

Title: "OK, here's my situation..."  
Text: Matthew 6.14-15; 7.15-27  
Theme: How does forgiveness work?  
Series: Matthew #33  
Prop Stmtnt: True belief changes the way that we live, not just the answers we give in class.

You can read all of the articles that you can find on riding a bike, riding a motorcycle, getting married, having a baby, performing surgery, raising children, fighting fires or fighting a war. But, until you actually do any of them, you cannot claim to be an expert at any of it. Information alone is not sufficient. The heart of Christianity is not knowing the right facts and being able to get the answers correct on the written test. Notice the emphasis that Jesus places on living out what you know from the Bible. Unless you actually live by the authority of the Bible, you cannot claim to actually know the Bible. There is an eternity's worth of difference between knowing information about the Bible (like the stories and doctrines) and being gripped by and governed by, and driven by and convicted by and convinced by and corrected by and set free by those same truths.

Read Text: Matthew 6.14-15; 7.15-27

This morning is a follow-up to the message that I preached last Sunday morning. In many ways it is what your lab class is in relationship to the lecture class. Last Sunday I preached on the issue of forgiveness. This morning, I want to help you apply this. I am doing this for several related reasons:

- 1) For your joy.
- 2) Because Jesus talked about the importance of doing this.
- 3) Because this may reveal whether or not you are a believer.
- 4) For your family.
- 5) For the sake of the gospel.
- 6) For the unity of the church.

Remember from last week:

**I. Your sin (even just one) against God is infinitely worse than the innumerable sins of others against you.**

I do not think like this naturally. This is why I need to pray like this every day. I need God's help to remember the fact that I am the recipient of an amazing amount of grace. When we have been wronged (or perceive that we have been wronged), we tend to get an attitude as if we are morally superior to the other person, or we tend to become bitter because we think that what has happened is SO unfair. When I remember that my sin (even just one) against God is infinitely worse than the innumerable sins of others against me, then I am rightly humbled and I bring a spirit of cooperation to address the problem. No matter how much I am offended, slighted, and hurt by others, if I am in Christ, I am still infinitely better off than what I deserve. This is why Jesus said in Matthew 7 that

before you try to help someone else with a problem in their life, that you have to first address your own. Sure, someone else may have a problem, like a speck in the eye, which is very irritating. But, if you have a log in your eye, you are not going to be able to see clearly to help the other person with the speck in their eye. What is Jesus saying here? Is he simply being funny, because the picture is funny? No, he is pointing out the fact that if you do not deal with your problems then you will have the wrong goal when you attempt to help the other person with their problem. Seeking and granting forgiveness is not a matter of someone losing and someone winning. It is not about being proven right, or appearing to be more spiritual than others. Seeking and granting forgiveness is ultimately about healing a wound in the body. When a wound goes untreated, we all lose. When a wound is healed, we all win. Seeking and granting forgiveness is an opportunity to reflect how deeply the gospel has gripped your heart.

Question: *What is the issue, really? What can I learn from this?* (i.e. what is God up to in my life)

**II. Forgiveness is a promise to remove the offense and to treat the offender as if the sin never took place and that no offense ever occurred.**

This means, that forgiving someone is an act of the will. Forgiving someone is a specific, conscious decision to make this promise. This promise is not made for me, nor can it be made without me. If I am the one who has been sinned against, I am the one who needs to forgive. Our forgiving of others is based upon God's forgiving of us through Christ.

Question: *Am I prepared to forgive the other person if asked?*

Here are a few more things to keep in mind:

**III. Maybe you should allow love to cover this issue.**

In 1 Peter 4.8, Peter writes, "*Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.*" In other words, I do not need to confront and correct people about every thing. If that were the case, then that is just about all that we would be doing. If the issue is something that is hindering our fellowship (bugging me and I can't get beyond it) or it is hurting the other person, then I need to address it. Seriously, if I am preaching the gospel to myself, then I am looking for reasons to be gracious and NOT looking for reasons to be offended. By the way, not everything is a sin.

Let's say that the son of some friends of yours got married and you were not invited to the wedding and you feel hurt. Now, I am not denying the hurt at all. But, I am pleading with you to be careful about how you choose to think about this. Did your friends sin against you? No!

But if you are dealing with a matter that is clearly thoughtless (like the neighbor who allows his dog to use your yard as the bathroom), what do you do?

