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Matthew 6:14, 15 Biblical Forgiveness

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“Father in Heaven, we are in the midst of life, and life is all over us. And some things in life are unpleasant and painful, and we’ve come with those experiences. And some things in life are just pleasure and joy-filled, and we come with those. And Lord we come, some breaking in their hearts, others rejoicing. Some concerned with relationship issues, some concerned with Spiritual issues, some concerned with family issues and finances and everything associated with it. Some burdened down with physical malady. Lord we come with all these things, we bring them to You. Where else would we go but to You? And we pray that every situation that we are praying about, every concern that we have, we will know You are listening, and You are dealing with it, and You are taking care of it. Please give everyone here a sense of Your presence and peace. As we open Your Word, we pray that You will be the One who teaches us. Lord, please direct Yourself to our very hearts. And we pray that all of us will know, we have heard from You today. We ask and pray this in Jesus’ name, Amen.”

Twenty years ago, Karen was in school, full time, finishing her undergraduate degree. We had three children, we lived in a mobile home, and we had one vehicle. And so, there was a lot of coordination that had to take place. She was a mother of three, she was a pastor’s wife, and she was a full time student. And we had come up right to the end of her senior year. Finals were looming, just around the corner. And she wasn’t feeling well. She hadn’t felt well for a number of days. Cold, but maybe a little more than a cold, we weren’t sure. Well anyways, we were talking to some church folks about it, and they said, one lady said oh, she had had one very similar situation and she used hydrotherapy. Now, hydrotherapy is water therapy. And the principle of hydrotherapy is the exchange of hot and cold water back and forth which stimulates the body and causes the blood to go to the area where it needs to, balance the temperature and things.

And we were into that. We thought that would be fine. And so she told us the system that she had practiced, and it completely got rid of her cold. And I don’t know if we had missed a step or two, I am not sure, or if Karen just was in a situation where it just wasn’t going to work anyways, but here is what we did. The principle being involved that by having cold, wet towels on her chest, and then wrapping her in plastic that that would force the body to have to deal with that cold spot, and so by generating the blood flow in that area would also have to take care of whatever was going on there. So we soaked towels in ice water. Wrung them out, placed them on her bare skin, and then took a garbage bag and poked the hole in the end for two arms. We slid that on her. Then, we took her regular pajama top, bundled her up into that and put her into bed. Now she’d been having chills and this wasn’t helping. She was shaking, shaking and shaking. Anyways, I went to sleep and she did too.

The next day she woke up and she was very ill. We had to take her to the doctor. And when we took her to the doctor, he said, “This woman has pneumonia.” Well, the good news is that’s curable. And so she took the antibiotics or whatever you do for pneumonia, and she got well. I’ve often thought how I probably had done the wrong thing. You know, I was the one that was encouraging her, “No, it will work, it will work, it will work.” She did get something out of it though. We went to the store and she got this fake fur coat. She looks like a bear when she wears it. She still has it. And every now and then when it’s really cold, she’ll bundle up in that, and she’ll remember the time I almost killed her. I meant well. You know, you can be very sincere, and still do damage. I had the best information I had at the time and acted upon it, and I sincerely wanted her to be well. But I increased her illness.

Do you know, in the realm of theology, in the realm of religion, we can be extremely sincere. We can act on the best information we have and in reality, we are making things worse. Let me be specific. There is a false teaching that goes around Christendom that has caused damage that can’t be measured. And it is simply this: very few

people understand what Biblical forgiveness is. And I want to study that with you today. Please turn in your Bibles to Matthew, chapter 6. Our passage is in verses 14 and 15. We've been studying the Sermon on the Mount for a while. We've just concluded Jesus teaching us how to pray and He is concluding that part of His discourse with these two verses. He says in verses 14 and 15, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Forgiveness! There is a lot of confusion in Christendom regarding forgiveness. Now you may be thinking, "Well, there is no confusion and I know what it means, and I know what we are supposed to do." Well, please listen. You may even argue with me in your mind, and I give your permission in your mind to argue with me. We confuse forgiveness with love. Now as Christians, we are taught to love. In fact, love is described for us, and I am just going to refresh your mind. Look at First Corinthians 13. The love that we are told as Christians that we are supposed to express, it's Agape love. It is love that is not emotional based. I don't have to like you in order to love you. Love is principle based. It's what I do for you or what I don't do for you or against you. And it says in First Corinthians 13:1, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love. I have become a sounding brass or a clanging symbol. And though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge. And though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains but have not love, I am nothing."

"And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing." And here is the description of this type of love: "Love suffers long and is kind. Love does not envy, love does not parade itself, is not puffed up, does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil, does not rejoice in iniquity but rejoices in the truth; bares all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails!" It's a principle, it's a decision that we make to have God love through us. You go all the way down to verse 13 and it says, "Now abide faith, hope love, these three, but the greatest of these is love." Christian should be known by their love. And if we don't love we are not Christian. And you can't love unless you are a Christian. So who are we supposed to love? Who is it that we are supposed to love? The answer is everybody – and how? Unconditionally! Correct? That's what we say, that's what we teach. I can't argue against that.

