

Joseph Forgives His Brothers
Genesis 50:15-21,
Second Sunday after Epiphany, January 18, 2015

Beloved of the Lord.....Jesus said to His disciples “Woe unto the world because of offenses! For it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh.” This does not mean that we must always be careful not to hurt anyone’s feelings. Rather an offense “is anything that is likely to lead a person into unbelief, misbelieve, or sin, or anything whereby he is encouraged to continue therein. Such offense is given by false teaching, by setting a bad example, by an inconsiderate use of our Christian liberty without due regard for the weak in faith. The sins we commit are harmful not only to ourselves, but also to those who are thereby tempted to follow our example.” (A Summary of Christian Doctrine, Koehler, pg. 76)

The Bible thus teaches we are not to give offense in such a way, nor are we to take offense. This means we should not let the sins of our neighbor cause us to be angry at them because our pride has been offended. I remember years ago Pastor Miller telling us at a Pastoral Conference pastors should never be offended by anything. They should never take offense at all. And not pastors only, but all Christians are commanded not to take offense. This is especially necessary in a Christian congregation. If your fellow Christian says something to you that wounded you, that gives you no right to bear a grudge. Their sins do not justify your sins. Jesus said, “Resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.” Whatever trespasses your neighbor has committed against you, by word or deed, these offenses should roll off your back like water off the back of a duck. You should also freely and easily forgive and not hold a grudge, and if you having trouble doing this you need to repent and pray without ceasing. Don’t let that anger in your heart be the way Satan possess your soul. Repent of your anger, put it away, and seek God’s mercy through Christ. Jesus said, “Freely ye have received, freely give.” As you were freely forgiven all your sins by Jesus and His cross, be sure to freely forgive the sins of your neighbor and don’t be bitter. Jesus said in Matthew 6, “If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” With this background, let us now see how.....

I. Joseph did not hold a grudge, but forgave the sins of his brother’s, and he also absolved them. As we read, all this happened after the passing away of the father, Jacob. By their message to Joseph, we learn they had previously told Jacob the events of the past, and their sorrow over the sin. It is good then to know poor Jacob heard their repentance before he died. There can be little doubt they asked their father’s forgiveness also, for they had lied to Jacob long ago, or at least deceived, by dipping in blood Joseph’s coat of many colors. By the words of our text today also we see they were truly sorry for their sins. “Forgive I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren and their sin, for they did unto thee evil.” It seems the brothers were there before Joseph in person when they also said, “And now we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servant of the God of thy father.” They also humbled themselves by bowing down before Joseph, just as God had prophesied by two dreams.

We see also the effect of their repentance upon Joseph. “And Joseph wept when they spake unto him.” It hurt him to think they were still uncertain regarding his forgiveness. He took no pleasure in the pain of his brothers, and indeed their lack of certainty regarding their forgiveness, hurt Joseph much. So the Bible says “Weep with them that weep.” When we see a fellow Christian hurting because they have fallen into sin and they are sorry but uncertain if God can forgive them, by all means we should absolve them and be good and kind to them as Joseph was. Don’t allow your heart to be cold and hardened against any brother who sins against you, lest God harden His own heart against you, and take away His Spirit.

All of this should remind us how important it is to humble ourselves before our neighbor whom we have sinned against. We are not to deny our sin or hide our sin or cover our sin, but confess our sins and forsake them. Proverbs 28:13 says, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.” It is a vain and foolish effort to try and hide your sins from God, who sees all things and knows all things. Nothing is hidden from His sight. God also knows the secrets sins of your heart which you yourself do not know. Likewise those who deny their sins and refuse to repent will eternally be condemned to hell after death. Don’t let that be you because of the hardness of your heart. Seek God’s mercy now while you can and ask Him to forgive you. Do not forget “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” The Bible teaches only those who confess and forsake their sins will find mercy. Do not then continue in the sin, but confess it and forsake it. Cry out and pray “God be merciful unto me, a sinner.”

