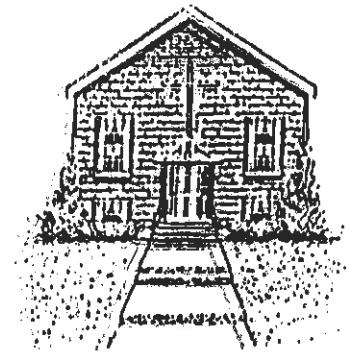


DARTMOUTH BIBLE NOTES

Sermon

Notes From the Sunday Messages

52 Norton Avenue North Dartmouth, Massachusetts



Series: The Forgiveness of God
Scripture: Matthew 18:32, etc.

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 1 Aug. 18, 1991

THE DEEP NEED FOR FORGIVENESS

Introduction If you have ever been caught "red handed" stealing something, you know what it is to feel guilty and also what it feels like to need the person who caught you, to forgive you. Actually, I think the very fact that you are here today indicates that you need little introduction to the subject of our frequent need of forgiveness. As evangelical Christians we hold to a couple of basic truths:

1. God is holy and righteous and never in need of forgiveness
2. Man is evil and sinful and always in need of it--he is not a helpless victim TO sin, he is a willing agent OF it.

In *pride*, man cherishes himself and his ability and his own perception of his worth.

In *greed*, man cherishes material wealth.

In *sensuality*, man cherishes bodily desires, and in ALL of these he subordinates his fellow-man to himself. That's because he is a sinner, plain and simple.

Now those two propositions set us blatantly apart from the mainstream of popular thought today, but that is part of what makes us followers of Jesus Christ: we believe what He taught, and He surely taught these two things about man, plainly and often.

Let me set you up with a little more background...

Divine forgiveness is *distinctively* a Biblical concept:

* The ancient Zoraster of Persia had a high, ethical concept of God but knew little or nothing of His redeeming love and mercy. According to Zoraster, there was no hope for the wicked, who, when they would cross the line--what he called the "Bridge of the Separator", would fall off it into hell.

* Hinduism believes in the inescapable law of "karma." according to which a man's deeds, both good and bad, work themselves out in one life after another. The only escape from the wheel of reincarnation is to become wholly apathetic, or in getting some high insight into some supposedly releasing truth.

* Buddhism recognizes the law of karma too, is no less blind to any forgiveness by God or a god than Hinduism.

* In Islam, the *idea* of forgiveness by God is present, but nowhere near as prominent as in Judaism or Christianity.

It is in the Bible that the idea of a forgiving God comes into its own.

Now most people around will readily admit to some need for God to forgive them for some things... That people need some of God's mercy, few doubt. But dear ones, our need is not token--it is great. Today, I want to establish for you, either as a new thought, or RE-establish for you the reality of our DEEP, DEEP NEED of forgiveness.

Matthew 18:32 It is a little detail in this parable that grabs our attention--but first let's consider the very first feature of how Jesus told it:

Vs.23 - It is a King who is settling accounts with his slaves! The imagery is not accidental. God is a King, with Whom we must deal and with Whom all people must deal. And those who owe Him, are but slaves.

The little detail that I want you to notice is the GREAT DEBT that is owed to the king. Jesus numbered it at 10,000 talents (vs. 24) --depending on how you value the amount, His point is crystal clear:

The slave owed the king a hundred jillion dollars. And the king ended up having compassion--that's a clue to forgiveness, by the way--and releasing the slave from the loan. It was all gone. He didn't owe it anymore!

And that's what forgiveness IS, folks: cancelling out the debt; removing it from any relevancy at all; hitting the "delete" button for all the debt (to put it in "computerease"). I don't know how to put it any plainer: YOU DON'T OWE IT ANYMORE.

Now the thing that has grabbed me as I have thought about this is the SIZE of the debt. It was colossal.

It would make anyone despair. I have seen the despair in people when they get just 10 or 20 thousand dollars in *personal* debt... But can you imagine the depth of hopelessness if a person found himself with a *personal* debt of a hundred million dollars? Bingo--you've got it! That's a rough and CRUDE analogy of the kind of debt every man, woman and child owes God, morally and spiritually. It can never be repaid!

A Basic Theme Through Scripture

The NEED of forgiveness runs all through the Bible. It comes up so much, AS A THEME, that we would plunge into complete despair if it were not for the fact that as often as the DEPTH OF NEED--the profound and sheer amount of forgiveness that people need from the true God--comes up, it is matched by equal amounts of God's compassion. The need was so deep that God could not send Michael or Gabriel, or use Daniel (about whom bad is ever said in Scripture), or ALL of them to substitute for men's debts... It had to be a perfect Lamb--only His Son could do it, and indeed, it is the evangelical Christian in this world who says:

"Even with the need for forgiveness so deep, the blood of the Son of God is completely sufficient to cover the need!"

The need for forgiveness is PERSONALLY sensed by people all through Scripture: Genesis 4:13; I Samuel 15:24,25; Psalm 32 and 51; Luke 23:39-43; John 8:1-11.

PERSONALLY SENSED

Genesis 4:13 And Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is too great to bear."

I Sam.15:24,25 Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned; I have indeed transgressed the command of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and listened to their voice. Now, therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me, that I may worship the Lord."

Psalms 32:3,4 When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away with as with the fever heat of summer.

Psalms 51:1-5 Be gracious to me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness; according to the greatness of Thy compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, and done what is evil in Thy sight, so that Thou art justified when Thou dost speak., and blameless when Thou dost judge. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.

Luke 23:39-42 And one of the criminals who hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom."

ILLUSTRATED

John 20:28 Thomas answered and said unto Him, "My Lord and my God."

