

Luke 17:3-5 – 10-6-2013 – The times God gives us to say, “You’re forgiven.”

List the things you do every day:

- Sleep, wake up, shower, get dressed, eat.
- Go to work/school (most days), spend time with family/friends/others.
- Read the Bible, talk to God in prayer.

How about: identify sin – and repent?

How about: forgive?

It’s been a rough week. The battle’s been tough. I’ve been bombarded with temptations... I’ve sinned. I’ve been hurt by others. I’ve learned of the sins of those I care about – sins against family members & against God, which have thrown lives into turmoil. I’ve seen the devastating effects. And I’m hurting from all of it. I’m hurting, and I’m worn by it.

But the last thing I should do is take a break or give up on the effort to identify sin and come clean about it. The last thing I want on this side of heaven is a day where I don’t hear and don’t say: “you’re forgiven.” Because, as Jesus says, “The things that cause people to sin are bound to come.” And so praise God he places into our hands a simple pattern – he gives us his prescription for the ongoing health and healing of our souls. ... and, this includes caring about the souls of others.

Such a simple pattern: first, watch yourselves (vs.3). I go to the Word, in order to identify my sin and turn to my Savior. Then, when my fellow Christian sins, just go to them and talk directly to them about it (vs.3). When he or she repents, assure “You’re forgiven” (vs.3). Then, reapply / repeat as necessary (whenever needed) – vs.4.

When should I do this with a fellow Christian? How am I going to get into that conversation? Sometimes it happens when the person tells you about something they’re doing or have done. Your friend may mention a way they’re living, which you know is against God’s will. Or they may brag about something they think is impressive, but really is wrong. Or they may express a vague feeling of guilt, and as you listen it becomes clear to you it’s because of a sin. If they don’t identify their behavior or feelings that are sinful, God calls on you to lead them to the truth. He placed you in that very spot to lovingly point out their sin so they might turn away from it, and to their Savior in repentance.

Kids, this includes you! “When? How?”, you say. Think of those times when you see / hear one of the other kids at church saying, “you can’t play with us” (or, “we don’t want you to be here”), someone being mean to someone else, or insulting them? Talk to them about it! Don’t talk with the other kids behind their backs, saying “So and so is a big bully.” That would be wrong. You may seek a parent to help guide you. But go to the individual who has sinned.

Now we all arrive at a critical juncture...When I’m told to talk to someone about their sin, my gut reaction may be to slowly back away. . . to say, “Not me. It’s none of my business. I don’t want to interfere.”

You see, my sinful self squirms at the thought of such action, and uses it as an excuse for inaction. “Why spend time putting myself in such an uncomfortable situation? She might not even listen. Worse yet...

she might get unhinged – what if she blows up at me?! Even if she doesn't show it, this may affect our friendship.”

Yes, it's a difficult conversation to have. It's not always received well when you tell people they are doing something wrong. It might feel uncomfortable. It might lead to confrontation.

Whose hand does that play into? Who more than anyone else wants that brother/sister in Christ to remain caught up in their sin? Satan. So he does what you might expect. He deceives. He tries to make the Christian service of correction seem like the height of hypocrisy or meddling. He accuses. “And what gives you the right to say anything, when you've fallen for the same filth as him? Better keep your mouth shut.” Satan's end goal is that the sins of the believer would eventually lead to a fall from God altogether. refusing to repent. He wants people's sins still bound to them, so they will be bound forever in hell.

The world adds its commentary: “How dare you call that sin!” And if we dare to address it: “That's so unloving. Don't you want the person to be happy? Can't you find it in your heart to just let them be?”

How do you respond to that? We should probably clarify for ourselves right now ~ what love, real love, looks like – acts like. Ask yourself: Which is loving... to quietly stand by and allow a fellow Christian in your family, who is either unaware or not-the-least-bit sorry about a sin, to go on in such danger that could have consequences that last forever; or, to grab the person's attention and call out a warning? It's obvious!

