

2 Corinthians 2

Sunday 1/29/2012

Well, if you have your Bibles this morning, let's go. We're going to be in 2 Corinthians, as you probably are aware of today. It's good to have all the kids here today. I enjoy you coming in once a month, and I watch some of you older ones take notes and even show me your notes. Some of you draw pictures of me while I'm preaching, which aren't too flattering, but I like it too. So, I'm glad you're here today, and we always enjoy you. You're so very much a special part of our church, and we love you to death.

Last week, we saw basically probably the single greatest message that you're probably ever going to hear, not because I preached it, but because it was just simply the truth of God laid out. In a lot of ways, you can scrap everything in your life before that Sunday and start building just upon that, because that is the apex of where we have to get. Somebody could say, "Well, I didn't know, I didn't understand, I didn't figure it out." You can say all of that for the last many years of your life, but from last Sunday, it certainly all changed as far as your accountability now to the reason God saved us and the importance of being involved in ministry.

Of course, we talked about the aspect of the second benefit, how that when you were saved, that was your first benefit. The second benefit is when you get to the point in your life where you really begin to understand the first one, what God did for you. I think I summed it up probably in the easiest way for at least for me to understand it: the first benefit, when you got saved, you got all of God there was. Then you go through a process in your life, and that process brings you to your understanding of the first benefit, that then you get the second benefit. That is the point in your life as a child of God, the point in my life as a Christian, where now God gets all of me.

We talked about the earnest of the Spirit, how we likened that to buying a house and putting down the earnest money. When you got saved, God put down the earnest money, believing that you would carry through with the contract, that you would fulfill what He started but never finished. This is why Jesus said to His disciples—I don't know if you ever figured it out or thought about it—He said to them a strange verse. He said, "Greater things will you do than I will do." He's simply meaning that in God's scheme of things and God's plan, God never intended Christ to go beyond when He was crucified. He intended His life, His death, to impact the world in such a way that people like you, His common ordinary folk, people like me, would come to the point where we really saw what Christ had done for us and then pick up the mantle and finish for Him what He started. That's really the aspect of the first benefit and the second benefit.

In this great book, Christ is portrayed as our sufficiency, and this is all we need. In every chapter, we find everything we need to be everything to Him and for Him and to accomplish the ministry that He has for us. You remember I told you when we started the book of 2 Corinthians that each chapter in this book will be laid out around a central theme. It's very important to get these themes, and I will give them to you as we go through each chapter. If you've been paying attention for the last couple of years, I've given them to you in various scenarios, so you should have them, but certainly, we'll talk about each one, and it's important that you see these central themes. Then, within that theme, there will be an incredible amount of material that will all be

focused on you and me preparing ourselves for the second benefit and doing those things that God has for us to do.

I. The Key to Ministry: Suffering

We saw in chapter one that the key to ministry is suffering. That's very important for that to be the first chapter because that defines the ministry now, and we know that this church is focused on ministry. We know that this church is focused on accomplishing everything that God wants us to accomplish. I'm well aware that not everybody in every church, and certainly this church is no exception, will always do what they need to do. You always have people who won't be part of ministry, and that's fine. It's certainly okay, but that's not what God has called us to do. God has called us to band together as a team, and that's why it's so important that we understand that the defining of the ministry is suffering, becoming one with your people through suffering, going through what we go through in life many times because of our own bad choices, many times because we're just going to do what's right with God.

We learn from those mistakes, and we learn from everything that we go through, and we learn from our suffering. Through our suffering, we learn what God went through in His suffering. Then the Bible says, as God controls us through our suffering and helps us understand all of the things that it has to do with and all the ramifications, then we're in a better position to help somebody else that's going through things. I might say this to you: I look around and see what's going on behind the scenes with many of you, and I really appreciate the little things you do for other people that nobody ever sees. I think that's probably the greatest mark of the spiritual level of a church. It's not what you do that everybody sees; it's what you do when nobody sees. The little acts of kindness, the little acts of benevolence, the little acts of helping somebody that's struggling that nobody ever sees, and you don't go around broadcasting it. You just do it because of where you're at in your own relationship with the Lord, and I appreciate that so very much.

II. The Forgiving Spirit of the Minister

Now today, we're going to start chapter two, and in chapter two, we're probably going to see the single greatest thing that a pastor or someone who is involved in ministry can have. In this chapter, the theme is very simple, and if you've been with me for any length of time, you probably already have it in your Bible. Where chapter one, we saw that the key to ministry is suffering, in chapter two, we see the theme of the forgiving spirit of the minister, learning how to forgive.

When I talk about forgiveness, I'm talking about God's kind of forgiveness: unconditionally. It'll be the single greatest mark of our spiritual maturity and being like Christ. Somebody would say, "Why is that?" Because the greatest attitude and the greatest concept of God's character is His ability to forgive. I always have a saying, and I've said it for many, many years. I've dealt with hundreds and hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people over the years, and I've seen all kinds of people deal with circumstances different ways, and I always say this: I simply say, "If you can forgive, you can forget." The ability to forgive also leads to your ability to forget. I

always say that if you can forgive, you can forget, but if you can't forget, learn to forgive, then you can forget it.

The reason why I say that is because your inability to forgive and forget. Forgiveness and forgetting go hand in hand in a New Testament biblical concept. It may not work that way in the world. You may find people say, "I forgive you, but never forget it." But the greatest single attribute of God was the fact that not only did He forgive our sins, but the Bible says He forgets our sins. We have a lot of people that struggle with losing their salvation after they're saved, and I really understand that, and I've always tried to take a little extra time with people like that because I know how that feeling is, and I know that that's a hard thing sometimes to get through. It just takes a little time, but I try to help people with that whenever I get an opportunity to.

The greatest aspect of understanding that you can't lose your salvation is to understand the fact that when God forgave your sins, He forgot your sins. How does God take something back for something you did when He already forgot what you did? When you put the Bible context together, you find that forgiving and forgetting go hand in hand. God forgives our sin and then forgets our sin. I think that concept is probably the hardest thing for me to grasp personally. I believe it. I thank God for it.

I had a lady one time years ago that she kept coming up to me with a problem, a particular issue in her life that she had done a long time ago, and she had made it right with God, and it was under the blood, and it wasn't a recurring thing she was doing every week. It was actually something that she had in her life a while back that when she got saved, but it was so bad to her that she just couldn't forgive herself for it. So, the next step goes, she thought that God could not forgive her, and she would come to me almost every week, and she would bring up this same thing, and I would try to help her.

One day, I didn't know what else to do, so she came into my office, and she sat down, and tears began to roll down her face, and I knew where it was going, and she began to tell me again that she just felt like God could not forgive her. I said, "You know what, honey," I said, "when you get to heaven, let me fast forward here, when you get to heaven, because this is such a burden on your heart, the first thing you're going to do is you're going to run up to God and you're going to tell Him personally that you're so sorry for this, aren't you?" She says, "Oh, that's exactly it." She said, "If He even lets me go to heaven, the first thing I'm going to do is I'm going to run up to Him and I'm going to say, 'Oh, Jesus, I did this back here when,' and she says, 'I'm so sorry, and I just want You to really forgive me.'" You're going to go up there, and you're going to pull Him out, you're going to find Him, and you're going to look into His eyes, you're going to tell Him all this thing. He's going to look down at you and He's going to say, "You did that? Huh? I'd forgotten that."