Acts 2:37-39 Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

TAUGHT

Psalms 14:1-3 The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; there is no one who does good. The Lord has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.

Isaiah 1:4-6 Alas, sinful nation, people weighed down with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, sons who act corruptly! They have abandoned the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away from Him. Where will you be stricken again, as you continue in your rebellion? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head there is nothing sound in it, only bruises, welts and raw wounds, not pressed out or bandaged, nor softened with oil.

Isaiah 1:18 Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool.

64:6,7 For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; and all of us wither like a leaf, and our iniquities like the wind, take us away. And there is no one who calls on Thy name, who arouses himself to take hold of Thee; for Thou hast hidden Thy face from us, and hast delivered us into the power of our iniquities.

CAPABILITY TO GET US TO HEAVEN

Colossians 2:13,14 And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

The depth of need is ILLUSTRATED in Scripture: John 20:28; Acts 2: 37-42.

The depth of need in directly TAUGHT in Scripture: Psalms 14 & 32;
Isaiah 1:4-6; 18b; 64:6,7; Hebrews 6:1c.

The NEED for God to forgive us is great because...

He is a King and we are but slaves, despite all the noble fantasies of the educated and high-minded classes.

We are SO guilty. We need a high view of sin again in this country and in the American church. We have gone very soft on sin. We need to recover a high view of sin because a high view of sin is an accurate view of sin.

It is the only thing *capable* of getting us to heaven. It is a pearl of great price! Look at Colossians 2:13,14.

It is the only thing *needed* to get us to heaven. It is not "being forgiven by God PLUS going to church a lot.." It isn't "being forgiven by God PLUS feeding the hungry....." It isn't "being forgiven by God PLUS knowing right doctrine." It isn't "being forgiven by God PLUS anything." It is the one key that opens heaven. So teaches the Bible, at least. So teaches the Lord Jesus Christ, at least...

We never outgrow our need of it. It doesn't matter how many years you walk with the Savior, if you have ever truly met Him, you never outgrow your need of His mercy and compassionate act of forgiving you for sin.

Our reception of it cost God His only Son. The depth of our need MUST have been great dear ones, matched only by the depth of His love.

The need of forgiveness is great for us a Christians STILL, because arrogance and hard-heartedness and cynicism creep in so easily, and they BLIND us so easily!

Concluding Comments:

We run into some problems with this. First there are now and have always been people in the church who think they are saved, but are not. A big signal for that is that they have not yet seen their utterly lost state and future apart from obtaining forgiveness. They may be church members, they may be sincere practitioners of some OTHER religion, they may be really "good" pagans... But the church has always been faced, since the days of Jesus, with having some in their midst who have not yet seen their own, personal need for Jesus to die.

I see it for me. Do you see it for you?

Another problem is in the fact that all too often, Christians--who are truly saved and regenerate, FORGET the depth of forgiveness needed. I think we are reminded often in the old hymns and rarely in the new praise songs of HOW MUCH NEED of God's forgiveness we actually have. If we ever lose the old hymns, we will suffer great injury--theologically!

O to grace how great a debtor, daily I'm constrained to be!
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to Thee:
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it; seal it for Thy courts above.
Hymn #2, "Come Thou Fount"

Dear ones,

the degree to which you sense your own deep, deep need of forgiveness will greatly affect three things: (and let these sink in...)

1. How much true JOY you will experience in your Christian walk.
2. How pleased, in fact, God will be with your service for Him.
3. How useful you can be in His hands.

Let's close with the song, *Make Me A Servant...*

Dartmouth Bible Notes

Dartmouth Bible Church 52 Morton Ave., North Dartmouth, Mass.

Series: The Forgiveness of God
Scripture: Luke 15:23,24,32; Neh.9:17

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 2 Sept. 15, 1991

THE FACT OF DIVINE FORGIVENESS

Introduction We know that Satan plants many lies in people's minds. He gets some people thinking that Christ was not really God, or that the Bible is not reliable, or that theft is OK when nobody finds out about it, or that sex is OK outside marriage as long as both people are consenting, or even that he, himself, doesn't even really exist. Maybe the lie that Satan plants in people's thinking the most often is this: *God exists, but He will not forgive people for their sins.*

Today, in this second look at the subject of divine forgiveness, we want to establish the fact clearly that God does indeed forgive sins and some of the things that means for us.

Last time, we dealt with man's deep need for divine forgiveness. That is a fact. He is born with the need, and he "perfects" that great need as he grows older. And through the payment that Jesus made on the cross, any person can know divine forgiveness... At least, that's what we say. But how do we know? How can we be so sure that God will recognize Jesus' death as applicable to MY need for Him to forgive me?

Today I would like to put before you four proofs that God will forgive every person on the planet for their sins, if they place their trust in Jesus Christ to make it possible. In my mind, at least, these four proofs establish the FACT of divine forgiveness. After having established the fact of it, though, that is useless unless it is made PERSONAL, by personally appropriating it. Simply knowing theology does no good whatsoever if it is not attached to personal action.

Proof #1 God's Willingness to Forgive

Now naturally, my reference manual for these proofs is the Scripture. It is my assumption that the claims made by this book are both accurate and reliable. If we seek to interpret the Bible responsibly--and that is not so near a hard thing to do as is sometimes thought (and said)--then, we can have complete confidence that its promises are true and dependable. The Scripture was here before you and I, and it shall be here when we are not. Although it was written in time, by man of various times, it is timeless. We base our whole faith on it, and we do so unashamedly.

If there is one truth crystal clear within the pages of the Bible, it is that the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is WILLING TO FORGIVE men their sins. He is willing to not count their many, many offenses of His law against them. He is willing to wipe the slate clean and to cancel out all moral and spiritual debt that we have accumulated. He is willing to do this because His heart compels Him to be willing, out of His affection and love for His creatures.

