

Dartmouth

Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Forgiveness (lesson 7)

Scripture: 2nd Timothy 4 and various

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Four “Excellent” Reasons NOT to Forgive

2 Timothy 4 (NASB)

I SOLEMNLY charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: ² preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. ³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; ⁴ and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths. ⁵ But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. ⁶ For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; ⁸ in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. ⁹ Make every effort to come to me soon; ¹⁰ for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens *has gone* to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. ¹¹ Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. ¹² But Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. ¹³ When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments. ¹⁴ Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. ¹⁵ Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching. ¹⁶ At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. ¹⁷ But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, in order that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the lion’s mouth. ¹⁸ The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen. ¹⁹ Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. ²⁰ Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus I left sick at Miletus. ²¹ Make every effort to come before winter. Eubulus greets you, also Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brethren. ²² The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

Introduction Sometimes life seems like a game of moving between hurtful experiences, dodging bumpers and flippers like a pinball machine, failing and getting pinched or smacked others. Life has plenty of joys in it too; but it seems to me we spend a good bit of time maneuvering between hurtful obstacles.

Driver training in high school struck me as an exercise and challenge to return the vehicle TO the parking lot intact, accident-free, all riders healthy. I actually had trouble in driver training keeping the car on the road. It seemed to me to possess a mind of its own, intent on drifting to the right, and into the shoulder. That early, life started taking on the assumption that much of my energy would be invested in avoiding injury.

Its part of our fallenness that whispers to us and says, “You deserve to live carnally.” So, we indulge temptation, we reward ourselves with sin because we somehow (quite darkly) imagine we deserve a little sin—and one of those “rights” we think, is to strike back when we think we deserve to.

If someone sets out to hurt you, and they succeed, don't you want to strike back, at least at first? Pain hurts (you can quote me on that!) And if pain comes from an identifiable other person, we generally want very much to strike back. It is natural. It is human, and it is likely.

Jesus came into the world, and in addition to dying for sinners on the cross, and offering salvation freely to all who will simply receive it by believing in Him, He taught a new way to live—based on what He called “the kingdom.” (By the way—it isn't one without the other. Christianity is both His atonement for sin and personal salvation, what we call the Gospel, AND the way of life that follows.) FORGIVENESS is one of the foundation blocks of the Christian life.

So far in this series on forgiveness we have said:

1. That forgiveness is fundamental to the whole point and system of doctrine in Christianity. It isn't a peripheral teaching—it is the core of our faith. Second, we have said that,
2. Personal forgiveness is to release a debt owed to us, grounded in and defined by *divine* forgiveness—a thing distinct to Christianity. We have *not* said it is necessarily easy. But we have said it is necessary. And we have said,
3. There is a price tag associated with NOT forgiving, to our relationship with God, to ourselves, to the persons in question and to other people.
4. Forgiveness is a PROCESS, where we work through an injury, we often remind ourselves of how much we have been forgiven by God, asking God for strength to let bitterness and grudges go, exposing ourselves to helpful resources (and avoiding influences which would promote bitterness,) give ourselves some time, and realize that forgiveness isn't tied to their saying they're sorry.
5. Seven times to forgive someone for an offense is not enough.
6. God is at work underneath the things that happen to us, even working a greater good despite the pains we may have to endure.

Let's take the problem of forgiveness seriously. We withhold forgiveness for lots of possible reasons.

- What They Did To Me Cannot Be Undone
- They Don't Deserve to Be Forgiven
- They Are Not Sorry
- If I Forgive Them, I Might Not Get Satisfaction—or they might do it again.

But Paul's experiences show some basic reasons why it might be tempting to NOT forgive someone. We need to think clearly about what is genuinely offensive—because I think we get offended way too much about things that really are not major sins. Also, I think we can relate to these things that Paul talks about:

VIOLENCE and PAIN

In Acts 23:1-3 we read,

AND Paul, looking intently at the Council, said, "Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day." ² And the high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth. ³ Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! And do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?"

