

### I. The Purpose of Ministry and the Book of 2 Corinthians

We are headed in a direction in our church to train people to really be able to work in their own life first and work through the problems by using biblical principles. We think that's foremost in our lives: being able to handle every circumstance or situation that comes into our life by going to the Bible. But then we want to develop a group of people that have the ability to help others.

The ministry is simply taking what God has given us and then taking it to someone else and giving it to them. My Father in the Lord said one time that ministry is nothing more than one beggar telling another beggar where to get bread. And that is so true. That's what we're about here. That's what we want to train people to be able to do: helping people in the crises of their lives, being able to get to the Word of God and solve their issues, whether it be a bad marriage, problems with their children, or individual issues in their life. That's where we're at.

And so we decided to study the book of 2 Corinthians because the book of 2 Corinthians is really the handbook on ministry. It's a book that Paul wrote to the church at Corinth after he wrote 1 Corinthians. It's an interesting two books that kind of go together because, as I've said many times, in the book of 1 Corinthians they're really messed up on just about everything, and he has to really deal with them. But somewhere in the process, they begin now to want to do what's right. So in the book of 2 Corinthians, he writes them chapter by chapter, admonishing them and giving them great insight into how to do the ministry. For us, it forms the handbook of how the church today should really handle the issues and the great concept.

### II. The Doctrine of Forgiveness and the Priesthood of the Believer

We talked about how in chapter 2 that it's the great chapter on forgiveness. It's built around an issue that happened in chapter 1 where a man got into some very serious problems in his life. The church, because he would not do what was right, then kind of excommunicated him. They put him out and said, "Until you get right with God, you're not coming back, and we're not going to have any fellowship with you," which is the biblical way to handle it when somebody doesn't want to do what's right.

Somewhere in the process, we're not told the details, this man comes to himself and wants to get back in fellowship and make it right with God. At that point, Paul begins then to tell the church, "Hey look, if this guy, just like you, you put him out because he wouldn't do right, now he wants to do right, you've got to bring him back." And he lays out for us the great chapter on the aspect that as Christians, we need to be able to have the ability to forgive people.

Many times, as we've talked about already in our introductory sermons, many times it's people who have done something to you personally. Sometimes it's people who just fall into sin and have to be dealt with. I think last week probably gave you the basis for your ability to understand

not only the whole concept of forgiveness but how to take the fundamental foundation in your own life and make it work for you. Because we laid out the great doctrine, probably the single greatest doctrine in the Bible for you and for me in relationship to how we deal with issues, and that is the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer.

Now we know that you and I are a priest after the order of Melchizedek, a spiritual priesthood, and Christ is our high priest. Remember I told you last week, I showed you the example of the Levitical priesthood in the Old Testament, which was physical, is a picture of the spiritual priesthood that you and I are part of because we are God's children. Just as the Old Testament priesthood worked within the tabernacle, we then as God's priests work within the tabernacle, our body, to reconcile a man to God.

That's really what dealing with people and their problems in life are. If you're dealing with somebody who's unsaved, your goal ought to be to reconcile them to God through salvation because they're never going to have anything in life that is going to work for them. They'll have no power over the sin in their life. They have no power over anything in their life until they come to a place in their life where they have the Lord Jesus Christ as their own personal Savior. That's where they get the power to overcome everything. So when you're dealing with unsaved people, you're dealing basically in the format to try to get them through their issues, their circumstances, reconciled to God as far as salvation.

But there'll be many times that you're going to work with people who are struggling in life, who are saved people. They've gotten off the track or they've got into some bad situations in their life, and now they're having some real issues in their own personal relationship. In that sense, you're there to reconcile them to God, not back through their salvation—they're already saved—but through their fellowship to get them back where they need to be. That's very key to understand that.

That's what a priest did in the Old Testament. Somebody came up in a literal sense and said, "Hey, I trespassed against my neighbor here. I shot his dog. I didn't mean to, but I did. And the guy said he's really upset with me." So he actually brought an offering to that priest. That priest took that offering, did the work, and made it right before God, and then it all went down the chain of command, so to speak. That's how it worked out.

