

Cut It Down & Forget It

One Another Duties

By Pastor George McDearmon

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Ephesians 4:30-32; Matthew 6:12; 6:14-15
Preached on: Sunday, December 23, 2012

Ballston Lake Baptist Church

1 Edward Street
Ballston Lake, NY 12019

Website: blbc.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/blbcsa

Brethren, you may be seated and we are returning tonight to our final heading, the finale of forgiveness and back to Ephesians 4:30 and 32. That will be the text of concern initially and then we will finish up in Matthew 6:14 and 15. Follow now as I read in Ephesians 4:30

30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Now in summary as I close this morning, I set out this truth: the Holy Spirit is a divine person who reacts to certain attitudes, words and ways in his people, he reacts to such in a manner akin to how we react when we are grieved, when we are hurt, when we are disappointed by another. There is a perceptible relation that is being conveyed by this anthropomorphic language of the Spirit not being grieved, there is a perceptible relation between how the Spirit reacts and how we react when we are grieved: there is a restraint, there is a withdrawal, there is a limitation upon his dealings with the one who has grieved him. In the language of Charles Hodge, "Though he will not finally withdraw from those in whom he dwells, yet when grieved he withholds the manifestations of his presence." In the language of another, the effect of our grieving him is to lead to the suspension of his influences, to the withdrawal of his comforts, to the temporary loss of our assurance, in a word, he will withhold the manifestations of his presence.

We'll again consider this tonight by way of an illustration that I have used before when we were dealing with this text some years ago, an illustration regarding what happens when a man grieves his wife and the point is, analogous to that is what happens when the Holy Spirit is grieved in the church. By an angry word or a rude slight, by a cold shoulder, a husband may hurt his wife causing her pain, causing her disappointment. His lazy ways, his preoccupied and negligent ways, or perhaps more likely a bitter biting comment, inflicts upon her soul sadness. Now when that happens, how does she react? The wife, the Christian wife committed to her vows and to her husband who has grieved her, does not take off her wedding ring and throw it out the window, does not pack up

and leave him, does not begin seeking out a divorce lawyer. No, she will continue to perform her basic domestic and marital duties but the relation having been wounded, you know what it's like, there is now a coolness over that relation, there is a degree of tension, there is a resultant restraint that comes over her affections and especially the free manifestation of them, there is a bit of holding back in the way of freely expressing her mind. Yes, she remains his wife but the openness, the cheerfulness, the freedom, the transparency of the relation has been overtaken by the tension and the hurt that has been wrought by his angry word, his rudeness or his slight. The wife temporarily no longer acts with the glad and whole-hearted freedom and expression that she would prefer, the direction she wants herself in the relation to go is, as it were, blocked by the barrier of the unresolved hurt. It must be that husbands and wives recognize how that works, sadly. My point is something closely analogous to that occurs when we grieve the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit does not utterly abandon and disown us but the relation has been wounded, and the result is his free and unfettered expressions are restrained.

Now the question is how does one grieve the Holy Spirit and the answer in Ephesians 4 can be summarized this way: by attitudes, by words and ways that disrupt brotherly relations. That's exactly how. By attitudes, by words and ways which hinder open and honest fellowship, which cause people to draw back, to avoid you, to speak and relate to you superficially due to the affront and the tension that has been caused by a disposition and its effects which tend to rend what the Holy Spirit is endeavoring to create in the church, going back to the beginning of this chapter, the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. The Holy Spirit is endeavoring to create in the church like-minded, open, supportive, loving, sympathetic, brotherly relations among the "one anothers." What grieves the Holy Spirit? Those attitudes, those words, those ways that introduce conflict, division, tension, that begin to break down "one another" relations. What grieves the Holy Spirit in the immediate context? The social poisons of the next verse. And what is the antidote to those poisons? What is that which cultivates and strengthens the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace? Well, it's what we find in verse 32 and among what we find forgiving each other.

Briefly let us look at verse 31. In my own understanding of the verse, bitterness is the primary poison that grieves the Holy Spirit and what follows, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, malice, are not so much just a listing of specifics but the rotten fruits that develop from a bitter heart towards others. Bitterness literally describes something that is pointed, something that is sharp, something that hurts. With reference to one's attitude, disposition or temper, bitterness signifies a dispositional complex of resentment that is a smoldering, grudge-bearing anger and ill-will towards others, a complex of resentment and irritability, the arousal of angry feelings towards others, a complex of hostility and rancor, a brooding over perceived wrongs and slights incurred from others. Bitterness signifies a cranky, sour, harsh, mean-spirited disposition which when manifest purposes to sting, purposes to cause another pain and grief. One with a bitter disposition is, as we might say it, crabby, cranky, caustic and abrasive, and that one when offended strikes out, and with what purpose? Well, for the same purpose you might poke someone with a pointed object, to hurt.