In the deepest sincerity, from authentic Christ-like love, say, “I'm not coming to you as someone above you, but someone beside you – a sinner who is turning with you to our Savior.”

When they repent, rejoice! Now you get to say: “You are forgiven!”

Yet sometimes there is an added challenge in just that: the sin that we're called to forgive can be something that hurt us deeply. Sometimes it gets pretty personal – yes, even from our family of believers. It can be hard to forgive in those cases.

It could be easy for me at this point to simply stand here and **tell** you to forgive. But let me acknowledge: I don't know who has hurt you. I don't know the ways: the lies they told, the stabbing betrayal you have felt from someone you thought you could trust. I don't know how others have manipulated you, causing grief greater than any physical pain. That pain at times pierces deep. It makes it difficult to eat, to sleep. “How on earth can I forgive?”

The feelings may come welling up from within us: “I have a right to make them pay – to put them in a sort of spiritual/emotional prison where they suffer and must pay for what they put me through.” (Remember the battle raging within us: Romans 7.)

But now I see right here Jesus says, “Forgive them.”

The pattern is simple – but it is anything but simple to do. How difficult is shown by the disciples' response: “Lord, increase our faith.” They know their strength to do this cannot come from within. It's gotta be supernatural: It's gotta come from God.

So ~ how do we forgive?

- “Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” Col 3:13 “Forgive each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you.” Ephesians 4:32

God cared so much about each one of us that he spread his arms out in an embrace to the whole world, as he was nailed to the cross. “Father, forgive them!” he cried, as he suffered for *our* sins.

You know personally what His forgiveness means to you. You’ve felt the guilt of sins... you have whispered with shame, “Sorry.” You’ve been lifted to joy by the news, “You’re forgiven in Christ.” Your Savior Jesus has taken away your sin. Look how God planted the cross deep in sin-stained ground... and there himself absorbed all the suffering we deserved – the debt we owed for sin he took upon himself... He poured out his lifeblood for us, and along with it ~ his life’s perfect record covers the sins of each believer.

You get to be the messenger of such good news to others. What’s the most beautiful words in all the world you could ever share? “You’re forgiven.” “I forgive you. God forgives you.”

That’s the beauty of sharing Christian correction with one another. This whole pattern brings everything out into the open, where we together breathe in the free air of God’s forgiveness to us in Jesus. As fellow family-members in Christ: We loving share God’s truth with one another. We talk about sin – we identify what went wrong – those who committed wrong confess – the others forgive. Think of the joy at each time one of us hears, “I’m sorry.” For then, we get the honor to offer healing, to tell wounded hearts: “I forgive you. And be assured: God forgives you.”

What a privilege...

- Here among one another...
- In a Christian home, parents to kids... husband and wife to one another...
- Full and free forgiveness shared in Christ. Everything is right between you and God. No penalty for sin remains. The punishment for sin has been taken. Period.

Consequences will still be felt in your life, as the Bible shows us occurred all the way back to the first sin. But we’d be wise to see how God uses them for our good. Yes, lingering pain is often felt – physical or emotional – because of the fallout of our sin. We are wise to note this. This of course brings sadness to the heart of a forgiven child of God. But it can also serve as a tool placed into your hand, O child of God - a weapon, in fact, in your battle to fend off the next time you’re tempted to sin. If there is some discipline you face in connection with your sin (if you have some privilege taken away, for example, or if you have to pay a penalty), see it too as an aid provided to you for moving forward on a safe/healthy path. This either keeps you from or helps you steer clear of tempting situations, as you go forward.

All the while be clear: the consequences you experience in this life do not change your cleared, holy standing in your relationship to God.

And maybe that’s how we wrap up today – the sight of us standing wrapped in God’s forgiveness to us, because that is the truth that makes our hearts eager to watch ourselves against temptations, and that is the truth that leads us to carry on the highest service to one another of Christian correction.