Obviously, we don't do that physically. You bringing an offering to God because of your sin, whether you're saved or you're lost, doesn't do any good for anything. No, what God's looking for in you and me is a broken spirit and a contrite heart that wants to do what's right. When you have that, then you and I take that person through the Word of God as God's spiritual priest, and we bring them through that process to get reconciled to God. That's simply how it works.

You can better see now and hopefully understand how this great doctrine of the priesthood of the believer and its application to our lives is really the foundation for your ability to be able to forgive. Two key words we looked at last week, and you want to remember these two key words because you will hear them a lot and you will be required to know them. That is where he said, "I forgive anybody in Christ's stead." And then he says, "in the person of Christ," you and I.

The idea that when you and I work with somebody in the Bible and help them through life or get them reconciled to God, or you and I forgive them or bring them into our life, we're actually standing in the place of Christ. He's up at the right hand of the Father as the high priest. You and I are doing the work of the ministry as His priests on this earth and having the power to deal with them through the Word of God.

There's a lot of confusion today. Many churches take the form of a very high ecclesiastical hierarchy. I talk about that. Basically, what comes to mind would be the Roman Catholic Church. This is not a criticism of them; it's just the way that it is. In their theology, what they teach is that the Pope is the Vicar of Christ. Vicar of Christ means "in the place of Christ," that when God went back to heaven, they left him in charge. Then you have an ecclesiastical high order that comes down to a hierarchy that works its way down to what we know as Roman Catholic priests. That's why so many Catholic people, or all Catholic people, are required to go to that priest and have confession. They tell them. Then the priest has the ability then to give them whatever he does, and that helps them get exonerated from their sin and to confession and all the things that they've got to do. That's how a structured church in an ecclesiastical way has all of the things done in a fashion that all comes back to a spiritual hierarchy.

But in the Bible, the spiritual hierarchy starts with Jesus Christ. He is my high priest. Everything I have, I have with Him. The Bible says that there is no mediator between man and God other than Christ Jesus. In the Old Testament, yes, you had to go to a literal priest and confess your sin. You don't need to confess anything to me. You have a high priest seated on the right hand of God the Father who makes intercession for you. That's the only priest you need. Your job and my job is to facilitate that of helping somebody get to that point where they understand it.

In the Roman Catholic Church, you have to go years and years and years to seminary, and then you get ordained as a priest, and then you have the ability to do that. In the Bible, every one of you today who are saved, you are because you're saved. The moment you got saved, you're part of that spiritual priesthood and have the ability through the Word of God to do what I do every day. Most people think that my job is different than your job. This is one of the mindsets I'm trying to change, and many of you have picked up the idea. There really isn't any difference between me and you. I am a pastor. That is an office within a church that puts me over this church and accountability to God as far as the leader. But my daily ministry duties are exactly what you ought to be doing. That's the concept of God's priesthood. That's the way it has to work. Christ is my high priest, and you and I are His priests, and we administer the Word of God in people's lives every time you try to help somebody with the Bible.

Now today, I want to read again this passage and begin to see why it is so vital to get the spirit of forgiveness down. Not just because the greatest character quality of Christ is His ability to forgive—that's really important—but rather to see how it will affect you in your own life. And then later on, in the lives of people that you're going to work with. You'll see today that it's not just for others who have hurt you or you yourself, though it's very important. But in dealing with people down the line, down in the road in your life, you will use this and teach this and find yourself dealing with this over and over and over again. We'll talk about that here in a little bit as we get through it because there's always going to be an issue along that.

*But if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved me, but in part: that I may not overcharge you all.*

*Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many.*

*So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.*

*Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him.*

*For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things.*

*To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ;*

*Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.*

Father, we thank you and praise you for the Lord Jesus. We ask you today, Father, to give us wisdom and insight as we look at this great passage and focus on yet again another great principle. I pray, Lord, that you'll raise up out of this church men and women who have the desire and have the ability to be able to stand in your place and take the open Word of God and to help people, to help them through their issues in life. That we might be faithful priests as we minister the Word of God and minister to people's lives and their needs. We thank you, Father, and praise you for our time today. We pray you'll bless us in Jesus' name. For His sake we ask it. Amen.