There is no more basic injury than physical violence. The violence of this episode is brief, simple and painful. And I think Paul flashes back, which would be understandable. While there is nothing said about Paul forgiving Ananias, "those standing beside Paul," or anyone else involved, this is the kind of thing that Paul frequently had to forgive. Today, you and I are rarely subjected to this kind of rude attack. But if we are, we need to forgive it. It's the kind of thing it would be understandable to NOT forgive. No one ever has an excuse to abuse someone else physically. But if they do, as Jesus endured, we must say, **Father, forgive them** and remember His words, **as we forgive those who trespass against us**. Do you do that? Do you forgive the most basic, crass and painful offenses? I find this one of the hardest things to forgive. I know wife-abusers, for instance, and child-abusers, who my nature says, "take them out back and do the same to them." But this is where forgiveness becomes a spiritual exercise. It isn't natural to "release the debt." It seems more like an excellent reason to NOT forgive...

DESERTION

2nd Timothy 4:10

...for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens *has gone* to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.

Demas—perhaps short for Demetrius—is mentioned by Paul in Col.4:14 and Philemon 24. He was a **fellow-laborer** but he got tired or scared and **deserted** Paul. Sometimes we feel deserted, and sometimes it isn't just feeling deserted, it IS being deserted. The person was there, and now they're not. They were there, alongside of you, and then--they have gone.

I can relate to this offense. I was told in seminary to "beware of who picks you up at the airport" when candidating or beginning a new ministry job. So I came here with the warning to expect the people who are in leadership when you start in a church to desert. I was not prepared to actually see it happen. By the end of our second year here, four leaders and their families were gone. That is with me having heard the warning and working hard to nurture those men. One

might say, “Well, you weren’t a very good leader. You couldn’t hold them in the church.” That is true. But all four abandoned their wives, and in some measure their faith—none went back to any church for a number of years. Two still have not returned to my knowledge.

Whatever their own problems, whatever my inability to effectively shepherd them through those problems, still it hurt to be brought to New England and then deserted. Or so it felt. (God blessed though in those who have stayed faithful to this ministry, some of whom are here this morning, and whom I appreciate greatly!) But if anything seems like an EXCELLENT reason to NOT forgive, it is to be deserted in the place of a hard ministry, as Paul was by Demas. But those of us who have felt deserted, must forgive. We must cut loose the debt we feel we are owed. We must let it go, and move on.

LEGAL HARM

2nd Timothy 4:14

Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds.

Now, in connection with the trial, Alexander, by means of *deeds* (verse 14) and *words* (verse 15), had succeeded in damaging Paul. No doubt he had helped to bring about an adverse court-decision with respect to the apostle, though we do not know whether the sentence, “Condemned to death” had already been announced or conveyed to the apostle. We *do* know, however, that this sentence was now *certain*, and that Paul knew this. He knew that he was about to die (see on 4:6, 7, 8; also on verse 18).¹ Alexander the coppersmith was no small part of it.

I have not yet had the experience of being sued. I have also not yet been accused of a crime, indicted, arrested or put on trial. I hope I avoid those things for the rest of my life. But Paul had been targeted by this man—and his summary to Timothy is that ***the Lord will repay him according to his deeds.*** Paul also wrote, Romans 12:19 ***Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord.***

What deserves more to NOT be forgiven, than when someone goes out of their way to ruin you—and you don’t deserve it? Legal harm is a hard thing to forgive. One of the best reasons to avoid divorce is to avoid the turmoil and frustration and anger and waiting of the legal entanglings.

¹William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 4, *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles*, Accompanying Biblical Text Is Author's Translation., New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001), 325.

ABANDONMENT

2nd Timothy 4:16

At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them.

I make a distinction between the “desertion” of vs. 10 and the desertion by everyone here in vs. 16. Sometimes it is a single, important person who leaves you. Other times its everyone or so it feels, who has abandoned you. You’re alone! Paul’s reflection on this isn’t to withhold forgiveness, to be bitter or to summarize in his mind, again and again, how much he is owed. He says to Timothy, **may it not be counted against them.** There is no better encapsulation, no better or plainer way to say it than that. That is forgiveness. It is to, before the Lord, say, “Lord please don’t count the fact that all fled from me and left me hung out there to dry!”

There are these four, and I am sure other EXCELLENT reasons to NOT forgive someone for something they have done to you. I’m sure you can make a great case for their conviction.

We sang today,

*I’m forgiven, because You were forsaken
I’m accepted, You were condemned
I’m alive and well, Your Spirit is within me
Because You died and rose again...*

There are many strong and sometimes even rational reasons for not forgiving people of their offenses. But our basic character is to forgive any way. Because we have been forgiven. If I’m going to receive His forgiveness, it lies on me to spread it around. That’s the Christian life. That’s what it is to have Jesus Christ truly in your life.