Speaking now of those sins we ought to confess, and relating them to our text, let us be on our guard against the giving or taking of offense, and bearing a grudge. God’s Word commands, “Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.” Whatever the sins of our brother against us, we do not have the right to carry anger in our hearts against them, nor do we have the right to judge and condemn them. That, by the way, was the original sin of Joseph’s brothers. They were jealous of Jacob’s love for them, and so they hated Joseph and sold him into slavery. Yet God does not allow us to bear a grudge, nor does He allow us to be a judge over our brother. If then you find yourself angry at a fellow Christian for something they said or did, remember that you must still forgive them as Jesus has forgiven you, and even if they don’t apologize, you still need to forgive them and remember what Jesus said, if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

For a moment then let us remember what Jesus said also in John seven. “Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?” This teaches us there is an ungodly way to judge a brother that is sinful and evil. If you judge him in such a way that you want him to suffer for his sin against you, you are forgetting the patient sufferings of your own dear Christ, who when reviled “reviled not

again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.” When you are thinking as a Christian ought to think, whatever their sins against you may be, that is of little importance. You shouldn’t care about your pride or honor, nor do you care that they insulted you. What you care about is their soul. What is important is their salvation. When Jesus said “Judge not that ye be not judged”, He was not saying that we have no right to rebuke others for sin. We do and we must. But after this we cannot ascend the throne and sit in the Judgment Seat.

Beware then if in your thoughts you find yourself comparing yourself and measuring yourself to your neighbor, if you exalt yourself in comparison, you are once again failing God. Indeed if you really care for their soul, shouldn’t you humble yourself before them, as Jesus humbled Himself before you on the cross? Do not become an obstacle to your neighbor’s faith because your pride has been offended. Romans 14:13 says, “Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.” Do not judge the person, but judge the sin. Adultery is evil and adulterers will be judged, but you have committed adultery to, and do you want your adultery to be judged? Aren’t you saved by grace alone? Isn’t your neighbor, whether they know it or not? When the self-righteous Jews condemned the adulterous woman, they were judging in a self-righteous way. So Jesus answered, “he that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” Then Jesus absolved the woman saying “Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more.” In this way the proud sinners were rebuked for their pride, and the penitent sinner was absolved and forgiven. So it is written in James four, “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up. Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?” Thanks be to God then Jesus did not come to destroy us, but save us by His cross. Hence.....

II. The Office of the Keys, and Christ the Judge, who is our also Brother. If our judgment in this world is to be righteous judgment, as Jesus commands, it must be Gospel oriented, all through the blood of Christ. Like Joseph, Jesus is our own Brother of flesh and blood, and we are the miserable brethren who have sinned against Him. Because this Brother saved us by the cross, we do not need to fear the wrath of this Judge on the Last Day. As Joseph was a brother who sat upon the throne of Egypt, so Christ is our Brother who will judge every believer righteous on the Last Day, righteous and holy by His blood. So “ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.”

Knowing Him who first loved us, each Christian on earth possesses by faith forgiveness of sins, and we want to share and disperse this forgiveness to others. This sharing and dispersing of forgiveness we call The Office of the Keys. This is “the peculiar church power which Christ has given to His Church on earth to forgive the sins of the penitent sinners, but to retain the sins of the impenitent as long as they do not

repent.” When Joseph forgave, absolved, comforted, “and spake kindly unto” his brethren, Joseph was exercising this office, this peculiar church power which Christ has given to His Church on earth.

We still do this today publicly in church, and privately at home or work, or wherever we live, for God has commanded us to forgive the sins of the penitent, and not forgive the sins of the impenitent, as long as they do not repent. If (for example) a man or woman in our congregation commits adultery, or someone falls into an open and manifest sin, if after the three steps of church discipline they still refuse to repent, we excommunicate them out of love for their soul. For if they don’t repent they will be damned. Likewise regarding penitent sinners, we have the Office of the Keys on pages 6 and 16 in the front of our hymnbooks. When members of the congregation confess their sins on page 6 or 16, it is the duty and privilege of the pastor to absolve such members in the name of Christ and the congregation. When I do so “by virtue of my office, as a called and ordained servant of the Word”, this is as valid and certain, in heaven also, as if Christ, our dear Lord, dealt with us Himself. My mouth at that time is nothing more than an instrument whereby Jesus assures you all sins are forgiven by His blood. And when you are at home or at work, and you speak to someone who is sorry for their sins, and you tell them of Jesus and His forgiveness, you are doing the same thing and it is no different nor is it less valid. Pastors have no other authority than the Word of God. Likewise Christian layman, women, and children have no other authority than the Word of God. We are all equal, this Church, each believer one with another, and we all share and have the same authority, the power of God’s Word, the forgiveness of sins through Christ, and by the same Word we open or close the doors to heaven, based upon the confession of penitent or impenitent sinners. Do not doubt my words, for they are God’s Words, for Jesus said, “Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” May God grant we do so faithfully, as Joseph did. “Freely ye have received, freely give.” Amen.

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