In no passage of Scripture is this more clear than in Luke 15 where we read about the time Jesus told the story about the "prodigal son." Jesus didn't tell it by accident. The point was clear: the father was more than willing to forgive his wayward and selfish son. Why? Because he loved Him and grieved so deeply over his waywardness. In vss. 23,24,32 Jesus said there was **merry-making!** So happy was the Father at the return of the prodigal son that they had a party!

Now the older brother--well, he was another story. He was unwilling to forgive. He was the way many of us, sort of expect that God is really. Pouting and bitter... But Jesus makes it very plain that upon the repentance and return of the son, the father was more than willing to forgive. To pretend like the son's rebellion had never happened. It was a great love this father in Jesus' story had for his son. It is a great love that our heavenly Father has for us. God is willing to forgive.

Proof #2 Scripture's Promises

In Nehemiah 9 we read the ancient text, actually the transcribed notes, of the joint prayer of eight Levites as they led the sons of Israel in a sober and serious time of worship. Verse 17 represents almost countless examples in Scripture--and we understand them to be PROMISES, not just mere ancient opinions--that He is a *God of forgiveness*. Why? Because He is *gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness*. Four attributes of God, those eight Levites say, are what lie behind the FACT that divine forgiveness is available. And this passage is only one of many, many such testimonies in the Old Testament. God is Jehovah! He is awesome, a consuming fire, a great God! But He is also quick to forgive, though He knows all about us!

Now, do you suppose God has changed since those words were spoken? Do you suppose He has changed His mind? Well, let's move a little more recent, in time...

Proof #3 Jesus' Demonstration

We are told by the Apostle Paul, that Jesus *is the image of the invisible God...*(Col.1:15a). Jesus, Himself, said to His disciples, *I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known my Father also; from now on, you know Him, and have seen Him* (John 14:6,7). So, if that is true (and we are persuaded that it is), then the Father would be something like the Son. And on this matter of "likelihood-to-forgive", how was Jesus?

Who is it that we read about Jesus condemning?

Is it murderers, prostitutes, tax-collectors, vagrants?
Is it combat-soldiers, ethnically impure "commoners"?

No, rather, it was the religious leaders, most often who DID come under His condemnation and warning, and we know that even they, if they repented, would receive His gentle patience, am I right? The study of the three-year incarnate ministry of Jesus of Nazareth is, in fact, one long study of a forgiving rabbi (who, it turns out, was none other than God's chosen Messiah, after all!) Point: If it is true--or shall we say, even just a possibility--that Jesus really was the "image of the invisible God" (as Paul asserted), then what does Jesus' life tell us about God's likelihood to forgive people, even us today, for our many, and complicated sins?

Proof #4 The Disciples' and Apostles' Experience of Divine Forgiveness

One other evidence for you to take with you... You know, we base our whole faith today, as Christians have now, for two millenia, on the conviction that the written records of the Apostles are accurate, true, reliable and in fact, without any error at all--do we not? Were it not for Scripture, we would not know about God's Messiah having come! And that, of course, is why the Holy Spirit saw to it that those great events of the first century would not be forgotten. The Spirit *inspired* those witnesses to record their experiences, what they saw, what they heard. The Apostle John put it point blank: *What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life...*(I John 1:1).

So what was the experience of these men and women who knew Jesus personally, and most of whom ended up giving their very lives for the testimonies they bore? How did they find God? I tell you, dear ones, each and every one of them found Him FULL OF FORGIVENESS. They found Him ready to "make merry" and to "kill the fatted calf." Even Paul, who, before His conversion brought great evil on the early disciples of Jesus, wrote to the believers in Rome, *there is therefore now NO CONDEMNATION for those who are in Christ Jesus* (8:1).

For those NOT in Christ Jesus, there is condemnation. There is a terrible accountability not yet satisfied. Oh, what a terror yet awaits the person who refuses to flee to Christ for forgiveness!

But for any person who has placed their complete faith in Christ to BE their Savior, there is nothing but the prospect of receiving God's total and, shall we say, *comprehensive* forgiveness.

Applications..... Now dear ones, let me ask you this: what does this do for you today? How does knowing that there are quite a few solid evidences that God is, in fact, a very forgiving God. If the evidence is solid that He is willing, and likely to forgive me, what does that do to me NOW? Let me suggest a couple of things for you to take with you today:

1. It paves the way for me to experience real joy. If my greatest problem is solved, then all my other problems, as hard as they may be, must fade.
2. It compels me to serve Him. Who would reject a Master who so readily and completely forgives me, even the deepest and blackest evil I might commit? Is there *anything* you would not do for a God like that?
3. Any debts that are owed me, what do I do with them? How can I hold my debtors in the "accounts receivable" column, when Jehovah has wiped out my name from His "accounts receivable" column? Even erased my name and Social Security number from the computer altogether... How can I bear grudges, maintain bitterness, review past offenses, if He has cancelled out all MY debts?

Dear ones, how can I contemplate divorce, removing a name from a will, cutting a person off from personal fellowship? How could I plot revenge on an unfair manager, go on a campaign to spread the word about some shyster retailer...?

4. It equips me to deal better with doubt and uncertainty. If it is true that our God is a profoundly forgiving God, then all my questions will someday be answered. I am able to be open with Him and really admit TO HIM the things I doubt.

Many years ago a father and his daughter were walking through the grass on the Canadian prairie. In the distance they saw a prairie fire approaching, and they realized it would soon engulf them. The father knew there was only one way of escape: they must quickly build a fire right where they were and burn a large patch of grass. When the huge fire drew near, then they would stand on the section that had burned. When the flames did approach them, the little girl was terrified, but her father reassured her, "honey, the flames can't get to us. We are standing where the fire has already been..." (Erwin Lutzer, p.53, *Failure: the Back Door to Success*).