You see, when God forgives, He forgets. The problem with us so many times is we can't forgive ourselves for what we've done, or in many cases, we can't forgive what somebody else has done to us. Therefore, the devil all of our lives will take advantage of that, and if you don't live the life of forgive and forget, the devil will always get the advantage in our lives and will eat you alive and will make you a bitter person. Yet, dealing with people—and I've dealt with them all of my

adult life in the ministry—God's people are famous for holding grudges against the brethren. They just are, and it's one of the things that it just goes with the territory unless you know.

For me personally, there are things that I look for in people that I never really say anything about, but I look that I now, after my years in the Word of God and dealing with people, I pretty much know what a hard-line model is for what God looks for in character of people, male and female. I tell you, nothing will red flag your immaturity and lack of spiritual relationship with Christ faster than an unforgiving spirit. You're going to find people that, and I'll be honest with you, people are going to hurt you. People are going to say things. People are going to do things. When you get into the ministry, it separates the men from the boys. When you get working with people in this church, or you get doing this, or you're ahead of this, or you're ahead of that, the first thing you know is that people are not going to like every decision that you make, and people are going to talk about you behind your back. They're going to try to cut your legs out from under you, or sometimes they will go to somebody else, and they'll make the situation much worse than it is. They'll go after you with a vindictive spirit. They'll hold a grudge for 20 years. Then they'll try to hurt you in some way.

The greatest thing that red flags a person's immaturity is their inability to forgive. Do you know why that is? Because your inability and my inability to forgive somebody is in such stark contrast to God's ability to forgive. When you're over here and can't forgive, and God's forgiveness is over here, the distance is just too great, and you can't hide that, because I'll say it again: the greatest single characteristic of God's character is His ability to forgive. When we talk about being Christ-like, that simply means "like Christ." We use those terms as talking points, "Yeah, you need to be Christ-like." What does that mean? It means that you take the same attributes that He has and you put them into your own life, and the key to ministry in this aspect is the ability to forgive and to forget.

I've had people tell me all the time, and it's just a mark of immaturity. Somebody will say, "Well, you don't know what I know about that person." My answer to that is, "Yeah, I know, and I don't know what God knows about you, and you don't know what God knows about me." I mean, come on, "You don't know what I know about that person." Hey, we all got enough baggage in our closet so we could keep Greyhound Bus and UPS shipping in business for the next thousand years. What's your point? The point is, you have to be able to learn to let it go. You have to be able to learn to forget.

III. Defining the Minister

In fact, I'll tell you this, and you want to mark this down because this is really very important: 2 Corinthians chapter 1 will define the ministry. We talked about that already, didn't we? 2 Corinthians chapter 1, the heading for that and the theme will be, it will define ministry. You can put right by chapter two of 2 Corinthians, where 2 Corinthians 1 defines the ministry, 2 Corinthians chapter 2 defines the minister. This is what will define you.

I told you last week that the Apostle Paul is our great example, probably the greatest example of a human man anywhere in the history of the world in the Bible, certainly too, of what we are to

be and how we should conduct ourselves within the aspect of ministry or just really being a Christian. I told you many times, Paul sets up for us the model minister and really the model ministry. You'll notice that Paul's not a pastor, so he sets up for us what we should be as ministers. The model pastor in the Bible will be Timothy. A study of his life, Paul's life now, a study of his books, a study of how he deals with people and problems and issues within the churches that he writes or the people that he deals with, is quite incredible.

You've heard me say many times that there are three aspects, three aspects, to stay on top of our game as pastors or ministers. You remember last week, I'm speaking now from the concept that God does not recognize anywhere in the Bible a saved person that's not involved in ministry. You may choose to be there, and that's fine, and you're welcome here, and I love you, and I'll go out to eat with you, I'll hunt with you, I'll shoot with you, I'll fish with you, I'll fly with you, whatever we want to do together. But the bottom line, at the end of the day, it's simply that. You see in his life, we find all of these three great examples, and you hear me talk about it many, many times. You hear me talk about purpose, you hear me talk about getting a perspective, and you hear me talk about passion: the three P's of ministry. We've talked about it many, many times.

Purpose now should even have a greater dimension to you because purpose would be when you understand the first benefit, when you get to the point in your life that you begin to realize what God did for you and the agony and all of the things that He paid for on the cross, and you recognize that's your first benefit. You see, your first benefit, purpose, will always form for you your perspective, and perspective will lead you to the second benefit because now you know why you're doing what you're doing. From a perspective point of view, you're able to see it, you're able to understand it in a better way. Of course, when you have purpose, then you have perspective, it'll always become your passion. This will be when God, if we talked about last week, God changes your name, and now your passion has changed. It doesn't mean you don't like to watch football, doesn't mean you don't like to hunt, don't like to fish. It just means that those things always take precedence to the number one thing that God has saved you for. In a lot of ways, you use those things then to reach other people and to just combine everything into what you're doing.

Obviously, today is going to be an introduction to this great chapter, and I think it's very important to give a background of each one of these chapters because we have to define a few principles about a forgiving spirit before we can really appreciate all that's here, and boy, there's a lot in here. I want to be very careful today too. I'm not saying that you can get to this point overnight to forgive and to forget. A lot of times, preachers get up and they make things so hard-line and out there that they think that you think, "Boy, if I don't have this fixed by this afternoon, I'm a terrible person." That's just not true. I never approach things that way. If I learned anything in my life, I know that everything in the Christian life will become Christ-like is a process, and it's a process that you enter into, and you work at it, and you make progress. Someone said, "I've asked people before, 'How are you doing in your walk, your growth?'" And they say, "Well, sometimes, Bob, it feels like I'm going three steps forward and then two steps back." I always say, "That's good, because you're still getting forward." You don't have to worry about how fast

you do it; you just have to worry about the fact, "Are you doing it?" I know it's a process, and everything in the Christian life basically will hang on these two principles of the first and the second benefit, and everything else that you're going to do, encounter, get into, is going to go back to that foundation. That's why I said you can basically take your Christian life, if it wasn't already plugged in, scrap everything in the last 20 years, start from last week, and get the right definition and move on from there. It's the greatest thing you could ever do.

In a process within understanding how these things work, you understand first that when Christ died on the cross, He gave you all of Him. You get to the point through a process then where you give God all of you. I know it takes time, but I also know that it should be at the top of your priority list, that it should be the thing that you try to work at every day, and in time, you will get there.