### III. God's Plan vs. The Devil's Plan

You heard me say many times how God has a plan for your life, and you should probably understand that by now. I'm sure you do. But I'll tell you something else: just as God has a plan for your life, the devil has a plan for your life. All through the Bible, you're going to find the Bible is in conflict over two things. There are only two spiritual beings, two forces in this universe, when it comes right down to it from a Bible standpoint. One of them is God, one of them is the devil. Where God died for you and wants you to be everything for Him, the devil wants you to be everything for him.

You find it in a great story in the Bible in the book of Daniel. I think Daniel chapter 1, when we get into the real hands-on counseling things, we'll spend a lot of time in Daniel chapter 1. The book of Daniel is an incredible book, especially chapter 1. I know that Daniel is the book that everybody gets excited about, about prophecy, and I understand all of that. There are some great prophecies in Daniel. But don't get so excited about the prophecy that you miss that Daniel is probably one of the most practical books you're ever going to find in the Bible for your life and my life. Because Daniel pictures you and me. This idea that the devil has a plan for you and God has a plan for you is never more clearly laid out than it is in the book of Daniel chapter 1.

You basically know the story. Daniel, the Bible says, is of the king's seed. He's in the line of Christ. In that sense, he's a picture of you and me because you and I are in Christ's line through a

spiritual new birth. He's in a line of Christ through a physical birth. You'll find him in that line in Christ's genealogy if you ever study it out.

What has happened is this: Israel has gone down into captivity. Nebuchadnezzar has come down, and this is about 606 B.C. now, and has taken the whole nation of Israel captive. The first thing he does, the Bible says, is he scans over all Israel and he picks the very best that Israel had to offer. In other words, he goes after the key men and women who have the potential to ever bring Israel back to God. He looks at the sharpest, the neatest, the keenest minds that Israel had. The ones that had all the ability, if Israel ever got back on track, could rise up and be the great spiritual leaders. Those are the ones that he targeted. And he brings them to Babylon.

When he brings them to Babylon, the Bible says that he instructs their keepers to give them a daily provision and to teach them, the Bible says, the way of the Chaldeans, to give them certain food that they would eat, to bring certain things into their lives that were totally foreign from what they had when they were back in their homeland. Time this morning would not permit me to tell you the wickedness and the ungodliness of the Chaldeans. Nebuchadnezzar himself was not only a great type of the devil in the Bible, he's also one of the 18 types of the antichrist. The Babylonian Empire was as wicked as you could ever imagine it to be.

What he wants to do is take these children of the King's seed, Daniel, and all these ones that he's taken, and amalgamate them in. The Bible tells us that he wants to do it for three years. It clearly says down there around verse 5 that at the end of three years, after they give them all this stuff and do all this stuff, teach them the thought, the thinking, and the teaching and the tongue and all the stuff that goes on with it, at the end of three years he says that they might stand before the King, being Nebuchadnezzar.

Now that's a great picture. That picture shows you that God wanted Daniel to stand before Him, but Nebuchadnezzar wanted Daniel to stand before him. Just like you and me, God's got a plan for your life. The devil, Nebuchadnezzar, has a plan for your life. You see the process too because Nebuchadnezzar then brings all the things of the world, all of the things of the filthiness of the Chaldeans and the Babylonian Empire he put in their lives to try to get them to stand before him.

So my point is simply this: you're going to take a stand one way or the other. There will be no neutral parties in this thing called life because the two opposing parties or forces here, God and the devil, will not permit it. The moment you decide you're not going to stand for God, you're going to stand for the devil. You can't take a middle ground and say, "Well, I'm not standing for either one." That doesn't work. You're either one or the other. The Bible says God's viewpoint is, "If you're not with me, you're against me." That's not a good position to be in.

Like I said, the devil wants to destroy you and your family and have you die in sin. God, on the other hand, died for you and your family. One wants you to be in heaven with Him forever, the other wants you to be in hell with him forever. So you've got to understand that God has a plan for your life, but the devil has a plan for your life.

There's another great principle when it comes to dealing with situations like this, and maybe it will help you understand. You'll tell this to people when you're working with them to try to get them to see this. The devil wants first and foremost to get you in hell. No question about that. So from the time you're born, he throws everything in your life to try to get you that way. On the other hand, the other force, God, wants to get you into heaven. So He'll do everything to get you that way.