We are to love everybody, even the rascal, the scoundrel, whomever. We are to have love towards them. The question is this: whom are we to forgive? Most people would say, "Everybody!" You forgive everybody for everything. And I am going to tell you right now, that's wrong. That is not Biblical. And that has created a havoc and pain and sorrow, and is the cause for thousands and thousands of people to leave church. Because that attitude empowers evil! That attitude is basically saying, "Oh well, you know, just forgive, just forgive, just forgive." And it forces people to live in the shadows. And they lose their self respect and dignity. "I am just supposed to forgive, I am just supposed to forgive, I am just supposed to forgive." Well the Biblical teaching for forgiveness is very clear. And it's not what this pseudo, emotional based forgiveness that we've been taught, it's not anything like that.

Let's study it. Let's look at Luke chapter 17. Luke chapter 17 and we'll start with verse 1. Jesus is speaking to His disciples. "Then He said to disciples, 'it is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come.'" Now, offenses, if you read it in NIV are things that cause people to sin; Amplified: temptations that is snares, traps, to entice to sin. New American Standard Bible, stumbling block! It's impossible that these won't come. They are going to come. You are going to be giving stumbling blocks: temptations, things to cause you to think about sinning. The Greek word is interesting. I'll give you the Greek word; you give me the English word we got from it. The Greek word is "scandolon." Scandal, you got it! All right, now you are Greek scholars. Scandal! And

a scandal was the bait stick in a trap. An animal would be lured by the bait, and when it brushes the stick, the trap falls down on it. That was the scandal in Greek language. And eventually it evolved and it came to mean, "Any stumbling block placed in a man's way."

Essentially this verse is saying, "Woe to those who teach others to sin. Jesus goes on in verse 2, "It would be better for him if a mill stone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea than that he should offend one of these little ones." Now we don't know who the "Little ones" are that He is pointing to or directing their thoughts to? Some scholars say young in the faith qualifies. Really in the principle it would be anybody. Essentially what Jesus is saying, "Look, it would be better for you to suffer a mafia like death where you have a stone tied you and you are drowned in a sea. It would be better for that to happen to you than to face me in the judgment if you've been causing people to sin." That's what He is saying, it's a tuff language. And then come the passages I want you to note. But we had to see it in context, verse 3: "Take heed to yourselves, if you brother sins against you, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him."

Now it is crystal clear in the teachings of Jesus that if somebody sins against you, you are to rebuke him. That means an expression of strong disapproval and reprimand. "If he repents," what are you to do? Forgive him. What if he doesn't repent? You do not forgive him. There is no forgiveness. That's the principle of heaven as I will demonstrate in a few moments. In the Bible, when somebody sins against you, you are to rebuke that person. You are to look them in the face, point your finger at them and say, "You will not talk to me that way. You will not touch me that way; you will not treat me that way. I rebuke you in the name of the Lord." Now I tell you right now, if that had been going on for the last 2000 years, there would be a whole lot less evil in the church and a whole lot more good - because the best way for evil to thrive is for the good to do nothing. And that's typically what happens in churches, and that happens in families too.

You get a bully or a molester, someone in the family, people are afraid of them, "Well, well, we just keep forgiving them." And we hide in the shadows, and we become shadows of what God wants us to be. God wants you to be a person of dignity and self-respect. You are a child of the King. And you don't have to take what many of you have been told to take. "Just forgive, just forgive!" That's a fancy way of saying, "Stuff it, live with it, cram it down inside, ignore that it's happening." And I am telling you, it doesn't work, and it's not Biblical. Jesus says in verse 4, "If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him." So there is unlimited forgiveness when there is unlimited repentance. Repentance has to be a part of it or there is no forgiveness. All right, I know, you've got some text in mind. You've got some ideas. But I've anticipated that and we are going to move on to your first question. "What about Jesus saying on the cross?"

Let's turn there, Luke 23. Jesus is on the cross. We come to verse 34. Luke 23 verse 34 Jesus while being crucified says, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do!" "And they divided His garments and cast lots." "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do!" Who is He talking to? Well, minimally, it would be the Roman soldiers, right? So in the minimum He is saying to the Roman soldiers, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." If you want to go to the maximum, He'd be saying that to the entirety of the human race. "Forgive them," we are forgiven. Are we? Be careful; be careful before you commit to an answer. What about these men at the cross? What did Jesus mean when He said that? I'll be honest with you; I don't know what He meant. But I do know how the church responded to it.