IV. Not Taking Things Personally

Paul's life, and a study of it for me over the years, taught me probably the single greatest—and I'm speaking personally now—probably the greatest key to my life and happiness and success in ministry with people, because people can drive you nuts. Old Bob Jones Senior said that the more that he's around people, the better he likes dogs, and I understand that concept. But obviously, ministry is not made up of dogs; it's made up with people, so you've got to deal with it the way you've got to deal with it. But I also know that people can drive you crazy sometimes, and if you don't understand what you're doing and why you're doing it, it can get wearing on you. This is why, to me personally, studying Paul's life, the greatest key to forgiving and forgetting is something that you've heard me say many, many times, and it is the fact that the number one cardinal rule in dealing with people and surviving the ministry is simply the fact that in ministry and dealing with people, whatever happens, whatever takes place, you learn never to take it personal.

I don't know how to impress that upon you. I'm going to try to impress that upon you today. For some of you, it will work; for some of you, it won't. But it is the single greatest thing you better learn if you're going to actively pursue a ministry based on the first benefit and the second benefit. I think let's better understand this concept. The reason we take things personal, bottom line, if you want to psychoanalyze yourself here in a moment, the reason why you and I will take things personally is simply two words that tell you exactly what it is, and it's spiritual insecurity.

When somebody attacks you when you're in the ministry doing something, they don't like what you say, they don't like what you do. I'm telling you, somebody said years ago, "Wherever you've got movement, you've got friction," and that is so true. I don't know of a decision I ever made in my life that everybody liked. I don't know a decision that you're going to do if you've got more than three people in your prayer group, and you make a decision, probably somebody's not going to like it. Obviously, you make sure that it's the right biblical decision you make, but you've got to realize that a leader has to lead, and a leader is someone who understands going into it that not everybody is going to agree or appreciate what he does.

You learn that in the military, and you guys that were in the military, in the old military, not so much today, but in the old military, especially in World War II, in Korea, not so much even in Vietnam, but in the old military, an order was an order. The hardest thing for a commander to do, whether a lieutenant or a captain with a company or a squad, would be faced with a terrible situation that you knew whoever you were going to send out was probably going to get killed. You've got to look that guy in the face and say, "Go do this." You've got to basically give him an order to send a man to his death. What makes the military work back then and made it what it was is the character was built into those people that when the commander said, "Go take that hill, go take that pillbox, go do this," that person just said, "Yes, sir," and went out and did it. That's what it needs to be in Christianity. That's exactly what it needs to be.

You find that not being secure, and when somebody attacks you, basically goes back to not knowing who you really are in Christ. I know we say we do. I've learned this: I don't listen to what you say. I maybe did the first six months in ministry, and I don't claim to be the smartest man in the world, but my claim to fame is to be the smartest one in a slow class. I fall into the great category of some great philosopher who said, "In the land of the blind, a one-eyed man is king," and that's me. I'm not very smart, but I'm the smartest one in the slow class, and it doesn't take me long to figure things out. I never look at what somebody says to me because people will say all kinds of things because people get inflated opinions of themselves right up to the point that then somebody says something negative to them, and they fall apart like a broken accordion. I'm not interested in what you think about yourself; I'm interested in what you do in any given situation. You'll see it as we get through here today. So, not being secure in who you are in Christ will be your downfall in so many areas because it's a weakness that the devil will always exploit to the fullest.

I think pastors make a mistake. I know they do, and I think I'm well qualified to speak about pastors. I think pastors make one fatal mistake, and they make it because of their spiritual insecurity, not immaturity necessarily, but insecurity. That is, they get the idea that everybody has to come to their church. They get the idea that their church is for everybody, and boy, that's a dangerous slippery slope to go down because that's simply not true. I have never been under the illusion for any moment of time in my life that I ever thought that any church that I would build, any ministry that I would do, would be for everybody. I mean, I'll be just honest with you, it takes a special kind of individual to put up with this junk every week that you get clobbered with. I mean, it's something that it's good junk, but the bottom line is, you don't come here and just get pampered and babied; you get the truth whether you like it or not. Honestly, some people like the truth, and some people don't like the truth.

So, a pastor falling into this trap where he thinks that everybody should stay in his church, if you leave my church, he takes a personal offense to it. I've seen it all the time. A pastor ought to take the position that people come in, they find out if this is what they want, what they want and what they get from it, and they want to do something with it or not. You don't make people bad people because they don't like what you preach. Somebody comes in and stays for six months and says, "Well, my personal opinion is this." I've told you this before publicly: if you can find a better church and a better pastor to give you everything you want, you'll be there tomorrow. Absolutely.

Never be more loyal to a man than you are to the Word of God. It's just that simple. But pastors can't get there today, you see, because of their own spiritual insecurity, and so they get their feelings hurt or they get mad. No, no, no, they take it personal.

You see, when you leave and you go up and you'll say to a pastor, "Well, I'm just not getting spiritually fed." The pastor, "Well, how can you not get spiritually fed from me?" Well, you obviously haven't listened to yourself lately. You know what? If you're not, you're not. It's just that simple. I've had people come to me in the past and say, "Bob, I don't get anything out of your sermons." And I say, "Hey, you know what? Okay, I understand. No problem. Good luck to you." It isn't that they're a bad person. It isn't a fact that I'm going to take it personal. It's one of those things. I had people come in my past, they come up and said, "You know, I don't like the way you run your church." And my answer is, "That's fine." My answer is, "I understand." And they say, "Well, I just want you to know that." I say, "Well, I want you to know this: I appreciate that. When you start your own church, you can run yours any way you want to run it." See, they don't have a problem with it, but we get too insensitive to it. We get too insensitive to it, and that's of course, that all goes back to our spiritual insecurity, knowing who you are in Christ.

Last Thursday night, our Skype people from up in Nebraska, Gene, asked a question about Proverbs, about wisdom, knowledge, or knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. I told you that knowledge was the facts, wisdom is facts applied, and understanding is how God relates to God and what God's doing in the Bible. Getting understanding in ministry is simply understanding. When I talk about understanding, you see, you can be saved and have the facts. You can even do some ministry and apply it and have some wisdom. But when you get understanding, you understand the first benefit and the second benefit, and off you go. That's what I'm talking about. You understand every situation and people you deal with, and how the situation is going. You see the problem from the Bible standpoint.

I use another phrase that I talk about all the time, and I basically what things that I do, and I call being smarter than the problem. You've heard me say it many, many times. I've talked to you one-on-one when you've come to me and say, "Well, what do I do about this?" And I say, "Well, you'll be smarter than the person you're dealing with." I don't mean that in a bad way. I mean, in your set as a minister or whatever you're doing, follow the biblical protocol. You know what I've taught you. You know how I expect you to operate. You know when I expect you to how to deal with it. Deal with it that way, and it's just dealing based on the Bible. Smarter than the problem defined is simply knowing who you are in Christ and seeing the situation from God's standpoint. That's all it is. It's the ability to look at a situation instead of seeing it as it appears, having understanding and seeing it as it is. A great key to that is keeping your emotions out of it. Keep your emotions out of it. Don't get your emotions. If you don't take it personal, then your emotions never get into it. It's simply, "This is what the book says. This is my church. This is how I teach it." There's nothing to get emotional about it. You don't like it? Hey, if you can't deal with it, hey, I understand, no problem. Let's go eat lunch. Let's go down to Arthur Bryant's and get some food. I'll buy you your last meal.