My friends, I suppose the main point here today is so simple that maybe it is beneath your intelligence. I suppose I'm really only wanting to reinforce one simple, theological truth: the FACT of DIVINE FORGIVENESS. But I am convinced that if we really believe this, it transforms and sets free powerfully--Jesus did say, *you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free...*

May you dwell on this, this week. May you bask in the sunshine afresh of His lovingkindness and compassion. May you recalibrate your thinking today about your God. May you have real joy this week, like you have not had in a long time!

Dartmouth Bible Notes

Dartmouth Bible Church 52 Morton Ave., North Dartmouth, Mass.

Series: The Forgiveness of God
Scripture: Various

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 3 Sept. 29, 1991

THE IMPACT OF GOD'S FORGIVENESS

Introduction Probably for all of us here today, there are events in our past which have made a significant impact on our lives. I'm talking about things that happened, or people you knew, the encounter with which you are still affected today. Some people have known someone famous. Some people have fought on the battle field. Some people have had significant financial events occur. Others have gone through times of great hardship in terms of their health. And others still, have enjoyed important friendships that have marked them for life. But I am talking about the kind of event or relationship that really makes a lasting impact on your life.

For true believers in Jesus Christ there is one thing that has happened to them from which they will never recover. Every genuine Christian has had an encounter at some point in their past, which has so marked them that they have been dramatically changed. It is a thing far greater in effect than meeting a President, or winning a lottery, or going through a divorce, or being sexually abused, or having lived in a foreign country. It is as profound as if you had your DNA restructured, or if someone were able to inject you with a drug that would guarantee you a lifespan of 200 years. In fact, the thing that genuine Christians have had happen to them even eclipses those... A Christian has been forgiven by God directly, by God the Father Himself, for his sins. For all his sins. For all eternity. There is nothing which makes a bigger impact on a "homo sapiens" than that.

In the first time that we talked about God's forgiveness, we established that mankind has a deep, deep need to be cleansed by God of sin and its debt. Then, we established that His forgiveness is a fact of the universe, that despite Satan's objections, or our doubts. Today then, we want to consider the IMPACT of divine forgiveness and I am going to suggest five areas in which the Christian should see some change in his or her life as a result of having received Jesus Christ as personal Savior.

The Spiritual Impact (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6)

Every person on the planet has a spiritual side to him as well as a physical side (his body), an intellectual side (his mind), a volitional side (his will) and an emotional side (his feelings). We are referring to this spiritual side when we talk about a person's *soul* or their *spirit*. In recent years Hollywood has become fascinated with this side of people, with films like *Ghostbusters* and *Ghost* and *Field of Dreams*. It seems like no one really needs to have it proved to them that there IS a spiritual side to life; they know it, intuitively.

And that's the core of what Christianity is all about--giving attention to the spiritual needs that people have. Well, when a person comes to see that

spent time as a member of a jury trial for murder one
got called on to lead in prayer
lost sister to drowning by undertow at the beach
owned three horses
trapped in a blizzard for two days in car with only a frozen six-pack of Budweiser
served tour of duty in Korea
served tour of duty in Vietnam
served tour of duty in Belgium and was captured by S.S. troops during the Battle of the
Bulge and spent four months in as a P.O.W.
Admitted to being an alcoholic and have been dry for ten years
Got addicted to cocaine
Attended a Billy Graham crusade
Widowed twice
Had life threatened
Enjoyed a friendship with a nationally known Christian leader
Honeymooned on Hawaii
Used to box semi-seriously
Witnessed the birth of a son
Gave birth to a son

- * they, personally, have the NEED for spiritual forgiveness, and when
- * they come to see that God has, in fact, offered His hand in forgiveness (through the blood atonement of His Son), then

when they actually DO experience God's forgiveness, it affects them first of all spiritually. In Romans 8:15 we read,

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons, by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" And in Galatians 4:6 we read,

And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"

Coming to faith in Jesus Christ--and I mean real, saving, life-changing faith--it deeply affects our very relationship with God. We go from being ruined, rebellious, hostile creatures, to being His own children. And He even is willing to place the precious and Holy Spirit of His Son right INTO our beings. There are lots of intended results from this. The big thing is that from the moment a person is saved--receives the Holy Spirit--they begin to grow spiritual fruit inside. That means JOY and PEACE and LOVE and a new HOPE for the future.

When a person experiences God's forgiveness, he or she is affected first and foremost *spiritually*. Now, there are many people running around out there who have NOT yet experienced God's forgiveness.

They may be faithful church attenders,
but they have not yet experienced God's forgiveness.
They may come from good Lutheran family, or a good Catholic family, or a good Baptist family, but they have not yet experienced God's forgiveness, and there has been no *spiritual* impact on their lives, yet. They need to HEAR that God indeed freely OFFERS His forgiveness.

The Personal Impact (Romans 8:35-39)

Then, there is a deeply *personal* side to experiencing God's forgiveness. A great many people suffer from guilt or dread or anxiety or depression or fear, or, they allow themselves to become *cynical*. These are feelings which are personal and private, but they are very real and sometimes completely *dominant* in a person's life.

I want to suggest to you today that having been forgiven for your sins and for you very sin-nature, is intended to have a meaningful and profound affect on the personal side of your life. Your self-concept and view of your own future should be touched by the fact of forgiveness. The fact is that NOTHING can separate you from the love of God in Christ...nothing! So you can stare that guilt/dread/anger/depression/anxiety or whatever, in the face and say, "I am forgiven and loved by God." Whatever happens to me, I cannot elude His love or lose it.