Now related to bitterness, verse 31, the rotten fruits of bitterness: wrath, thumos, speaking of anger that flames up, among the deeds of the flesh translated outbursts of anger, the quick temper that flames up in anger towards another. Wrath. Anger verse 31, that's not a synonym, anger, orge, is that settled slow burn anger, that seething spirit of antagonism and hostility towards another. That's another rotten fruit of a bitter spirit. Wrath. Anger. Clamor. Clamor being angry demands that you please me, that you meet my expectations, that you do as I want. Slander, defaming speech designed to demean, belittle and hurt another. Malice, that spirit of ill-will towards others, that desire to injure them, that rejoicing inside when we hear that something has gone wrong, gone bad for another. Our hearts are so malicious, we're happy to hear of bad news.

Bitterness is a self-focused dispositional complex central to which is angry resentment toward others, others who may have displeased me, others who have disagreed with me, others who have slighted and offended me or at least I so think, and as the term is used elsewhere, often manifest in angry cutting speech. Hebrews 12:15, when the root of bitterness springs up, it causes trouble in a church. And what's the antidote to bitterness and its rotten fruits? What, as it were, flushes it out of the system? It's verse 32, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted," and our present concern, here's what flushes it out, when you've been offended or you think you have, "forgiving each other, forgiving each other just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." That's the antidote that cleanses the system of this relational poison.

Forgiving each other restores relations, sweetens relations, nurtures relations. Forgiving each other edifies, unifies. Forgiving each other is conducive to peace. That's where we're going next in the church. Forgiving each other is a potent ally of the Holy Spirit and his work. The finale of forgiving one another, an ungrieved Holy Spirit, free, unbounded in his operations, in his operations in a unified peaceful church. Forgiveness leads to a unified church wherein there is the presence of the Holy Spirit working freely and fully, unrestrained, effectual.

The finale of forgiveness also includes the following. It includes the assurance of salvation and in a world of small-hearted, mean-spirited, grudge-bearing, resentful people, it includes an attractive winsome testimony of the very nature of God in Christ who so freely, fully, finally and forever forgives the sins of his people. The world doesn't see much of that. We have the great privilege of manifesting that very truth of the character of God that we ourselves have experienced when we forgive our brethren.

Now in our final considerations tonight, we turn to Matthew 6 and follow as I read at verses 12, 14 and 15.

12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And at verse 14,

14 For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

Now related to that, Mark 11:25,

25 Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions.

And in Luke 11:4,

4 And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

And Luke 6:36,

36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. 37 ...pardon, and you will be pardoned.

We now do a little bit of work of exposition beginning back in chapter 6, verse 12 with the petition, "And forgive our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors." Note "debts" and "debtors." It is commercial and legal language found only in one other place, Romans 4:4. There it is translated "what is due." The sense of debts and debtors fundamentally is the sense you're in obligation to someone. The idea of a debt is simply what is owed to that one. A debtor, those who owe to another. Summarily put, it was reasonable and right that we render obedience to God in his law. We failed, we sinned and now we owe.

As William Hendrickson writes, "We must suffer punishment unless payment is made, satisfaction rendered by ourselves or by another. That is, our offenses have indebted us to God whom we have affronted by rebelling against the law. By reason of our sin, we are moral delinquents who owe and others stand before us in a similar way due to their offenses against us. They are our debtors upon the grounds of having offended us."

Now note "forgive, have forgiven." Both terms arise from the most commonly used word group in the New Testament that is commonly translated "forgive, aphemi," meaning again "to let something go; to send it away; to remit or cancel," in the language here our context of debts, that would be the term to use because the term had the sense of release from a debt. Here we're taught to pray in the living out of the Christian life that we profess to be living, here we are taught to pray consistent with how we're taught in 1 John 1:9 when we freshly sin, here we are taught to pray for release from, a cancellation of, a remittal of what we owe. We are taught to pray for a remittal of the due claims of justice against us, yet it is not as if justice will be cheated, it is not as if the delinquency will be left outstanding because the Bible teaches, Matthew 26:28, "for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out," there's the payment, "for forgiveness of sins," for the letting go of sins, the release, the remittal of sins. Ephesians 1:7, "In Him we have

redemption through His blood, the forgiveness," the dismissal, the sending away, the remittal, the cancellation, in him we have, through his blood we have "the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace." Satisfaction has been made, the law has not been cheated and the benefits of the satisfaction are graciously offered to sinners. Colossians 1:14, "in whom," that is, in Christ, "we have redemption," the letting go, "the forgiveness of sins." The ground of the petition is my point, the ground of the petition in Matthew 6:12, the ground of the petition for forgiveness is the merit and the work of Christ who has met the claims of justice, who has paid my debt, who has made satisfaction that I might be released and thus when I sin, before going to bed tonight or a few moments after waking up tomorrow, I can confidently pray, "Forgive my debts." In the actual living out of the Christian life, I profess to live because payment has been made in the vicarious sin-bearing work of Christ.