Along the way, some of you have trusted Christ as your own personal Savior, if not all of you. At that point, we now know from the Bible that the devil never can get your soul in hell now, ever. You're sealed unto the day of redemption. There is no such thing as losing your eternal security and losing your salvation. That's just trumped up in the minds of people that the devil has put there to defeat them all of their life. Once you trust Christ as your own personal Savior, you're hooked, and He's yours, and you're His. It's never a question after that, "Are you saved or lost?" The only question after that is, "Are you a good child of God that's obedient to Him, or a bad child of God?"

I've never understood it. All of you have kids, most of you, and you older folks, you know that when you had kids, your kids weren't perfect every day. There are times you had to deal with them, give them this or give them that, and hold them accountable for things. But you know, the worst thing they ever did, they're still your child, but you have to correct them, and that's the way it works with God.

Now, when you understand that, then you realize this: the first plan the devil has is to get you in hell. When you get saved, that plan goes out the window, but he's not done with it yet. He'll just take it this way. He'll say in his mind, "If I can't get your soul in hell, and you got saved, and now you're eternally God's, here's what I'll do: even though I can't get you, I'll get your kids. I'll get your family. I'll get the people you work with." What he does, he'll allow you to go to heaven and make that choice, but then he'll put all these things that Nebuchadnezzar wanted to put into the Hebrew children of the King's seed, and he'll play the odds. Even though he'll never get you, he knows that if you become a wishy-washy person and you never take a stand and you never grow spiritually and you never do anything with your life, he may never get you, but there'll be hundreds or maybe even thousands of people. I know parents today that they're going to heaven and their kids are going to die and go to hell just as sure as I'm standing here. You know why? Because they got saved at some point in their life, and then the devil got them off track, and then the rest of their life, he kept them ineffective.

So what I want you to know today and begin to understand this thing is God's got a plan for you, but the devil's got a plan for you. It's a battle for who you're going to follow. Just as God, as I said, has a plan and He'll put everything in your life to help that plan. That's why He gave you the Bible, why He gave you the Holy Spirit of God, why He gave you a church with a pastor and people that will help you. But at the same time, just as God will put everything in your life to help you, the devil will put everything in his life to stop you.

I've had people say, "How in the world am I ever going to win if I'm in this gigantic chess game where God and the devil are knocking me all over the board?" Of course, the answer to that is

the truth of the matter is if you're saved this morning, you have already won. You just don't know it. I would advise you to go back to Daniel chapter 1 and find out how Daniel dealt with it. Because the answer is in verse 8, he was just like you. He was faced with everything that came around him. And yet he was taken out of his home. He never saw his parents again. He never saw his friends again. If there's anybody who could have justified his situation, which we like to do, and said, "Well, here I am. God stuck me here. So I'm going to make the best of it," it would have been Daniel. That's what we do so many times.

But the Bible says in Daniel chapter 1, verse 8, that Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's meat. You see, Daniel knew that the devil had no power over him. That's the thing you need to learn today. This is where I'm going with this. The devil has absolutely no power over you and anything as a Christian in anything in your life unless we give it to him.

## IV. The Samson Principle and Biblical Principles for Overcoming

With that, I go back to what I told you last week about the Samson principle. Samson is another great example that we'll spend a lot of time with here next year. Samson is a great picture of all of us. As a Nazarite, God has a job for Samson. He wants him to do. But, oh, look what happened. The devil stopped him at every turn. But the only way he could stop him was because Samson, much like you and me, allowed the devil to do it.

You see, Samson's like most of us now saved Christians. He violates every principle that you can find in his life that God gives you. And then he walks around wondering why his life is always in a disaster. There are two great New Testament principles that are found as the root of his problem. I tell you that every story in the Old Testament, I've told you this before, is what you do is you find the story and then you find the New Testament principles and you line them up, and you've got the greatest picture and the teaching concept to give somebody exactly what their circumstances are. He forsakes two great biblical principles that are the root of his problem. As long as he or you or me continue to violate these two principles, we aren't going anywhere.

- Principle number one is found in Ephesians chapter 4 verse 27.
- The second principle is found in Romans chapter 13 verse 14.

Now these two principles are what get him in trouble, and these two principles are what get us in trouble. Our issues in our lives that keep us from doing the work of a priest are our own choice. We choose not to forgive somebody. You see, we choose not to forgive somebody. That's our choice. That's what we do. We choose not to do what we're supposed to do.