The Family Impact (Ephesians 5:25-27)

I think that most of us are sensitive to the way we relate to non-Christians in our lives, be they neighbors, bosses, Moms, Dads, etc. We are sensitive to our "witness" before them. But if there is an area that

we need to see the impact of having been cleansed of sin by God, it is as members of our own immediate family. All too often, dear ones, we do not act IN OUR FAMILIES like people who have been redeemed and forgiven.

In the Ephesians passage, Paul directly connects the husband-wife relationship with the Christ-church relationship. The husband-wife relationship is supposed to reflect that which we enjoy as a church with our Savior. In verse 26 we read that the Savior has cleansed the church by means of the Gospel. The heart of the Gospel is God's forgiveness, and the fact that a Christian husband is part of the Church should greatly impact the way he relates to his wife. It is not a patronizing, looking-down-the-nose kind of relating to his wife. It is a sacrificial LOVE for his wife, even as Jesus gave Himself up for the church.

Having been forgiven by God--if you have been--will have an impact on your family. It is intended to bless them, not curse them. As a member of your family who is a Christian, who has all YOUR debts removed, you will be an agent for peace, and an agent for sacrifice.

I remember when I was in college and one of the side-jobs I did to make a few bucks was deliver papers with my landlord's family. That family, who was also in our church, was the main distribution unit for the paper for the whole town. And each of the teenage kids had a motor-route. I would go out many mornings early, with one or another of these teens and help deliver the papers. One of the daughters, even though having accepted Christ at a young age, was particularly surly. She wasn't much fun to be with, was crabby all the time, and especially at four in the morning. One day, I had had enough and I said to her, "Aren't you a Christian, Nancy?" She looked at me with great surprise on her face. "Why are you ticked off all the time, if you know Jesus?" I said to her. Now, I wouldn't have predicted it--I was just fed up--but that little confrontation changed her life. Her whole perspective changed (I was as surprised as anyone), and she took on a whole new joy that lasted from that day on up to the last time I talked to her. And the thing is, that her family noticed the change, and praised God for it.

Having been forgiven by God makes us better family members.

The Ecclesiastical Impact (I Peter 3:8,9; Ephesians 4:32)

And then there's the fact that from one angle, the local church is nothing more than a collection of redeemed, forgiven sinners. Whatever else marks churches as distinctive in one way or another, all they are, are groups of pardoned criminals. Don't forget that, dear ones!

When we have leadership meetings and committee meetings and business meetings, don't forget from where we have come! Scripture speaks to us collectively often--we dealt with a good bit of this last Sunday when we looked at Phil.1:27-2:2. And we need to practice forgiveness with each other as a matter of obvious policy and rule, not as an exceptional and rare burst of high-spirituality. A group of ten pardoned criminals is what the church is. But I must emphasize the word PARDONED. God has called us together as a CORPORATE REFLECTION of what it looks like to be forgiven by Him. His reputation is on the line, in other words. Now how does that translate down into the every day or every month affairs of a church?

1. There ought to be restoration of fractured memberships

2. There ought to be almost no divorces
3. There ought to be short-memories of things said w/ a sharp tongue
4. There ought to be a solid trust in the leadership
5. There ought to be openness to meaningful fellowship w/
other churches of like faith

The Social Impact (Ephesians 2:11-16)

The fifth area of our lives that needs to reflect our forgiveness, is in what I'm calling the "social" areas of our lives. I mean by this the community, the workplace, the stores in which we shop and the other places we do business. And insofar as we have influence, in the national affairs of state. Yes, having been forgiven by God even impacts the Christian's view of politics...if the Christian really appreciates the degree of debt he once owed to the Lord.

Now we do business, and the attitudes we have in the workplace where, YES, there IS injustice sometimes--will bear the marks of having been bought with a price, paid for in full by nothing less than the precious drops of blood of God's own beloved Son. That's what it cost the Father to buy you and me back, dear ones.

Is there any area of your life of which you can say,

"That's mine, Lord! You may have wiped away all my offenses, but THAT grudge is one I get to keep. That little cynical attitude about the manager is one that I get to hold onto. When it comes to forgiving my brethren in DBC, OK, but not when it comes to forgiving my husband or my wife. They have yet to earn my forgiveness, Lord. But thank you for sending Jesus to die for all my many and deep offenses." ?

The point is clear to me, my friends... Since Jesus and the Father forgive me of my sins, that FACT should strike me down in EVERY area of my life: in my spiritual life, in my personal life, in my role as a member of my family, in my church-life and out in society. There is no field of being or operations in which I will not be changed, if I have truly been washed of my sins.

God said to Israel through His prophet, Isaiah, *Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.* What does that do to me? What kind of an impact does that make on me, and when shall the day come when I shall think that outdated news, quaint, relevant on Sunday mornings, perhaps...?

My friends, are your sins forgiven? How do you know? You know by two means:

1. The book promises it to any and all who seek it by faith in the blood of Jesus.
2. Your life evidences it by the impact it has "across the board."

May the people who attend Dartmouth Bible Church never recover from the news that God forgives sin.

Dartmouth Bible Notes

Dartmouth Bible Church 52 Morton Ave., North Dartmouth, Mass.

Series: The Forgiveness of God

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.

Scripture: Isaiah 1:18; 43:25; 44:22; Job 4:7

Lesson 4 Oct. 20, 1991

BLASTING THE ENEMIES OF DIVINE FORGIVENESS

Introduction This week I heard a popular radio talk show host make the simple statement that she does not believe that anyone is born evil. And I guess I'm all agitated this week, what with the Supreme Court hearings and listening to argumentation and debate all around us. I thought about the effect of her saying that--she is popular and respected and there is no doubt that when many of her listeners hear heard her say that, it will contribute to their adopting that opinion. With the wave of a hand, a talk-show host can at least contribute to the adoption of hasty theological decisions.