This is particularly true when you are dealing with people who are not followers of Christ. Do not expect unbelievers to believe like and live like believers. They simply do not have the Spirit of God massaging their hearts. So, before I go and confront the issue, I need to consider how this will influence the reputation of the gospel.

Question: *Is this really a sin?*

#### **IV. Maybe you do not have all of the facts**

Proverbs 18.13 says, *“If one gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame.”*

There is so much hurt that can be avoided if we will take the time to get all of the information. When we assume that we know it all, then we make judgments based upon those assumptions. That is when things can really go sideways.

Question: *Is it possible that there is more to this than what I know?*

#### **V. Maybe you do not have a dog in this fight.**

I am not permitted (nor called) to pick up the offense of another person. Let's say that a friend of yours tells you how someone has slighted or offended her. What is your response? Take sides? No! Punish the person who slighted and hurt your friend? No! Your response is to challenge your friend to get this matter resolved. In fact, even as your friend attempts to tell you what happened, you ought to stop your friend from telling you everything. Your friend needs to handle this the way God tells us to.

Neither am I permitted to seek to get others to pick up my offense. In Matthew 18.15, Jesus says, *“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him ALONE.”* You are not permitted to go and talk to others about it. You are not permitted to post a message on facebook telling your world that you are sad and hurt, just hoping that someone will ask you about it, so that you can let someone pry it out of you. You are not permitted to tell others about it, disguised as a prayer request. If someone has offended someone close to you, you will probably become very angry and you may want to go and confront the offender. However, it is not your problem to solve.

If you are the one who has been offended, then you **MUST** keep the circle of knowledge as small as possible. (explain)

Question: *Does this situation really involve me? Who are the responsible parties?*

#### **VI. You are responsible for your part of the problem.**

In Romans 12.17 we read, *“Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.”* If there is a long-standing conflict that are you dealing with you are responsible for your part of the problem. Let's say that the other person actually started it. You are responsible to address how you responded to it. Just because they

sinned against you first, does not give you the right to sin against them in response. You do not wait for the other person to come to you. Rather, you go and confess your part of the problem. What if the other person does not admit his or her failure? Well, you have honored the Lord in what you have done.

Question: *What part if any have I had in this?*

#### **VII. You cannot control the outcome of every situation.**

In the very next verse (Romans 12.18) Paul writes, *“If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceable with all.”* You are not responsible for how the person will respond. You are responsible for you. Do what you can to reconcile a situation and leave the rest with God. There is only so much that you can do. God does not give you the power to reach into the heart of another person and cause them to change. Also, if the person that has sinned against you is an unbeliever, then you do not have the people of the church to help you since that person is not in the church.

Question: *What am I afraid of, really?*

#### **VIII. Do not be surprised when you are sinned against.**

Jesus calls us to pray about this on a regular basis because this is going to happen to us on a regular basis. People are not only going to sin against you, but you are going to sin against others. Expect people to offend you. It is going to happen. Expect people in the church to offend you. It is going to happen. Expect me to offend you; it is my spiritual gift (not really). The issue is not WILL you be sinned against or WILL you sin against others, but, how do you respond when it happens.

Question: *Are my expectations of others, realistic and gracious?*

Let's review these questions:

Scenarios:

##### **1) How am I to respond when I am asked to forgive someone who has sinned against me?**

In a kind and charitable way find out specifically what the other person is asking forgiveness for. You cannot forgive a generality. For example, here is how not to ask forgiveness: *“If I have ever offended you, then I am sorry.”* What do you say to that? The logical response would be, *“If you have, then it's ok.”* What just happened with that? Nothing! There was no confessing of sin. And there was not promise of forgiveness. Without the promise of forgiveness, you have no basis to build a relationship. Therefore, in order for you to offer forgiveness, the other person has to make a confession.

I think we all recognize that these types of conversations are difficult. We know that something needs to be said, and most of us are not too good at saying it. So, be charitable when a person is attempting to ask forgiveness. At the same time you need clarity so that you know what it is that you are being asked to forgive. So, be encouraging to them. You could say something such as, *“I am so glad that we are having this conversation and I am very willing to get this matter resolved. So, what is it exactly that you are asking me to forgive, because this is important to you and to me and I do not want there to be any more misunderstanding.”* So, when they say what it is, now you are able to say, (and you should say) “I forgive you.” I would suggest that you add, *“And do you know what I mean by that? When I say that I forgive you, I am saying that I will not bring this up behind your back or to your face for your hurt. God has forgiven me in Christ and I am free to be able to forgive others.”*

After confession has been made and forgiveness offered, then, look for the earliest possible opportunity to enjoy the reconciliation. That may mean that you go out of your way to say hi, or to have a conversation, but be intentional about putting the forgiveness into practice.