I have a rule that you've probably heard me say it before, that when I deal with people and they've got problems, this is the rule that you'll want to learn. It's a basic fundamental thing that your concept, but most dealing with people is basically based on fundamental concepts. It's

simply this: you cannot change or solve issues in your life with the same kind of thinking that created those issues or those problems in your life. Something has to change.

In Samson's life, it never changed. It never did. Samson, like most of us, always takes the path that makes the choice that is best for him. He never stops and considers, "God's got a job for me to do. I'm one of the judges. I'm supposed to be the great deliverer for my people, the nation of Israel." He never thinks about that. All of his life and every choice he makes is about him. Boy, I'll tell you what, he is one of the greatest studies in the Bible on human nature.

A couple of weeks ago, and I love to hear how things kind of shake down, a couple of weeks ago I gave you a little concept that when it starts wrong, it ends wrong. Now you've got to keep in mind, I'm teaching this to you in a conceptual concept. I'm not necessarily preaching this to you. I'm preaching this at you that you will get it and understand the concepts to help you, yes, with your own life first. But human nature is such an amazing thing. I don't know how many people have called me on the phone or talked to me over the process since I started doing that. They simply, people hear what they want to hear. I understand in the Bible why you can listen but not hear. I mean, it's very clear when you deal with many people. People, just like you choose to serve God or not serve God, we choose what we want to hear and what we don't want to hear. You can hear a sermon, and you know what you'll hear? You'll hear the things in there that don't affect you, and you will never hear the things that you need to change about your life. That's just the way we are.

Somebody called me up here a couple of weeks ago and said, "Well, you know what? You said, 'It starts wrong, it ends wrong.' Why should I even try that?" They don't hear the part that says, "unless you change it, unless you do the right thing, if it starts wrong, it ends wrong." Immediately people will say, "Well, I'm in a bad marriage, I'm in a bad scenario, it started wrong, so why not just end it?" That's where human nature goes. But you see, I wasn't talking about if it starts wrong, it ends wrong being your marriage. You missed the part. I'm not saying if your marriage starts wrong, when it ends wrong, I'm not talking about your marriage. Now, your marriage may get a divorce, and you may get a marriage a thousand times. You may have all kinds of problems. But when I say it starts wrong and ends wrong, I'm not talking about the end of your marriage. I'm talking about the day you stand in the judgment seat of Christ. That's where it's going to end wrong because God's got a plan for your life.

But you see, remember, I talked to you about looking short term. That's all you see. "Well, I'm in a bad marriage, or I'm in a bad relationship, or I'm in this or I'm in that. So Bob said if it starts wrong and ends wrong, there's my out." I'm not talking about your bad relationship or your marriage. I'm talking about if you don't change it, where it's going to end wrong is the judgment seat of Christ because God has something He wants you to do. Your marriage is just part of that process, good, bad, or indifferent.

People hear what they want to hear. Samson, like most of us, is always taking the path that makes the choice best for him. That's what we do. I do. I know you do. I've watched you. I know I do. I've watched me. Sometimes I'll stand here and step out and watch me. I just did it. See, that's me. That's human nature. We all do it.

Today I want to focus on what happens when you don't learn the concept of forgiving and choose to follow your own heart instead of God's heart. Thursday night, I forget who asked the question in Psalms 32:8, but it was an incredible question. It was that question over there that talked about that God will guide you with His eye. I took you back to Song of Solomon. I told you how that simply means that you see the same things that God sees the same way. I'm not saying just see the same thing God sees. I'm saying the same thing God sees the same way He sees it. That's the difference. That'll take the selfish motive out of it. That'll take the flesh out of it. That'll take the personal element out of it. That's where it's at.

## V. Satan's Advantage Through Unforgiveness

Today I want to just focus on one verse. We're going to probably be in 2 Corinthians chapter 2 for a long time here. But I want to focus on one verse that sets the stage for our study of how forgiveness will in time, if you don't learn to forgive, absolutely destroy you. Absolutely destroy you. Remember now, to forgive or not to forgive is a choice that we make based on the two principles: giving place to the devil, making no provision for the flesh. Now I know that that will work in every area of your life, but we're talking about the concept of forgiveness here. These two are based on violating these two biblical principles and doing what we want instead of what God wants because we don't see that God has a plan for us.