Today we want to continue our look at the forgiveness of God. We have done three lessons on this subject, so far. We have considered...

- * the deep, deep need for divine forgiveness, owned by all
- * the fact that God freely offers His forgiveness
- * the impact that *being* forgiven should and will have

Today I would like to equip you with some "weapons" to deal with the enemies of divine forgiveness. There ARE enemies of this conviction we have, that God will forgive any person who seeks it from Him.

And in order to make an assault on those enemies (or to defend against them), you've got to know your enemy. It is foolish to attempt an assault without knowing who the enemy is, or what his tactics and habits are. The wise soldier becomes a student of his enemy. And it is not some sort of paranoid fundamentalism which compels me to tell you that there are real enemies around of the Gospel. And the core of the Gospel is the forgiveness of God, and how it is intended to transform the Christian's life.

Isaiah 1:18 I want to begin our Scripture study with a single verse from Isaiah's prophecy. Before we begin to discuss the enemies of forgiveness, let's enjoy a brief reminder of what its all about...

Think of the reddest red you can possibly imagine. It might be a flag you once saw, or it might be a sports car, or the flashing red strobe of a police cruiser at night, or it might be blood spilled in the operating room. The word which describes the "reddest red" is *scarlet*. There are all kinds of red, but *scarlet* speaks of a brilliant and flashing red. That is how God views man's sinful nature and his practice of sin.

Now the reason we know that sin is no light matter, is because God has told us it is not. He invites Israel to **Come now, and let us reason together...** It is through sitting down with God and listening to HIM tell us how it is, that we come to understand that sin is a big problem with

us. Now many folks don't want to sit down with God and listen to what He says about this. If Mary Ann the talk-show host is correct, then we must ask the question HOW MUCH forgiveness from God does anyone really need? And also, isn't it likely then, that there might be some people who need no forgiveness from God whatsoever?

God told Israel that their sinfulness--and it is described right there in Is. 1--stood out like a bleeding thumb! But HE had a plan whereby it would be eradicated. In Isaiah 43:25 and 44:22 He offers that erasure, that cleansing, and tells them that divine forgiveness is not a plan up for negotiation with anyone. It is HIS decree that He will forgive whom He will forgive, and the fact of it isn't even just out of pity. It is for HIS Name's sake that it is so.

Now snow can be pretty white. It is especially interesting that God would liken the thoroughness of His forgiveness to snow, to a people who lived in the Middle East. They don't see much snow there and when they do it is unusual. God's forgiveness of our sins, and the condition that leaves us in, is extra special. When God saves a person, he goes from being like scarlet to being like. The red blood of Jesus on the cross meets our "condition red" and makes us white as new fallen snow, gleaming in the morning sun. Now, that's what Jehovah-God said to Israel through His prophet, Isaiah, some 27 centuries ago. It still stands, dear ones. It still stands.

But There Are Still Things Opposed To It

There remain forces and influences around, which seek to tell us that Isaiah was just hallucinating, that the words which he relayed from God weren't really from God at all. These forces and influences are the enemies of divine forgiveness, and I have already alluded to one of them.

You would think that no one would oppose the idea of God being a loving God. But His love for Christians is a love based upon His mercy for them. That urging of mercy within the Godhead compelled the Son of God to come to earth as a man, and to offer Himself up as a substitute for punishment, the result being that any who would ever--for all time--seek God's forgiveness might have a "legal" basis. Sounds like a reasonable plan to me... But there are forces and influences which oppose this.

The Host of Enemies The first enemy of God forgiving people is simply DISBELIEF that it can be true. That disbelief may take root in the more "introductory" teaching that man NEEDS much forgiveness. Or, it may just flatly deny that God has, in fact, done anything of a permanent nature which might demonstrate any decree of forgiveness.

A second enemy which fights to allow God's forgiveness to really take hold of a person, are SATANIC LIES. At the risk of sounding vulgar, I think that Satan is literally "mad as hell" that God would forgive anyone. He knows that he, himself, cannot be forgiven and would want no part of it anyway, because he is absolutely depraved and completely destroyed by sin. He wishes everyone and everything else were facing the same destiny which he is. So, he seeks constantly to undermine the news, and the belief and the effects of divine forgiveness.

When there are real conversions, he is there to inject doubt and fear. When there is restitution and peace, he might show up to stir up strife.

When the saints gather to remember the fact and the depth of divine forgiveness, he is there to distract and confuse.
 When there is joy, he is there to inflict sadness or hurt.
 And when there is confidence, he meets it with lies. A talk-show host says as did the serpent to Eve, *you shall not die...*

A third enemy of God forgiving people is the continuing effects of being raised in dysfunctional families. If forgiveness was not practiced in a person's upbringing, then that fights against that person believing it as an adult. If a person has developed a strong emotional insecurity and they lack a healthy self-esteem, then that fights against their believing that God would forgive THEM of their sins...

A fourth enemy of forgiveness is a lack of it between Christians, which sometimes happens. If believers choose to hold on to some bitterness--though it be secret to them--they douse the light of forgiveness in the church. If scores are kept...

I kept nursery and you didn't
 I was kind and you were not
 You spoke critically of me, or worse, spoke critically of me to
 someone else
 I attended that meeting and you did not
 I am committed and you are not

If scores are kept in a church, and forgiveness is not RIGIDLY practiced, the feeling of *divine* forgiveness will be infrequent IN that assembly. Dear ones, is every one's slate clean with you?