Of course, all of these principles that we're going to talk about today, they have to be in your own life first before you can apply them to somebody else. You can't tell somebody else and teach

them how to be spiritually mature and spiritually secure when you're insecure yourself. You just can't. I think the greatest aspect of the ministry, and everybody wants to minister, but the bottom line is, you have to have these things worked out in your own life first before you can give them to somebody else.

I think one of the greatest studies we ever took in this church, and you can get it on tape, and I think it's even probably online, is the understanding of the seven things that changed about you the day you got saved, and realizing through those things who you really are in Christ.

The Bible says that your soul changed.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

That's one of the greatest principles and promises anywhere in the Word of God, but it's probably one of the hardest ones to apply, isn't it? It really is.

The Bible says in Colossians chapter 3 that your affections change.

Colossians 3:2

Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

The Bible says in Ephesians chapter 2, verse 19, your citizenship changed.

Ephesians 2:19

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;

The Bible says in Ephesians chapter 2, verse 6, your position changed.

Ephesians 2:6

And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:

Why? To fully understand what each one of these things means.

Matthew 22:37 changes your attitude of heart. It says:

Matthew 22:37

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

2 Corinthians 5:20 says that now your job has changed.

2 Corinthians 5:20

Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

You ought to study a little, go on the internet and study what the job of an ambassador of the United States or any foreign country is. Do you know what it is? It's a person in a foreign land that doesn't have any emotional entanglement or involvement in what goes on. They're just representing the country from which they were born in. When you got saved, you became an ambassador for Christ. This is not your home anymore. Your citizenship is up in heaven. You're seated up there, and now you're an ambassador back to heaven. That's what God did. He saved you. He took you out of this world, seated you in heavenly places. He made you a new creature in Christ Jesus. He made you a citizen. He canceled out your old passport and gave you a new one, and then He sends you or leaves you here to be an ambassador. An ambassador in a foreign land that you don't get your emotions and your feelings tangled up with the things of this world. That's it, in a nutshell.

Then He says the seventh thing, your conversation in Philippians chapter 3, verse 20. Of course, we know that that's an old English phrase which means much more back then than it does now because conversation means lifestyle, and most people don't know that today, but that's what it really means because back then they understood the biblical principle that you live what you say. So, it's conversation.

These seven things are the greatest things that you'll ever get to begin the process of getting your spiritual security of who you are in Christ. I'm telling you, two of the greatest truths for learning not to take things personal, based on these seven things that change in your life and based on knowing who you are in Christ, it just comes down to two things, and I give you these two as we begin to come through here:

1. Always remember who you're doing this for. The thing that keeps you from taking it personal is who you're working for.
2. Don't take it personal.

Will works at Truman Medical Center as a patient liaison. He has a specific function that he does there, but he's being paid by that company. His interest lies in, "I'm just working here, and I'm getting paid for it." If somebody gets upset with the hospital and sues them, he may not like that, but it doesn't really affect him, does it? They have insurance; they're going to cover it. If somebody calls up and yells and screams at the head nurse on some floor because they didn't do what's right, he may hear about it at the lunchroom, but it doesn't change his day at all. Do you know why? Because he understands that that's just a job. He understands he's working for them, but his emotions aren't tangled up in the everyday problems. He's getting paid to do a job; he does that job. The problems are not his; they're theirs.

That's the way it is for a Christian. God saves you to do a job. That job is to keep your emotions out of everything else that's going around in this world and stay focused on the principles to get that job done. He saved you for a purpose, and the way you learn not to take things personal is you understand who you're doing this for. Based on that first one, then you take the aspect that you don't take it personal, and when you don't take it personal, where does it lead to? It leads to you being able to have a forgiving spirit. Somebody comes up to Will and says, "You know what, I called your head nurse today, and I really cussed her out, really chewed her out, and I want you

to know, Will, I'm sorry that I did that." Will says, "Okay, didn't call me, didn't cuss me out. I'm glad you're sorry about it, but it doesn't affect me one way or the other." Do you know why? He doesn't have his emotions involved in that. He's just working for that place. You're working for Him. People are going to not like Him and take it out on you. You take it personal because you don't know who you are in Christ, and you're not secure in it, so you start taking it personal when it's nothing personal to you. Their problem is with God, not you. You just happen to be the ambassador. It's real simple when you just try to get it down, but hard to work it through. It takes a process. It takes a process.

But I told you, you want to remember: chapter one defines the ministry; chapter two defines the minister. It just simply does. In relationship to this understanding who you are in Christ and not taking it personal, I want to give you another great principle here that will help you get to the place of a forgiving heart and a forgiving spirit and the ability not to take it personal.

V. Reacting Versus Responding

In ministry, as I said this already, people are going to cause problems. They're going to say things. They're going to do things. They're going to blame you for things. They're not going to like the way things go in the ministry. Ninety-five percent of it, ladies and gentlemen, when you get into dealing with people, 95% of it is just simply dealing with human failure. That's what it is. People get themselves in the worst scenarios you ever see. A lot of people come in, their marriages are just the Titanic. It looks like a good deal; I mean, it's an absolute shipwreck. You find people come in that they've been on drugs for 20 years, or alcohol controls their lives. You find that people get themselves in the worst situations you could ever imagine. I have someone in the church call me this week that works with a lady that obviously got pregnant and wants to get an abortion. I mean, you're dealing with the downside of humanity, and in all of those things, and let's face it, those things are life-changing things. Those things are things that will sink you fast, and anything else. There are some mistakes you can make in life and survive, but there are some mistakes you make in life, and your life is changed for the rest of your life. Our job is to help people with that.

But when you get people who are caught up in their own emotional things, they don't understand biblical principles. You try to help them. It's like a dog. One time there was a dog that I was out, he got caught in a barbed wire fence. He jumped over the fence, and his leg caught into it, and when he flipped over, it trapped him, and he went over, and he's a big dog laying on his back, and he's yelping out there. I said, "I'm going to help this dog." So I get out, and I go up, and you would think this dog thought I wanted to help him, but this dog snarled at me and growled at me. Now, I could have done what many people would have done. I could have said, "Well, forget you, pal. Starve to death." But at the same time, I knew that that dog wasn't angry at me. It was a situation that he was in that made him afraid. I knew that I wanted to help him. I knew I could help him. The dog didn't understand any of that, so he's naturally, in other words, his situation produced the anger toward me because he saw me as a threat. So what I did was, okay, I understand. We're way out in the woods; there were no farmers around. So I went back to my truck and got me a pair of barbed wire cutters and came up and snapped that one wire. He

unraveled, he got his leg out, turned around, trotted around. Do you know what he did then? He came over and wagged his tail at me.

The bottom line was, I could have taken it personal. "How can I say, 'Well, you stupid dog, I'm just trying to help you here. I'll put you out of your misery and shoot him.'" I could have said, "Starve to death." No, no, no. Smarter than the problem. Realize he's a dog. He doesn't understand what's going on. He's hurt. Now I can be an idiot and take it personal, "He tried to bite me," or realize he's scared, he's in a bad situation. If I can't help him this way, I'm going to find another way to help him. People are the same way. Maybe that's why God calls unsaved men dogs in the Bible, I don't know. But I know that it's the situation many times we learn not to take it personal.