Look what happens here in Acts chapter 2. Jesus goes back to heaven, He tells His disciples to stay together, to pray together in anticipation of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. They do that. They are together for about 10 days. And then, on the Day of Pentecost, there is the sound of a mighty rushing wind that swoops through Jerusalem.

That's how to get a crowd. Thousands followed that sound, and they came to the upper room where Jesus' followers were. And there they saw tongues of fire above each one. And these guys were speaking in languages that they'd never been able to speak before. And you know, you read it, and it tells you that people understood it in their home languages. And they said, "What is this, what's going on? We've never seen anything like this before."

Then Peter stands up and he preaches. And when he is done preaching, we come to that in chapter 2 verse 37: "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and to the rest of the apostles, 'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' Peter said to them, 'repent and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. And you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" Peter says, "You want Christ as your Savior, repent! And baptism is a symbol of your repentance." Verse 39, "And the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." So he says, as far as everybody being forgiven, the way to be forgiven is to repent. And he goes on, "And with many words he testified and exhorted them, saying, 'Be saved from this perverse generation.'"

"Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them." Added to the church! How? By repentance! What did Jesus mean when He said, "Father forgive them"? I don't know. But I do know this. The only way, the only way into fellowship with God is through repentance. Now, oh okay, you are anticipating another one. Let's go there, Acts 7. First Christian martyr, Stephen, while he is being stoned he has some interesting things to say. We start in verse 57, chapter 7 verse 57: "Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not charge them with this sin.' And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

What did Stephen mean? "Don't charge them with this sin?" Did they get charged with that sin; did that mean, well, okay, God would say, "First martyr, and everybody that did it, no problem?" There is a man there named Saul. He becomes the Apostle Paul. See what he has to say about salvation. Look at Acts chapter 26. Acts 26, he is standing before King Agrippa. He tells King Agrippa the story, the story about how he was walking down on the road to Damascus, and Jesus appeared to him. And how he gave his life to the Lord, and he tells him the whole story. And you come to the verse 19, and he says, "Therefore King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision." Verse 20, "But declared first to those in Damascus, and in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles that they should repent. Turn to God and do works befitting repentance."

Repent! There is no forgiveness without repentance. And you may be asking, "What is repentance?" Well repentance is an acknowledgement that we've done wrong. Repentance is a desire to turn away from what we've been doing. It is a conscience of sin and acceptance of responsibility and a desire to turn away from it. Let's look at one of our favorite stories in all the word of God. You'll find it in Luke chapter 15. It's the story of the prodigal son. In Luke chapter 15, this young man goes to his dad and he says, "You know, you are never going to die, and I'm never going to get to play. Let me have the inheritance that I would get if you died." And he takes the money, and he squanders it, loses it in rioter's living. He just goes out and he's lost it all. And he is feeding the pigs, and he comes to himself the Bible says, and we pick the story up in verse 18. He says, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father I have sinned against heaven and before you.'"

"I am repentant," that's what he is saying. "And I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants." All right, verse 20: "And he arose, came to his father, and when he was still a great way off,

his father saw him and had compassion and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and I'm no longer worthy to be called your son.'" So he gives his declaration of repentance. Does the father say, "Shoo, shoo, stop, stop, stop?" No! He lets him make his confession. And then, the father says, "Put the best robe on him, put the ring on his finger and kill the fatted calf. My son that was dead is alive." He accepted his repentance. He knew he was repentant when he saw him coming home, that's why he ran down the road towards him. You see brothers and sisters; access to forgiveness is through the door of repentance. It's always that way.

What about the reality of life? I can't speak for women because I am not one of you, and I have no intention of becoming one. But I know what guys like. All through history, there have been books written and now movies made out of those books about heroes for men. A hero for a man is something like this. There is a dragon to be slain; all right, let's go get the dragon. There is an evil present. In the Westerns, most Westerns follow a theme something like this. There is a town, and there is a gang of thugs that have taken over the town and good people of that town aren't safe there anymore, and they own the sheriff and on and on. And then the camera pans, and here comes some lone cowboy riding in. Our hero! Why? Because he cleans up the mess, he takes on the evil and it ends with the town being able to come back together.

Now in Christianity, that should be happening. It should be happening in the home and it should be happening in the church. We should be addressing evil and evil behavior. We ought not be afraid of it. But what happens is because of our natural cowardness, and our natural fear, and then this pseudo teaching about forgiveness, we say, "Oh, no, no, we just need to forgive. We just need to forgive." And we've weakened ourselves until in many, many congregations the wicked and bad people rise to the top, and the good people sit back quietly and let it happen. And then we wonder why thoughtful people come, see what's going on, and why they don't stay. It's time brothers and sisters, in our lives individually, in our homes, and in the church that we would address evil.