A fifth enemy of divine forgiveness, is what I call TRUE VIOLATION. There are some things which have been forced upon us for which there was NO excuse. I'm talking about major things. There are some things in the background of people which have so marked them, and for years maybe, from which they have not yet recovered. These "true violations" stand in the path of God forgiving people because WE are the instruments of people hearing about divine forgiveness, and if we are all bound up with the need for vengeance we are not going to be too interested in telling people about forgiveness.

The sixth and final enemy of divine forgiveness is just that thing we just mentioned. It is the very antithesis and opposite of God's plan to forgive. It is VENGEANCE. God said in both the OT and the NT that vengeance is mine, I shall repay, saith the Lord. One of the real indicators that a person has truly come to Christ, is the evidence that they are willing to turn their right to repay over to God, even in the event of true violations. As extreme as the violation may be, the Christian understands his own basic deeper debt to God for his violating Him.

Disbelief of this may fight us;
 Satan will try to squelch out that realization;
 My upbringing may make turning vengeance over to God seem foolish
 or foreign ("I wasn't raised that way")

Our Strategy with the Enemies

I said I wanted to equip you to fight the enemies of forgiveness, and the first "weapon" is to know about the enemy. These six things will fight YOUR feeling forgiven, and they will fight your desire to tell

others that God forgives. And we need to understand that actually, the whole direction of the world is prejudiced against God's decree to forgive people.

It shouldn't surprise us, therefore, if we sometimes feel

...lonely in believing what we believe, or
 ...defeated in the attempt to bring divine forgiveness out front, or
 ...unsure that the message is even real.

The enemies are formidable. They know what they're doing.

Now our strategy is as follows:

1. Understand that the Scripture is reliable.
2. Stand upon the Scripture without apology.
3. Commit to memory verses which, when interpreted properly, promise the forgiveness of God.
4. Be quick to forgive others for "routine" experiences of violation. Make use of the Lord's Table as a means to help you to do that. One thing the Holy Spirit is working to produce in us, is tender hearts.
5. Keep no scores. You know the little saying, "I'll forgive, but I won't forget..."? Deciding in advance to remember something is NOT forgiveness. That's not what God said to Israel, is it? He said I will not remember your sins (Isaiah 43:25).
6. In the case of "true violation" (major offence), admit the hurt and allow yourself to be angry. Work through whatever you have to, to make sure there is no denial at work in you. Then take it to the cross.

With these weapons--and perhaps you can think of others--we can blast the enemies of forgiveness. And I think this will go a long way towards creating real JOY in our midst. Where there is the powerful sense that God has cancelled out the debt, wiped the slate clean, deleted the violations from the record... How can there not be joy?

And when Christians--a whole bunch of forgiven people--gather, what a wonderful thing. Revelation 7:14 calls out to us. Let's practice it here, today, in 1991, in light of His soon appearing!

The FORGIVENESS OF GOD

THE DEEP NEED

- Personally sensed
- Illustrated in the lives of so many
- Directly taught frequently
- Only possible means by which to get to heaven

THE FACT

- God's willingness to forgive
- The "promise-nature" of Scripture
- Jesus' demonstration of it
- The disciples' experience of it

THE IMPACT

- on a person's spiritual being
- on a person's private life
- on a person's role in their family
- on a person's role in their church
- on a person's role in public life

Dartmouth Bible Notes

Dartmouth Bible Church 52 Morton Ave., North Dartmouth, Mass.

Series: the Forgiveness of God
Scripture: I Pet.1:5, etc.

Neil C. Damgaard, Th.M.
Lesson 5 Nov. 3, 1991

FORGIVENESS WHICH DOESN'T WEAR OUT

Introduction It is hard to imagine any human relationship which is so strong that it can withstand any offense. Most of us have probably had friendships which at one time were important to us but have since dissolved. Many of us have had, at one time, a good working relationship with a boss but that has since changed. It is hard to imagine an invulnerable parent-child relationship--one completely immune to damage.

I had an uncle I never knew, named Emil Damgaard. He was one of two of my Dad's older brothers. Uncle Emil was a railroad man, and then left the family home in Wisconsin to become a sailor in 1920, when my Dad was only six years old. My Dad worshipped his older brothers and didn't want Emil to go. But go he did, and the family received postcards from around the globe. But within five years or so, the cards came less frequently, and in 1927 Momma Damgaard received her last communication from her son. After 1927 Emil disappeared from the earth, and although the family tried to trace him it was to no avail. Poppa Damgaard died in 1941 and Momma Damgaard died in 1960 neither ever knowing what had become of their first-born male child. But in 1976 my Dad got an out-of-the-blue phone call from a lady in New Jersey who said she believed she was his niece. Her Dad was named Tom Churchill, had died in '73, and through a very strange set of circumstances, she pieced his true identity together and had come to strongly suspect that Tom Churchill was in also known as Emil Damgaard, previous to his marriage and subsequent fathering of two daughters. Why did he abandon his family? We will never know. But even a man's relationship with a whole family is not completely immune to decay and being discarded, is it?

And, it is increasingly unusual any more, to see a marriage relationship which is so secure and sure that it is completely safe from decay or eventual break-up. If there is one reason--beyond all the details of Biblical prophecy--which inclines me to think that, yes, we may in fact be in the final days, it is the condition of the family in the western world. In terms of family-happiness and security, some days I really wonder if maybe we aren't in fact on the very threshold of the tribulation. Satan is having a heyday with families and with injecting family members with dissatisfaction, disillusionment and discontent.