## **2) How am I to respond when someone has sinned against me and they have not asked for my forgiveness?**

This is where most of the questions come from whenever this subject comes up. For example, can I forgive someone who sinned against me, but who never asks for forgiveness? Should I forgive them if they never ask for it? Does God forgive people who never ask for it? If God forgave people without confession and repentance, then why does Jesus warn people about hell? If God doesn't forgive people without confession and repentance, then why did Jesus pray for the soldiers and others who crucified him to be forgiven?

By the way, when you are trying to sort out this type of a situation, please review the questions that I suggested that you ask from the beginning of the sermon. The Lord will use that to help prepare your heart. So, can you forgive someone who has sinned against you but has never asked for it? Not really, in the sense that you cannot make a promise to not bring the matter up, when the matter has not been resolved. True forgiveness sets the stage for reconciliation. You cannot begin the process of reconciling a relationship when the matter that broke the relationship has not been dealt with. God never calls you to have “pretend” relationships. God does not expect you to act as if everything is fine, when in fact everything is not fine. So, no, you are not expected to forgive the offender, however, (and this is a big however), you are to be prepared to forgive the person. In other words, you need to have forgiven them in your heart, and you are awaiting the opportunity to be able to forgive them in person. If you are not asking God to prepare your heart to be ready to forgive them, then you will simply become bitter.

Now, let's go back to the main question. How am I to respond when someone has sinned against me and they have not asked for my forgiveness? I need to go to that person and speak to them about it. I need to go to that person because I care more about them than I

do myself. I am not going to win, to get revenge, to prove a point or to look spiritual. This is why we pray about this sort of thing all of the time. I need God's help to care more about their need in sinning than I do my hurt of being sinned against. And when I go to the person, I need to go humbly. I need to ask if there is anything that I have done to contribute to the strain in our relationship. I need to consider what they say, if they suggest a few things. Then you need to let that person know what is bothering you. I have found that when I ask the other person permission to share something, it tends to go much better. For example, I will say something such as: "Would you let me share something with you and still be my friend?" When they give you permission, then you can tell them about the incident (or pattern) that has created a breach in your relationship and tell them that you believe that they wronged you and need to ask forgiveness, and that forgiveness is something that you are ready to grant so that you guys can go forward and lay this to rest.

**3) How am I to respond when someone has sinned against me and they ask for forgiveness, but I do not think that they mean it?**

We cannot look inside the heart. Did Peter have something like this in mind when he asked Jesus how many times he was obligated to forgive his brother? Jesus said, 70x7. And as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13, "love believes all things." That does not make you gullible or weak. It makes you godly. Can someone take advantage of you? Yes, and if they do, it will become obvious. Again, what is forgiveness? It is a promise that is made when the offender repents. Now, at the moment, you assume, and you should assume that the repentance is genuine. However, time may reveal that it was not. Repentance is not just feeling bad and saying that you are sorry. Repentance involves the changing of mind and direction. So, if a person refuses to change, then their repentance was not valid and the whole deal is blown up.

For example, what if you sell someone a car and they pay for the car in cash. That is fine, unless the cash is counterfeit. If the cash is counterfeit, then just because you shook hands and gave them the keys, does not mean that they now own the vehicle. The transaction is rendered null and void because they were not honest. So, we are to forgive when we are asked, but if the person reveals that they are not truly dealing with the issue, then they have essentially voided the whole deal.

Several years ago, one of England's most outspoken secular humanist, Marghanita Laski, just before she died said, "*What I envy most about you Christians is your forgiveness; I have nobody to forgive me.*"

Forgiveness is the grease that eliminates the natural friction that occurs when more there are two more people together for any length of time, particularly in a church and in a family. But, forgiveness that truly chooses not to remember, and that functions with an atmosphere of grace can only happen as long as the gospel is continually front and center in our lives. We must consistently return to the gospel. That is why I need to pray like this. I need God's help to think this way so that I can respond this way in order to treat others as a reflection of how I have been treated.