And when somebody is sinning against us, it is not Biblical just to say, "Well I forgive him." What is Biblical is to look at them in the face and say, "You are sinning against me, it is wrong, and you need to repent." When they repent, then you forgive them. That's God's system, not mine. If they don't repent, you do not forgive them. Ah, but you are saying, "But Pastor, then that creates bitterness in the heart." Does it? It can if you don't understand. Let me show you a passage that deals with bitterness. Colossians chapter 3 because what we've done is we've mixed things up so that some people think, "Well you have to forgive them or you are going to live in bitterness." Folks, unless the person repents, you can't forgive them. That's the Biblical principal, you can't forgive them. So then how do you live? I mean if you've gone to somebody and you've told them, "You did this to me," and they are not repentant at all, what do you do? Or, let's be honest, there are some people you are not going to address and you know you are not going to address them.

Sometimes circumstances don't allow it. There can be a situation where you are sitting on a committee and somebody is accusing you of being a certain way. And you know if you were to address it right then, everybody on that committee is going to believe that person. You have to wait. Sometimes you just have to wait. And sometimes you just have to pray, and the right circumstance comes around. So what do we do about this thing, "but if we don't forgive we are going to get bitter?" We need the different model. Look at a Colossians chapter 3 verse 12 "Therefore, as the elect God, holy and beloved, put on..." that's a choice, "...tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do."

Again, how did Christ forgive you? When you repented! "But above all these things, put on love, which is the bond of all perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful." Let God rule in your heart, you'll have peace. "...and be thankful" it says. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly with all wisdom." Let the word of God into your heart. Let it dwell with all wisdom, "...teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs..." I might not ever get a repentant expression from somebody. I might not forgive some people because they just don't get it and they don't confess. So does that enslave me to bitterness? No! I learn to move on and to move in to Christ, and let Him be my peace, let Him be my hope.

There are hundreds, thousands of people who have been taught, "Go back to the person who did this horrendous thing to you, and tell them that you forgive them." And they do that. And a year later they don't feel one bit better than they did before. Why? 'Cause it's unbiblical. If you are going to go back and talk to anybody who has done something to you, the first step is, you rebuke them. That's what the Bible says. You rebuke them! If they repent, then you forgive them. If they don't repent, you don't forgive them, you can't forgive them, it's unbiblical. It will never work. And you live with a reality that they are an unrepentant individual. That's just the way it is. And you move on. You've done all you could.

Now on the other hand, what if somebody comes to us and rebukes us, and we refuse to repent? We are in trouble. We are in deep trouble spiritually. Or, what if someone comes to us, and they are repentant, and they ask for forgiveness, and we refuse that forgiveness. That's the greatest evidence that Christ is not in your heart. Because, every time someone comes to us repentant, we forgive them. That's what the Bible says. What do we do with this? Well the Bible says, to rebuke, and if he repents, then you forgive.

Ladies, listen to me, listen to me carefully. A man should never be allowed to strike you. Never! If he does, don't cower and say, "Well, maybe I had it coming." Don't cower and say, "Well, he had a bad day." Don't cower. Rise up in Christ, point your finger at him and you say, "You will never do that to me again, and you better be sorry for doing it this time." And become a person of dignity and self-respect that God created you for. Don't take it! You are not required to. And this pseudo concept of forgiveness that empowers you to do that is actually enslaving you in fear, and stripping you of the dignity God wants you to have. If there is a young girl here who has a relative or a family friend who's taking advantage of you, the next time they do it, you kick them as hard as you can in their private parts. And if you want, I'll teach you how to gouge their eyes out. It's really easy. You come..., I am not going to do it.

Don't take it. You don't have to take it. You are created for more than that. Rebuke evil, and if they repent, then forgive them. Now men, thousands of ways this applies to you as well, in the work place, in the home, in the church. God is not telling you to be a spineless, you know, "Well we have to love" and you know. Fellows, come on, God never asked men who joined the church to become good little choir boys. He wants you to lead, he wants you to be a man, and He wants you to stand up and fight against evil. We need to protect one another, and we need to protect the women in our congregation. And we need to protect our congregation. And I don't ever, ever want a situation where the person with a least amount of faith and the list amount of Christianity and the least amount of character, that they are ruling or running anything. That's got to be confronted, dealt with, and run out of the church.

It's time for good to prevail. It's time for good to prevail in your heart, in your home, in the church and in our schools. I have a question for you today. How many of you would like to say it to the Lord, "Lord, I want Jesus so clearly in my heart that I'll have the courage to rebuke when necessary, and I'll have the grace to ask for

forgiveness when necessary.” Is there anyone here who would like to ask the Lord to be that strongly in your heart? If you are here, just stand please. “Father in Heaven we pray for Jesus to come into our heart. And we ask that the men will men, and the women will be women, and the dignity that You want us to have will be there. And we’ll move away from cowerdness, and we’ll move into bravery and true holiness and godliness in you. We ask and pray this in Jesus’ name, Amen.”