Today I would like to complete for you my covering of the important subject, The Forgiveness of God. I have not intended this to be an excuse to talk about the forgiveness of man by man, although you cannot look at divine forgiveness and miss its impact on people-to-people relationships, and God would not want us to miss that--the connection is too closely woven:

And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ has also forgiven you.

Ephesians 4:32

But in completing this survey of this central of all Biblical doctrines, I want to show you the simple fact that, according to the Bible, God's forgiveness of men cannot wear out. It cannot wear out for you personally, and it cannot wear out for the church as a whole.

Now, the forgiveness of God is no obscure doctrine for you I think. In fact, it is the key belief of any true Christian. And even though the "forgiveness of God" gets clouded with other factors of the Christian life (sometimes), it really is the main thing that we hold to, is it not? Any true Christian would say, yes, of course.

I think the little slogan Christians were sporting on bumper stickers, pins and T-shirts for a while was pretty right on:
"Christians aren't perfect; just forgiven."

The Apostle Paul illustrates God's plan to forgive men their trespasses real well in Colossians 2:13,14:

And when you were dead in your transgressions, and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him [Christ], having forgiven us all our transgressions, having cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us, and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

Now the "you" is the Colossian assembly of believers, and, we take it, us too and all people. "Deadness" is man's natural state, spiritually. His "circumstantial" state, is not being Jewish ("uncircumcised"), and therefore not even in the running to be justified before God. Nevertheless Colossian people and Roman people and English people and Portuguese people and (even) Danish people can come back to life with God and be alive, if they join up with Christ, who "beat death, hands down." God looks at me, and He doesn't see my sins. He sees the fact that Neil Damgaard's bill was nailed to the cross with Christ.

I have never seen a "bill" so long as that owed by the Christian School of Fall River. There are no less than 62 creditors listed in the "chapter 11" paperwork. But you know, even that "bill" isn't as long as MY bill, nailed to the cross of Jesus Christ on a hill called "Skull", two thousand years ago. My bill makes the Christian School's bill look like chicken-feed.

Now what I want to get at with you, is the question, How long does this forgiveness from God last? You will not be surprised to hear my answer. Does God's forgiveness have an expiration date? Can we expect the Lord to tire of His covenant, especially when the vast majority of His creatures seem to inevitably and eventually tire of nearly every one of their covenants and agreements? How can God be any different from us?

Well, I remind you that God was not created in our image. We were created in His image, but our reflection of Him was pretty much marred by sin. But that does not detract from the fact that He is still Who He is. When He gives a decree, dear ones, bet all that you have that it will come to pass.

How long does forgiveness from God last? How long can I expect that Jesus' payment for my sins on the cross of Calvary will endure and hold up? My friends, that forgiveness, that reconciliation between you and the Lord that you have through Christ, by faith, is permanent. It is permanent in several ways.

In I Peter 1:5 (and really this needed to be read in the context in which Peter originally wrote it), we read,

[we who have been born again] are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

God's forgiveness is permanent, first of all, because it is His powerful plan and intention to protect our faith down to the last phase of that plan. God has no intention of allowing your faith to emerge through "phase 1" (justification; conversion), and fizzle out in "phase 2" (sanctification; the "Christian life") and have you miss out on "phase 3" (glorification; being in heaven with Him.) The plan of redemption cost Him too much to see it fail mid-stream with any of those Whom He chose to participate. If anything, can we not grant that God is probably a wise investor or strategic planner?

Now some say here, "Well, it wasn't His plan to see some people's faith come apart mid-stream, but because of their 'free-will' (whatever that is, I say), God allows some to undo their faith which they had once upon a time." That would be a good theory if it were not for the fact that there is nothing in Scripture which indicates that man can undo saving faith. If the getting of faith to begin with--the generating of a faith by which to be saved--depended on man, then maybe. But even the very faith with which a person believes on Christ, comes from God as a gift of God.

There is a second reason why God's forgiveness of us and restoration is permanent. It is because He is not bound in a continuum of history. In other words He is not a being trapped in TIME as we are. We cannot conceive of any existence free of time. We fantasize about travelling around IN time, but to be free of it, to live in a TIMELESS state, is really quite beyond our thinking, isn't it? Well let me tell you, that when Paul wrote that Christians have been "elect from before the foundation of the world" he meant that God's intention and plan to forgive men was conceived in His mind *before time began*. Even the very acknowledgement that there WAS a "before time began" is, to me, extraordinary. Dear ones, our forgiven state, right here in 1991, with those offenses, trespasses, sins that you chose to engage in THIS WEEK, were calculated and factored into Almighty God's sovereign plan of redemption before there existed any years, months, days, hours, seconds, nanoseconds... His mercy and compassion are permanent because He is not bound by the decay of time.

A third reason why God's forgiveness of Christian believers cannot wear out is the pricelessness of the price. It cost Him His Son, to purchase our salvation for us. And as God looked around His heavenly abode, there was nothing of higher value for Him to pay. If Michael and Gabriel and all the beautiful heavenly host had volunteered, it would not have been enough and it would not have matched the priceless value of His own Son. So His forgiveness of US, cost HIM the most priceless one there was. It is not a transaction which He might change His mind about.

A fourth reason why God's forgiveness is permanent is because PERMANENCE is what the word "forgiveness" means. To forgive is to remember not the offenses once committed. It is to restore the offender to a position and status of non-offence, of *innocence*. To forgive at all is to FORGET! When God chose to free Christian believers from spiritual indebtedness to Him, from the curse of the Judgement Day, He made them *legally* as though they had never sinned.

My friends, the forgiveness that we enjoy, sing about, pray about, read about, tell others about, is the most wonderful doctrine in our whole theology. It brings joy and hope and happiness and peace. It is God's intention and will that we should dwell on it, and revel in it. May we do so this day, and tonight as we share His table again.