When you realize that and you understand that, you begin to see how the thing works in ministry. People are going to cause you problems. You better know that going in. What I'm about to give you is not new. I've used it in marital counseling for years, and I've taught it to many of you who are now working with people in these same principles. The truth of the matter is, and I've never given these out fundamentally in counseling and dealing with people with problems—I hate to use the word counseling—in ministering to people, there are 20 absolute principles. I've never found more than 20 of them. Twenty absolute principles in dealing with people with problems that if you just know and you make them part of your the way you do things, and they become just part of your inventory of tools that you work with people, you'll it's the greatest thing you'll ever have and you're ever find. One of these days, when we get some of the people that are working to get to that level, we're going to sit down, we're going to go through these 20 some principles. But they will set the context that you'll never again have to wonder. They're absolute, and they work because they're based on the principles of human nature and the problems people get into. As most Bible principles for ministry, I say it again, they only work for others if they're already working for you.

It is the great teaching that goes along with reacting versus responding. You've heard me talk about it many times. People who take things personal, they react. People who are spiritually secure in themselves and mature in the Word of God with biblical principles in any given situation, they respond. It is the greatest, one of the greatest single tools that you ever use in ministry. No single aspect of dealing with people or problems will help you more than this one, and it's one of the keys to not taking it personal and having a forgiving spirit, because once you don't have your emotions involved, once you don't take it personal, then there's no reason not to forgive. It's like, "Will, you chewed out the head nurse today." "Yeah, I forgive you of it." "Why?" "Because you didn't chew me out." When you realize that somebody does come after you, and you are smart enough, smarter than the problem, realize they're not really coming after you; they're coming after God. Then you can take that position, "You know what? I'm not mad at you. You didn't do it to me; you did it to Him. I'm just the ambassador. I forgive you. Nothing to forgive. I forgive you, but there's nothing to forgive." Do you know why? Because you really didn't do it against me; you did it against Him. As long as you've got it right with Him, I'm good to go. Do you know why? Because I don't take it personal, knowing who you work for.

Real mature Christians, they have the understanding and the ability to be able to solve problems, and they don't cause problems. That's the key, and it's really what I look for in people. In marriages, you have a lot of issues and a lot of struggles many times in dealing with people and their marriages, and I always tell, and I use this as a good example to understand the principle, and we'll come back and put it into a practical thing for you and me in ministry, but this will help you understand how it works. In ministry, I tell, and in marriage counseling, I tell people all the time, "You know that somebody has to be smarter than the problem." We use our famous verse:

Romans 15:1

We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

That's the mark of spiritual maturity. The mark of spiritual maturity is you recognizing the problem for what it is and in being smarter than a problem, because real mature Christians, they solve, help solve problems; they don't cause problems. When problem-solving Christians with gas cans in their hands, not what you want, because all they're going to do is make the fire bigger. You want people who are able to solve problems, and that's what it takes in a marriage.

I tell husband and wives all the time when they're sitting down and they have marital issues, I tell the husband, "Your wife does not have the ability to solve whatever problem you have in your marriage." Now, I'm not saying she isn't part of the problem, but I am telling you that she can't solve the problem because everything has to rise and fall on leadership. This had to be something that you girls who are looking for a husband look for. You look for somebody that is able to solve the problems, not cause the problems. Look for somebody that has responsibility, accountability, someone who looks at any situation that you're dealing with, and they'll always take it back to the Bible. There's somebody who will learn, even in their basic process, instead of reacting, they will begin to respond. We're going to talk about that here in just a minute.

The greatest aspect of in a marriage scenario of reacting and responding, here's how it works: somebody has to be smarter than the problem. It should be the husband, but many times the situation is where a couple has problems, and maybe they started coming to church, and they started to really get it all put together, but there's too much bad blood, too much bad water under the bridge. So they'll go somewhere, drive somewhere, and the guy will say something, or the wife will say something, and maybe it's not what you want to hear at that particular point in life. At that point in your life, you have the greatest opportunity to solve the problem or go back and get your gas can and inflame the problem because that person, male or female, has said something to you that you don't like. Now it comes down to who's the spiritual one here, and in most marriages, neither one until they get to a point in their life.

But now what you're faced with is this: as a husband, I'll put it in a husband-wife context, your wife says something, and you don't like what she said. You've got two choices now. You can either react to that and say something nasty back, which means that she's going to say something nasty back to you, and then you're going to have it's going to escalate into a full-blown explosion. Reaction, yeah, chain reaction. That's what makes an atom bomb. Put that down. You want to remember that your marriage will go up like a nuclear explosion because you react, you don't respond. The real key is that the husband should understand where she's at in a scenario.

First of all, he should understand that he's the spiritual leader. Maybe her frustration is because he's not been doing his job. Maybe her frustration is because she said, "Well, she's got problems." Well, how have you tried to help her solve those problems? You see, so the first thing, you'll be smarter than the problem. I don't want to say smarter than your wife because that will never work. You're smarter than the problem. You simply, when she says something, you don't react to it; you respond to it. Responding will always diffuse the situation. Reacting will always inflame the situation. It's just the way it works.

I've had couples that come in with bad issues, and I know that it takes time for them to learn how to forgive and forget. Many times they can't, and husbands make a bad mistake, just like pastors make a bad mistake. Their past issues that they had, I mean, I've had situations where they had a bad marriage 15 years before they got to church, but when they come to church, they really now start to get plugged in and really do what's right. But unfortunately, the bad issues are still in their minds, and they view everything that goes on now in church based on the past, and you can't do that. At some point in your life, the two of you have got to sit down and say, "You know what? We're not going to bring up the past anymore. We're not going to bring up the stuff that happened. We're here. We both want to do what's right. We both want to get the Word of God together and grow in our marriage. We know we've got some issues, so fundamentally, what we're going to do, we're going to work at not reacting. We're going to work at responding." When you both do that, your problems go away. Ah, but human nature is not going to always work that way, is it? Because you go out of here saying, "We're going to do that," and then 15 minutes later, he'll say something, she'll say something, and that's where you that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak. That is where you realize that they just had a weak moment, so instead of reacting, you still hold the line on your response. Bottom line is, as long as somebody wants to do what's right in any given situation, it'll usually always work out.

But responding and reacting is true not only in dealing with people in marriages; it's also true with you and me in ministry. When you learn to respond to people instead of reacting, when people don't like what you said, like what you did, I had people come up to me before and said, "I didn't really like what you said this morning." Now, see, I could take that personal, and I could say, "Well, Will, have you ever preached before? I mean, you know how many people I want to cry." No, see, that's falling into the trap. That's reacting. You're basically just say, "Well, I'm sorry you didn't get anything out of it. If you need to come over, and I can work through something with you, I'll help you. If there was something I said that you didn't like or didn't care about, I'd be glad to sit down and talk to you about it." See, that's responding. You don't ever solve a problem by reacting, and reacting is based on our emotions, and our emotions are based on the ability that we don't have that spiritual security who we are in Christ, so we can't be bigger than a problem. We've got to always get our two feet into it, and that's not what a mature Christian does. That's not what Christ would do.