Now I want you to look at verse 10 and 11.

*To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ;*

*Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.*

Now that's the verse I want to talk to you about today. I want to talk to you about the concept of Satan getting the advantage in your life. Then I want to talk to you about the second part of that verse, that we're not to be ignorant of his devices. There are two parts to this verse, and I want you to see it today. In theory, Satan should never be able to get the advantage over you, but in practice it happens all the time.

In parenting, dealing with parents, I always tell parents this when they have little children. I think it's probably the single greatest piece of advice that anybody could ever give anybody who's raising children. I always tell them, "Never allow anybody to have more influence in your child's life than you. Never, never, never allow anybody to have more influence in your child's life than you." You know, the reason why your child hits 12, 13, 14, and 15, and you can't tell them anything now, is because you lost the advantage to somebody else. Many times it'll be a teacher. Many times it'll be a coach. It'll be somebody who befriended them because you were just too busy. There was somebody who would listen to them when they wanted to talk because you didn't shut the TV off. What happens is, parents lose the advantage with their children because they allow their child to have a relationship with somebody that has more influence for them than you do.

This is why your daughter will come to the point when she's 15 or 16 years old, she'll hook up with some guy with earrings down to his toes, and drew stuff all over his body, and a ring in his nose, and a bone through the thing, with big ears down like some African cannibal with bottle tops in it or whatever they put in them. You'll look there and say, "My God, where did you find this guy? Are you in a movie? Are you part of the casting of something?" You know how she found it? Because you wouldn't listen. You let that goofy guy get more of an advantage of her life. And guys do the same thing with girls. The moment you allow somebody to have more influence in your child's life, you're too busy for them at four, five, six, seven, eight, nine. So now it's 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, they're too busy for you. You didn't guard that relationship, and now it's too late.

Satan gets the advantage over you and I the exact same way. When we start associating with things and spending more time with things that are not of God, the Word of God, the people of God, we start spending more time with the devil's crowd and him than we do God's people and His crowd, then somebody has more influence in your life than God. That's what it comes down to. You yield yourself to other influences that are outside the Word of God.

Now, this is why the church should be a family. This is why the church should never be a political machine. It should be a family of people who are human, all make mistakes, that all help each other, that are all there like one big family. All the times they get together should be fun, they should be joyful, but it should all be centered around the Word of God. There should be no fear here on my part or your part in any way, shape, or form. We're all the same. We all have the same goal. We're just trying to get to it. I may be the guy in charge, but in the end of the day, I'm no different than you. We all work together. We all have to help each other. That's what God intended the church to be. If it's that way and it's healthy that way, then nobody will ever get an advantage over you because nobody will ever pull you from that.

I've seen it happen with gals that get hooked up with unsaved guys or guys who get hooked up with unsaved women. It's a thing where they come to church, they get involved, but they're out there on the peripheral, or they just never really fix the things in their life. They come to Bible study, they come to church, they hear everything that everybody else hears. But then suddenly some unsaved guy or some unsaved gal drags them off. It is a process to it. You can watch it happen. First thing it goes is Thursday night Bible study. Then they're not in a prayer group. Then they don't do this, but they don't do that. Very slowly they make that process. It's a process that they're now through association spending more time, and somebody else is getting more of the advantage than God is. But in that case, that's their choice. But that's what happens. It's exactly what happens.

Simply put, Satan gets the advantage over us when we won't apply the principles to our life that God has given us and start applying the principles to the world. What we simply do is we start as Christians giving place to the devil and then provision for our flesh. Those two principles will kill you every time. I don't care what problem a person gets into. I don't care, say a person, I don't care what the extent it is, what level it is. I'm going to tell you right now, at the beginning of that concept problem, when it took issue and it took birth and it grew legs, is those two

principles. Every time you give place to the devil, he got the advantage over you, and you fed your flesh. It's just that simple.