But note something else, note that little conjunction "as." That's really the kicker here. Forgive us our debts as. The conjunction conveys correspondence, correspondence between the forgiveness we are petitioning for and the forgiveness granted to others, and the teaching here is if there's no correspondence, there's no forgiveness.

Now we know our forgiveness, our forgiveness of our debtors and we know that the analogy of Scripture is not, cannot be the ground of the forgiveness we seek. The ground of the forgiveness we seek is the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ and we also know that our forgiveness of others cannot be strictly the measure of that which we're seeking from God. If that's the case, we'll never be forgiven. All God does is perfect. There is nothing we do in the realm of forgiving others that is perfect. It's all imperfect. But that being said, the language plainly reveals correspondence, plainly reveals these two things go together and if they do not go together, there's no forgiveness. That's what's coming next.

In the language of one of the eminent commentators on Matthew, John Broadus, he says of verse 12 in this matter of "as we also have forgiven our debtors," it states very impressively the idea afterwards still emphasized, that is, at verses 14 and 15, that the unforgiving cannot be forgiven. It does teach that and we should and we do qualify this statement with the analogy of Scripture concerning the merits and the work of Christ, and we can qualify it by saying and we should, that the manner in which I forgive one another cannot be strictly the measure for which I'm praying God to forgive me. I'll never be forgiven by that measure. With all that being said, the qualifications being made, the truth is still this: the two go together and the unforgiving cannot, will not be forgiven.

Again, they are parallels. In Mark 11:25 and Luke 11:4, they teach the same. Mark 11, "And whenever you stand praying, forgive if you have anything against anyone." It's a first class condition assuming the reality that that's your case. "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions." And Luke 11:4, "And forgive us our sins, For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us." The two always go together. In fancy language, they are concomitants. They're never to be rent asunder.

Now it's interesting in chapter 6 of Matthew that of all contained in what we call the Lord's Prayer, this is the only thing our Lord returns to to amplify. That in itself ought to put us on notice of how critically important and necessary this is. Of all that's contained in the Lord's Prayer, our Lord returns to this, to expand upon it, to state it again positively and negatively, no doubt to impress our souls with the utter necessity of a forgiving heart.

Verse 14, "For," it's reaching back I think we would have to say to verse 12, that "for" is reaching back and conveying the thought, the confirmation of verse 12, of explanation that's to follow, "For if you forgive men for their transgressions," this is third class probably future condition. Surely our Lord ought to anticipate it. Who is he preaching to? Who is this prayer for? Children professedly so of the heavenly Father. Surely then he can use the conditional statement that anticipates you will forgive men their transgressions, for if you forgive men for their transgressions, again, forgive, if you let it go, dismiss it, send it away, and instead of the language of debt and debtors, Jesus uses synonymous language but with a different nuance, transgressions or trespasses however rendered, it pictures a man stepping out of the way, stepping off the path, a deviation from the way of righteousness. "If you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you."

Now again we know it is not the former, that is, my forgiving others of their transgressions against me, that is the meritorious condition of the heavenly Father also forgiving me. We know that's not the case but again in the language of another, Jay Alexander, the two must go together and the absence of the one, that is, forgiving men, proves the absence of the other, God forgiving you. However you qualify it, the two go together.

And so as to deepen the impression and emphasize the connection. Verse 15, there's a negative statement. He says it positively, now he's going to say it negatively, "But if you do not forgive men," that too is a third class telling us that among the professing children of God, there are some who are counterfeit and their counterfeit status is exposed by their unforgiving heart. You can anticipate that there will be some professing to be "one anothers" who really are not and how will you know? You'll know because there is no compassionate father heart in them and that is testimony that they have never experienced savingly forgiveness from the heavenly Father.

"But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions." That's the truth to come later in Matthew, Matthew 18:35, "So shall my heavenly Father also do to you if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

Again, however we qualify this language, and it needs to be qualified with the broader testimony of Scripture and briefly I've sought to do that, but that being said, the specificity and the categorical nature of verses 14 and 15 ought to make us stand up and pay attention. With clear categorical language, the indispensable necessity of a forgiving heart is set forth.