VI. The Art of Talking to Yourself

Now, let me show you how this thing works in respect to you and me in the ministry and not taking things personal and getting to the point where you can forgive and forget. Now look at 2

Corinthians chapter 2, verse 1. I told you last week, the thing I love about Paul, I love the big things he does and says, but I love those little obscure things that most people just blow right by and never see that I found are some of the greatest nuggets in the world. Now I want to talk to you, based on what I've said so far, I want to talk to you on a couple of issues here. I want to talk to you how to learn not to take things personal. I want you overall to understand the concept that that's the key to being able to forgive and forget. It's really the key for you to be that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak. It's really the key to reacting versus responding. But here is the thing that we've got to do in our lives.

Now look at chapter 2, verse 1. Paul says this, and I love these things:

2 Corinthians 2:1

But I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness.

Now that doesn't seem much like a verse, does it? I'd have not one we'd put on a three by five card, but when you stop and think about that, there lies the secret. There's the secret of forgiving and forgetting. There's the secret of responding versus reacting, and there's the secret for not taking it personal. Let me explain it to you. "But I determined this within myself." Now he'd been pretty hard on the church at Corinth in First Corinthians. He didn't spare them at all, did he? We've seen that already. And now he's come to the point where he's got them on track, but there's still some people who are holding out, and we talked about that, how he said some of you received me in part. But now we're seeing Paul be smarter than the problem, and the greatest thing he says there is, "But I determined this within myself."

I want to talk to you for just a few moments about the art of talking to yourself. The world thinks that when a man talks to himself, that you're crazy. Somebody asked me a question, I forget who it was this last week, about a story I told years ago about a guy—I can't even remember his name now—back at the Canton Baptist Temple, and I was just a young guy then, and everybody thought this guy was a little bit off the center, and he was eccentric, no question about it. He always kept to himself. He didn't wear his nicest clothes that everybody else did, and back then, you understand, clothes was a big deal going to church. He shuffled when he walked. He didn't shave very often. But he was just an old guy that everybody accepted to be around, and always carried his Bible, and he was always reading his Bible. I remember one time, Mel and I, and Mel really liked the guy. Mel, obviously, I was really young back then and didn't know much, and Mel told me, Mel always protected him and never let anybody hurt him or make fun of him or anything, and always chased him off. We came out of church one time together, and we saw this guy. There were bushes over along the wall of the church on the outside, and this guy was down on his knees, and Mel thought he fell. So I just go along for the ride. So I walk over there, and we get into that situation, and I watch Mel ask him if he's okay, and Mel get down there with him, and I got down on the other side, and Mel said, "Did you fall? Did you hurt?" And the guy said, "Shh, shh." And down there in his hands was a little dead sparrow that had died in the bushes. When he came out of church, he saw it, and he knelt down by that bush and was just looking at that sparrow and just had his hands around that little sparrow. Mel came over and asked him if he fell down, if he was hurt, and he said, "No, he says, 'No.'" He says, "Be quiet."

He says, "The Bible says that a sparrow doesn't fall to the ground, my heavenly Father doesn't know it." He says, "God's been here." He says, "I just want to be here for a little bit." Now, is that crazy? We got up, and we looked at each other, and he just went, "This is famous." We got in the car, we drove away, and he says, "Man," he says, "I just learned me a lesson today." In the next week, he preached a message on talking to yourself. I'll never forget the message, and it really shaped my whole concept.

You see, the world's view of a person talking to himself thinks he's nuts, but yet the Bible says in 1 Peter chapter 3, verse 4, that there's a hidden man of our heart. The Holy Spirit of God lives inside you.

Ephesians 3:16

That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;

Okay, every Christian ought to talk to yourself. That's why Paul says, when he's got this decision he's got to make here, he says, "But I've determined this within myself." He's talking to himself. I'll show you what he was doing. That's why, when you stop and think about that, that's what God does to an unsaved man. In Isaiah chapter 1, verse 18, the Bible says in John chapter 1, verse 9, He was a true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. In Isaiah chapter 1, verse 18, when God begins to deal with an unsaved man, an unsaved woman, He has that spirit. The Bible says it's the candle of the Lord. He touches that man's spirit, and then he begins to have a conversation that nobody hears, and He says:

Isaiah 1:18

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

In Luke chapter 15, verses 17 through 19, you've got the great story of the prodigal son. You know the story. He lived with his father and had everything he wanted, and he wasn't happy. He thought the grass was greener on the other side, and he wanted to go out and live his life with the riotous living, and he wanted his inheritance. He thought he knew more about life than his father did. You know, and you know the story is very familiar to all of us. So he gets all that he wants, and he heads out there, and just like everything else, he grew up fast, and he felt that his friends left him as soon as the money left him. The women didn't think he was quite as good looking when he didn't have any money, couldn't buy the drinks. So now he's out there, and the Bible says he got so destitute, he's working for a guy, and he's feeding hogs, and it's a picture of a backslidden child of God who gets away from God, doesn't listen to the preacher, doesn't listen to the Word of God, thinks they know more about it than mom and dad does. And then it's out there where your mom and dad try to tell you, "Don't stay out so late, don't go there." "Oh, you can't tell me, I'm 18 years old." Then you wind up getting yourself into some kind of mess, all because of the fact that you don't listen to people who understand a little bit about life. He wouldn't listen to his dad, so now he's out there, and he's out there in the pig pen. Now, let me tell

you, all of us can relate to the pig pen. That does not have to be explained. But I want you to look, if you've got that passage open, in verse 17 and 18, it says this:

Luke 15:17-18

17 And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,

See, he's reasoned with himself. He says, "Man, my father's servants are living better than I am." He's talking to himself. You see, the Holy Spirit of God lives inside you and me, and there's nothing wrong with talking to yourself because you're talking to that inner man, and Paul was talking to the inner man to find out what he had to do in any given scenario.

Do you know why people are drawn to the book of Psalms whenever we get into trouble, we have a bad time, we ought to go into Psalms? Do you know why Psalms has an addiction to people? I'll tell you why: because the book of Psalms is a man speaking to himself about his relationship with God, for the most part, David. Incredible.

Over in Luke chapter 12, verses 16 through 20, you've got the story of a rich man, and this guy was a fool, but note, he's speaking to himself where he says there:

Luke 12:16-20

16 And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:

17 And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?

18 And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.

19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

20 But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

You think God came down with a loudspeaker? God speaks in the recesses of our hearts. So an unsaved man, He'll speak through His spirit to you and me, His children, He'll speak down through our soul. We call it our conscience. But God said unto him, "Thou fool, this night thy soul will be required of thee, then who shall those things be?" Oh, what a great verse. We think we're going to live forever. The old preacher says, "Get all you can and can all you get." But at the end of the day, my friend, when it's all over, all the things that we have, whose is it going to be then? But we speak to ourselves.

