for his brutal persecutions of the church. This is a piece of Paul’s life—when he was still “Saul of Tarsus”—which we tend to gloss over. We tend to not think about the years that Saul of Tarsus was a terrorist, and did many evil things to the earliest of Christians. Peter was personally a recipient of the kind of treatment Paul was accustomed to dole out to Christians. Even though we have no record of Peter suffering anything specific at the hands of Saul, he had seen many Christians, including his friend Stephen, be persecuted and killed. Paul was guilty of orchestrating it and doing it. Paul’s crimes against the church were mean-spirited and many. For Peter to let all his feelings about this man GO, was no small thing.

**Paul on the other hand**, needed to forgive the Jerusalem apostles for being slow at first to accept his testimony. IT IS ALWAYS HURTFUL WHEN SOMEONE DOESN’T BELIEVE YOU. Paul was a “slow sell” and while we don’t have any recorded statements in Scripture of skepticism directly from Peter about Paul, we can only imagine that he would have been slow to receive Paul. Paul had seen Jesus. Jesus had talked to Paul. Paul had suffered a bitter reverse-persecution on more than one occasion. And yet still the Jerusalem apostles were slow to believe that he had truly become a Christian.

The lives of these two men touched on several occasions but they basically ministered apart from each other in separate missions (as Paul reflects to the Galatians.) But I can imagine that forgiveness lay at the base of their relationship. I don’t think their mutual forgiveness was a simple matter. And as each thought of the other one, there were probably things they had to let go of, more than once.

You and I need to really think about the **PROCESS** of forgiving people. First of all that it IS a process. To think that forgiveness comes by a one-time decision is to *under-estimate* the degree of hurt and injury that people have sustained.

I remember in the years when I was a new Christian. It was in vogue to simply ask for forgiveness from each other. “Will you forgive me?” was the simple inquiry we would give when we had little disagreements or arguments. Somehow if you were asked this, you had to pretty much say, “Yes.” But that was somewhat naive.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians,  
And ***be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*** (Eph. 4:32)

Peter wrote,

***Keep fervent in your love for one another because love covers a multitude of sins.*** (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:8)

John was even blunter when he wrote,

***He who does not love abides in death. <sup>15</sup> Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. <sup>16</sup> We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.***

(1<sup>st</sup> John 3:14c-16)

But the doing of forgiveness and the doing of keeping love fervent is a PROCESS, not just a one-time decision. We commit to being forgiving people because the Bible says that real Christians are people who are committed to building LOVE into their lives, into their world-view, into their personal day-t-day strategies and into their families. It isn't always easy to love, but real Jesus-followers are at least willing to look into it. A Christian couple doesn't give up on each other. A Christian parent doesn't give up on his kid. A Christian church leader doesn't give up on his church. A Christian worker in the market-place doesn't hold grudges against his manager. A Christian teacher doesn't give up on the kids he or she is teaching. We are committed to love, Jesus and Paul and John say. So, we are at least willing to consider how to forgive people that have hurt us.

❶ I think the process of forgiving people, starts with a realization that we must **WORK A HURT THROUGH.**

- We have to realize what exactly has been done to us, if it is a real offense or just my imagining one.
- When we decide that we have been genuinely offended (and sometimes we have *taken* offense when offense was not intended) this may not take too long,) then we decide to work on forgiveness. We give it to the Lord in an initial act of release.
- We admit real hurt to ourselves and to the Lord in prayer. We don't pretend that we are NOT hurt, for whatever sick reasons. We admit hurt and injury and pain.

❷ Then we deliberately **REMIND** ourselves again of what WE have been forgiven for, by God. This is what the Lord's Table should provide for us regularly; it is a built-in chance each month to intentionally remember the high cost of our own forgiveness.

③ Then every time we hurt, from the hurt, we **ASK** God to give us the love to let it go. For some hurts this may take years. But we are committed to working on it.

I remember the old 1953 movie *The Robe* which starred Richard Burton, Victor Mature and Michael Rennie as the apostle Peter and Dean Jagger as Justus, an old man and a disciple of Jesus. In the movie, a Roman squad ambushes some disciples and Justus is brutally and mortally wounded. Nevertheless the Christians come off well, full of the spirit of forgiveness. I recommend you find this movie and view it.<sup>1</sup> It is a powerful depiction of authentic Christianity.

Our culture has become much more adept at discovering the hidden damage that people sustain, and exploring all the ways that pain lingers. Yes, we get a little too indulgent sometimes in my opinion, and whiny. But in general I believe we are pretty “in touch” with the injuries that people endure. We currently have more counseling resources, self-help tools, therapeutic songs and recording artists, than people have ever had!

④ Then, I think exposing ourselves to **RESOURCES** that encourage forgiveness is a healthy and good thing. There are—believe it or not—Christian ministries which I believe encourage anger and bitterness. There are preachers, and writers and Bible teachers and just *influences* which do NOT encourage godly love. They look like they are about “righteousness” but really they are about being mad at the world and actually in some cases perhaps, they are about hate. You and I need to become discerning about what those “ministries” might be, and expose ourselves *more* to resources which encourage forgiveness in a healthy way.

⑤ Fifth, we take a realistic view of ourselves. I don’t think it serves anyone to place ourselves under a false guilt-trip about forgiveness and *pretend* that we’re OK with someone who has hurt us, when we’re *not!* In other words, I think it is healthy to learn to be patient with ourselves and give the forgiveness process time. Just because you know you’re supposed to forgive someone, realize that you may need some time to do so.

⑥ Finally, we must accept that our forgiving someone—really forgiving them—is not tied to their wanting to BE forgiven. If we wait around until they say they’re sorry, until they *request* forgiveness, until they repent and SEE what they’re done to me or to someone I care about, we may wait a long time and we may develop long shopping lists of all kinds of wrongs-suffered from many people! When we let it go, it needs to be gone.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Robe* is viewable on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) in its entirety.

Real forgiveness never minimizes pain or dismisses it. But as we work through pain and injury, we seek ways to let it go. I'm sure there many steps here, other ideas and pointers that mature Christians can offer. We need to be talking about this and prayerfully working things through in many of our small groups and classes.

We want to move on, to keep growing in grace ourselves and to **ENGAGE THE PROCESS** of becoming a forgiving people. If you haven't yet realized that **YOU** need forgiveness from a holy God, it is available. It is at the cross of Jesus Christ. Seek His forgiveness—He offers it freely for the faith to believe in it. With the Lord forgiveness is **NOT** a process—it was a one-time act of love, bought at a terrible price on the cross. He offers once and for all forgiveness in one moment—the moment you believe that He will give it to you, for which He has furnished proof when Jesus rose from the dead.