And, again, having benefited from listening to the Lord's servant in Louisville preach, he made this observation that I pass on to you. We admit that it's the will of God that as Christians we pray. I think we'd all admit that. We would admit that it is the will of God that we read our Bibles, that we invest our lives in Christ's church. You husbands, you would admit that it is the will of God that you love your wives.

And we could go on and name other dimensions of the will of God, but relative to those aspects just named and others that could be, here's the question: are there such absolute and categorical statements so specific, so stark, set out positively, set out negatively as we find about the will of God relating to forgiving each other? And the answer is no. Now we can certainly infer that if one chronically doesn't pray, if one chronically has no appetite for the word of God and on and on, that that one is not Christ, but can you find statements of the nature of Matthew 6:14-15 categorical, absolute, black and white, that so plainly absolutely put two things together? Can you find statements about these other things like you do about forgiveness?

We do not find, at least my recollection. I grant it could be inferred but you do not find that if you don't pray, you don't read your Bible, you don't love your wife, you don't bring up your children properly, you're not gonna be forgiven of your sins and you'll not go to heaven. You don't find that but you do find that with regard to the matter of forgiving others. You will not be forgiven your sins, you will not go to heaven if you do not forgive others. Again, however you qualify it, you've got plain, specific, absolute language that ought to arrest each one of us and cause us to seriously consider how do I respond when I'm offended? How do I respond to offenders? The answer bears on whether or not you're saved. Is there a forgiving heart? Do I graciously, readily, fully, forever forgive, conscious all the while of the overwhelming debt from which I have been released? Is there a promptness, a yearning, a solicitude to let it go? The answers, the real answers to such questions are primary indexes as to whether you are in Christ or not. Not just a little backslidden but in Christ or not.

A few summary truths and we'll be done. The first, again, the ground of our pardon. The ground of forgiveness is not found in us in anything we do, it is in the atoning work of Jesus Christ. One proper proof text for that statement, Colossians 2:14, "having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." That's the ground of our pardon. No merit of ours. No work of ours. No priority of order which begins with us. No, salvation is of the Lord and the priority is the Spirit's regenerating work giving the new birth to a dead sinner. That's fundamental.

The second summary truth begins with a yet, yet we are imitators of God because we are his children, and we are imitators of God here in the way of freely, fully, readily, promptly forgiving others.

And thirdly, forgiveness is both our duty and a preeminent evidence that we are in Christ and have experienced forgiveness. Forgiveness is both our duty and a very serious telling test of whether we are disciples of Christ or not.

And fourthly, forgiving others is a testimony, a winsome attractive testimony to the character of God. Forgiving as God in Christ has forgiven us is a reflection of our heavenly Father's heart and his ways amidst a world of small-hearted angry sinners who nurse and retain their grudges, who seethe in anger, and occasionally flare up in an outburst of the same. Forgiving others is a winsome testimony of the nature and ways of God in a world where men retaliate and get even and harbor resentment to anyone who they imagine, whether it's real or not, offends them.

In Luke 6:35 again, "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." That is, in the mercy you bestow upon offenders, you're reflecting the mercy of your heavenly Father's heart and ways.

"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; and do not condemn, and you will not be condemned; pardon, and you will be pardoned." And that pardoning of offenders, again, is a reflection of the nature and the ways of God. In our forgiving others, we have the opportunity to preach a sermon about who God is and how he responds to penitents who confess their sins.

I conclude tonight with an anecdote that I came upon actually yesterday that comes from the life of General Lee and I quote a description of this event from a book entitled "Lee, the Last Years," by Charles Flood. He writes, "He was taken to call on a lady who lived north of Lexington." Now this is after the war when he was the President of Washington College. "He was taken to call on a lady who lived north of Lexington and she promptly showed him the remains of a tree in her yard. All its limbs had been shot off by Federal artillery fire during Hunter's Raid, and its trunk torn by cannonballs. The woman looked at him expectantly. As she showed him this memento of what she and her property had endured, here was a man who would sympathize." And in interpret sympathize with her anger and her resentment over what had happened. Lee finally spoke, "Cut it down, my dear madam, and forget it." Brethren, relative to the trees of offense in the yard of your soul, cut them down and forget them. Let the offense go lest your own soul be corroded and poisoned with bitterness.

As I came upon another description this week, forgiveness is like unto having a malignant tumor cut out of your body. The tumor being the harboring of resentment and a grudge and anger towards the offender. When you forgive, it's a kind of surgery taking that tumor out of your system lest it spread to other parts, weakening and bringing disease and eventually the death of the soul.

"Cut it down, my dear madam, and forget it." In the exercise of forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven us, brethren, may we cut the offenses down and forget them.

Let us pray.

Father, give us the grace to do so and may we not forget this inseparable connection between our petition, our ongoing petitions for Your forgiveness, and our having forgiven others. Amen.