See, in our own personal life, as we mature and become secure in who we are and become more like Christ and get His mind, every situation you're faced with, every person that you deal with, everything that happens to you, good or bad, this becomes the process. This becomes the process by determining what you do or what you say before you say it. You now have a filtering process that lives inside you based on biblical principles that you can take your case to Him, talk with Him like Paul did, "I determined this within myself." You bet you he did. He talked it over with the Lord living inside him of how he wanted to do it. God brought the principles to him. That's how he did it. That's what you and I need to do: building a process in our life of filtering through, dealing with situations through a filtering process in our lives before you do anything or say anything. That, my friend, is responding versus reacting.

When you take the time to discipline yourself to do this, you never will lose sight of the two basic great principles:

3. Who am I doing this for?
4. Don't take it personal.

Proverbs 25:28

He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, and without walls.

The spirit is your emotions. You need to learn to keep your emotions out of ministry, and you do that by realizing not taking it personal. You do that by understanding who you're working for, and you do that by responding instead of reacting. It's just that simple. Who am I doing this for? Based on that, I don't have to take it personal. Paul always ran everything he was going to do or say through a process of sorting out the situation based on Bible principles with a good conversation with the Holy Spirit of God living inside him. You want to remember, God will not violate His own principles.

You heard me talk about the great little three-point outline: faith, fact, and feeling. We've talked about it many, many times. I have faith. My faith is in the facts, the Word of God, and my faith and the absolute facts of the Word of God then produces the right feeling. Most people have faith, no facts, no Bible at all, so their faith feeling, their feeling is based on their emotional structure, not the facts of the Word of God. When you operate with faith, facts, and feeling, you now have a go-between the absolute principles of the Word of God which keep you and give you a filtering process of:

5. Who you're doing this for.
6. Don't take it personal.
7. Responding versus reacting.
8. Being smarter than the problem.

That's how it works. That's how it works. That's how it works. Having a trail of biblical principles that wherever you go, you can look back and see what you want to do.

Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

It starts on the inside. It starts on the inside. He's inside you now. Here's the key, and you want to get this. This is why I put your little principles on three by five cards. We talked about it last week, won't go into it again, but in time, through this process, these things as you grow and mature and you learn these things, then this process of reacting versus responding by going through and talking over with the Lord and the principles, it becomes automatic. Right now, I can see what you're thinking, "Okay, I've got a problem with my wife this afternoon. We're driving home. She says something. Wow, it'll take me two hours to figure out how to respond. She'll forget about it by then." That may be true, but the more time you spend working on it and the more time you use it, you all got a cell phone at some point, and when you got your first cell phone, how long did it take you to remember what the phone number was? Some of you did it in a day. Some of you did it in a week. Some of you had to write it on the back of the phone. Some of you still haven't got it down. Your excuse is, "Well, I never call myself." Bottom line is, now that cell phone number is second nature to you. If I ask you what your address was, you'd give it to me just like that. Do you know why? Because you live there, and where you live, everything becomes second nature. I can have you close your eyes today and explain your kitchen and tell me where things are at, make a diagram, and go, "Bang, it's right on the money." Your bedroom, your living room, your garage, wherever you want. Do you know why? Because you live there. When you live somewhere, things just become second nature.

When you live the principles of the Word of God, you've got to do it first yourself first before you can do it for somebody else. But when you start to take the principles of the Word of God and you live there, in time, responding versus reacting just becomes automatic, just like your phone number, just like your address. The fact that you're not there yet doesn't mean you're a terrible person. It just means that probably not ready for really ministering to people on that level simply because of the fact that you're going to take things personal. You're going to get your nose bent out of joint. If you're going to do something somebody's going to like it, you're going to get mad about it. You're going to carry it around all because of the fact that you cannot not take things personal. Doesn't matter who said what. "Well, you don't know what that person said." So what? Grow up. The bottom line is, you're smarter than the problem. You're taking it personal. Drop it. Move on with it. It always, always in ministry, being smarter than the problem and understanding Paul's principle life, the Bible principles in your life, will always lead you down the right path in whatever you deal with or whatever situation or whatever you say or how you say it. That, my friend, is called being smarter than the problems. It will always in ministry keep it in perspective for you of:

9. Who you're working for.
10. Don't take it personal.

VII. Christ's Example of Forgiveness

Always remember the greatest verse in the book of Hebrews, and boy, it's a great passage that is found in Hebrews chapter 13, verses 12 through 13. You want to turn there and look at this.

Remember now, the ministry is suffering, but the ministry is not suffering for yourself; it's suffering for Him. You need to get that. Some of God's people suffer through things people say to them, do them for themselves. You know what? You need to get out of your mindset, get your mind off yourself, and see who you're suffering for. You're not suffering for yourself; you're suffering for Him. You may be suffering because you did something stupid, but in the ministry, you don't suffer for yourself; you suffer for Him. Therefore, you don't take it personal. You don't hold a grudge. You learn to forgive and to forget, just like Christ did.

Now look at Hebrews chapter 13, verses 12 through 13:

Hebrews 13:12-13

12 Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.

13 Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

See that thing? "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people," that would be me and you, "with his own blood, suffered without the gate." "Let us go forth therefore unto him," that'll be the rapture, "without the camp, bearing his reproach." Hey, He didn't take all the suffering on the cross personally when they did what they did to Him on the cross. My friend, what they did to Him, they'll do to you. I mean, come on. They called Him an illegitimate child of a German soldier. They called His mama a whore. They called Him an illegitimate. They lied about Him. They called His name. They called Him an illegitimate. They mocked Him. They beat Him. They hit Him. They spit in His face. They mocked Him by saying, "If you be the Son of God, come down off that cross," knowing that He was not going to come down. Do you know what? He didn't take it personal. He took it for you and for me. Now, if He can take that on the cross for you and me, why can't we take it for Him? That is a question. He didn't take the suffering on the cross personally. He took it for you and me. Therefore, don't take the suffering you go through in ministry personal. Do it for Him.

Then after all of that, talk about a model. After all of that, Luke chapter 23, verse 34. After all of that, the beatings, the spittings, the spear in the side, the beating of His back, the mocking, the ripping Him naked, putting nails in His hands and in His feet. Has anybody ever had that happen to you? After all of that, look what He says in Luke chapter 23, verse 34:

Luke 23:34

Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.

He didn't take that personal either. He knew they weren't taking it out on Him; they were taking it out on the Father. But He was willing to go through without taking it personal, and He forgave and forgot. I'll tell you what, Roman soldiers may have put the hands and the nails in His hands and His feet and the spear in His side. It may have whipped Him and did all the thing, but friend, it was your sin and my sin that put Him on that cross to begin with, and He didn't take that personal either, did He? Because after we had died and done everything, from the time we were born to the time we were saved, we did the exact same thing to Him that the Roman soldiers did

to Him. We just did it by cussing His name and doing this and doing that and breaking every rule and every law ever had. Do you know what He did? In spite of that, He never held a grudge. He forgave us.

You see, real forgiveness basically, we'll get into this in the weeks to come, real Bible forgiveness goes back to you understanding how He forgave you. If you can't forgive and forget, you don't fully understand how He forgave and forgot you, and that's spiritual immaturity. Just that simple. I hear people talk all the time, and they like to talk about how spiritual they are, put things out how spiritual. I close with this. You've heard me say this before, but it's an illustration that really makes the point.

If I was to set up and say, "You know what, we're going to have a thing here a month from now, and I want to have you sign up. We're going to have some fun, and let's have a Bob Alexander lookalike contest." You all know me, and you all know how I am and the way I do things, and I'm going to give you two months to get it all down, and then we're going to have a party, and you come up here and you imitate me. I'm going to stay out of the room, and you imitate me, and people have got to pick out if I'm really up there or not. Boy, some of you really, really, really get it down. I pick four or five guys, and boy, you get my mannerisms down. You get everything about me down. You get the way I walk, the way I talk, the way I use my hands. You get my mustache. You just do everything I do. That night, we have that thing up here, and they're one at a time, and there are about two of you that, I mean, we can't tell. Some of you are thinking, "I'm still in this, and this is a trick." You get my wife to come over, and she looks, and she says, "Man, I don't, I don't know. This guy really, really looks like him." So you call my mom. She comes in, flies all the way over. You wheel her down in a wheelchair, and she says, "I can't tell which one he is either. Bobby, is that you in there?" I don't know. It's a thing where somebody wins, and everybody says, "Okay, Bob, this is you up here. It is you." About that time, I walk in the back door and walk up here and stand next to the guy, and I'll tell you, he's done the job, man, and you guys are just taken out. He wins hands down.

But you know what? Christianity is a lot like that because that guy could imitate me. He could get my mustache, get my wonderful looks. He could get all the things about me, and he could come to the place where he could imitate me right down to the bottom line. But in actuality, he'll never really be Bob Alexander until he gets the mind of Bob Alexander. That's what a lot of Christians do. We imitate Christ so well. We put on the right clothes. We put on the right smile. We say the right things. We put on a big facade. We carry the right Bible. We do everything that we're supposed to do. But I want to tell you something, at the end of the day, it's about none of that, ladies and gentlemen. At the end of the day, the only thing that makes you Christ-like is, do you have His mind?

When you have His mind, and you see things His way, not your way, you deal with problems His way, not your way. You learn to forgive, and you learn to forget, the greatest attribute that God has. You learn to respond instead of react. You learn to forgive and to forget, and you learn and understand who you're doing this for and who you are in Christ, and you never come to the place where you ever doubt that again, and you never come to the point in your life where you ever take anything personal because you realize that the ministry is tough, and people are imperfect,

but your job and my job is to hold the line with the mind of Christ, and we deal with situations as best as we can. We don't always do it right, but the bottom line is, we do it the best we can.

I had a lady come in to see me a couple weeks ago, and I thought this was pretty interesting. This lady a couple of years ago went through a very bad divorce. Her and her husband hadn't gotten along for years and years and years and were in and out of churches and for the most part went nowhere. He had gotten so bad in that situation that she actually hated him, and I'm sure he hated her. They got a divorce, and it was a very hard, bad, bitter divorce, and both of them were Christians, and it was a thing where it was just one of those situations that it was just too little, too late. By the time I got my hands on it, it was impossible. Believe it or not, there are situations that become impossible to do what really needs to be done. In counseling, I'll tell you that sometimes you find scenarios, and some of you know what I'm talking about, where in actuality, the situation has gotten so bad and so desperate that there's really not a right thing you can do. Now I know that sounds hard for some of you, and you can't grasp that. No, no, stick around, maybe you'll learn some things in time. But the only thing you can do is not the right thing. The only thing you can do is the best wrong thing. That sounds completely contradictory to the Word of God, but boy, when you put human nature in a factor, and what human nature does to other human beings, what people do sometimes, you will find yourself in a scenario.

They both came to church for a while, and he couldn't handle it here. She came in to see me about three weeks ago, maybe four weeks ago. She'd been coming to church now, she got back here about eight or nine months ago, and I've known him for probably 35 years. She came back to church about eight or nine months ago and got into the Bible, got into the church, coming to Bible study. Women started to work with her, and she started to be very faithful in everything she could come to. She came in to see me a couple of weeks ago, and she said, "Bob," she says, "I want to tell you something." She laid out the whole story how she hated him. She says, "You know, I wanted him to die." She said, "I didn't want him to really suffer dying; I just wanted him to die." I looked at her. She said, "Maybe just a little suffering." She said, "I just wanted him to die. It would be easier in my life. It would be easier in everything I had to deal with if he would have just died." She said, "But I've got to tell you," she says, "I want to come in here and tell you," she says, "I've asked God to forgive me for that, and she says, 'I've come to the place where I have forgiven him.'" She said, "I don't know if it can ever work out between us or not, but bottom line is this: I went and told him that I want him to come to church here. I want him to get whatever help he can get, that I hold no grudges toward him, that the anger is gone, the hatred is gone, and I feel ashamed of myself for feeling that way and asking that. But I just wanted to come in and tell you that that's where I'm at now."

I looked at her and I said, "Honey, I really appreciate that, but let's learn from this. Do you know why you feel that way now?" Before she answered, I explained it to her. I said, "All your life, you've been doing it your way, and doing it your way will always lead to that bad situation you were in. For the last eight months, I've watched you do it God's way, and I've watched you put the Word of God into your life and put the principles into your life, and I watched God change it. You are living proof that God can take somebody that wants somebody to die and bring them to the point where they want somebody to do what God wants them to do and forgive and forget."

Because the key to your life will be the key to all of us: biblical principles, living our lives by the principles of the Word of God, looking at the situation, getting yourself out of it, putting Christ in it, dealing with it by the Bible. It'll work.

In ministry, this chapter is the greatest chapter on the key single thing, and I tell you, chapter one defines the ministry; chapter two defines you and me as ministers: our forgiving spirit, our ability to not take it personal, our ability to keep in mind who we're doing this for, our ability to respond versus react, our ability to understand that people are going to drive you up the wall sometimes, but you know what? How many times do I drive God up the wall? Realizing that being Christ-like simply means being like Christ in everything we do.

Father, we do thank You and praise You for the Lord Jesus. We love You. Thank You, Father, for the time that we have set aside today, and we pray, Father, that out of this group, You will raise up men and women who want to work alongside of me. I've told them from the very get-go of this book that I just don't want to minister to them; I want to minister with them. I want them to help me. I want them to learn everything that they have to learn, glean everything they have to glean. But Lord, none of these things will work in other people's lives if they're not going to work in our lives first. In other words, we have to be the model in our own lives to get to that point where we can effectively for anybody else. It's a process. It's a process that I fully understand and am patient to work through and help, because I know that somebody that wants it will get there. But Lord, help us to understand and go away today realizing that You did save us for a purpose, and that purpose is the first benefit and the second benefit, and to fulfill that second, we have to get Christ's mind. We have to learn to forgive and to forget. Lord, we'll thank You and praise You in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it. Amen.