You and I forsake the clear mandate of the Word of God of our priesthood to forgive and to forget in our life first and don't deal with the issue the way we should biblically, then that's how the devil gets advantage over us in this particular issue of forgiving. When you don't forgive somebody, or you have the inability to forgive somebody in your own life or somebody, and you know what, I've seen people be absolutely at odds with people that never did anything to them. They may have done something wrong, but it doesn't matter if they wanted to make it right. It did nothing to them. It's just that their arrogant, self-righteous attitude will not allow themselves to forgive somebody. I mean, I can understand you might struggle with somebody that did something to you personally, but somebody that brother or sister out here just falls into sin and then you don't like them when it had nothing to do with you. That's the height of where I'm going this morning to show you how this thing works.

Now, if you don't know it, we talk about levels going up. I want you to start at a level like our church did and move up these levels, and you and I, this counseling concept will take us up to the next levels. The prayer group took us up to the next level. Restart took it up to the next level. I always talk about going up those levels. Well, let me tell you something. When the devil's in your world and you're doing it standing for him, those, there are levels too, but they don't go up. They go down. It's just as clear. You're either going to stand before Nebuchadnezzar or you're going to stand before God. It's just that simple, and God's levels go up. Nebuchadnezzar, the devil's levels go down. It's not hard. It's not hard.

When you don't forgive somebody, an automatic process starts in your life, and it doesn't go up. It goes down. This is the reason why forgiveness is one of the most crucial things because unforgiveness in the Bible always follows a biblical pattern, much like human nature, like people's problems, like people's thinking process. Patterns and unforgiveness follow a biblical pattern. It starts with unforgiveness, then it goes to anger, then it goes to hatred, and then it winds up in bitterness.

## VI. The Progression of Unforgiveness: Anger, Hatred, Bitterness

Now, anger and hatred are two great words in the Bible because anger is a biblical concept. God gave you the ability to have the emotion of anger. There's nothing wrong with anger. Anger is defined in the Bible in Matthew 5:22, where the Bible says that,

*But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.*

If you have a legitimate cause to be angry, anger is a legitimate emotion. I always thought it was interesting that on all the new Bibles, that verse says there, "He that is angry without a cause is guilty before the court." What the new Bibles all do is they take out the phrase "without a cause."

So the new Bible just says, "He that is angry with his brother is guilty before the court." Nobody ever sees that, but when you get into the Bible and you're paying attention, there was a time when Jesus Christ was angry with his brother when He threw them out of the temple. But you see, He had a cause. "You have made my Father's house a den of thieves." The new Bibles take out "without a cause" and just make Jesus Christ a guilty sinner before the court. That's how the devil does it. It's exactly what they do.

The Bible says that anger is okay, as long as anger is under the control of the principles of the Word of God. Anger is not, there are some things you should be angry about. There are some things that you should be angry about, and you should, I don't think any guy's worth his salt in preaching if he isn't angry about something. But it has to be contained within the Bible principles. See, anger by itself is not wrong. It's anger out of control that's wrong. That's what happens. You get dads and husbands and wives and people who get angry, and it's out of control because it isn't guided by the principle. So that's wrong. You see, anger is a legitimate God-given emotion, but it has to be guided by the Word of God.

Now, the next one is hatred or hate. There are things as a Christian you should hate. Somebody asked a question the other night in Proverbs chapter 6 verse 16, the six things that God hates. Well, there are six things you can put on a list as a Christian you ought to hate. You ought to hate what God hates. See, but we don't worry about hating things. We worry about hating people, and you shouldn't hate people, but people do.

Now, hatred is a biblical emotion too. The Bible says that God hates with a perfect hatred. Psalms 39. There's no motive behind it. God hates on the basis of His holiness. God hates sin. God hates evil. You ought to hate sin. You ought to hate evil, but you don't need to hate the person sitting next to you. You don't need to hate your neighbor. You don't need to hate your ex-wife or your ex-husband. Well, we'll leave that one go. You don't need to hate people. You need to look at people like God looked at them and know you may not agree with them or you may not like them, choose them for your friends. The bottom line is you've got to love them.

I had a lady one time, she came in to me, she had all kinds of marital problems. She had them for years. She says, "Bob," she says, "I just, I just, I just hate my husband." I said, "Well, hon," I said, "I understand that, but, but, you know, you can't do that. Bible says you can't hate." She says, "Well, I just can't, I can't, I just can't love him. I can't like him as my husband. I just hate him." Then I said, "Well, if you can't, if you can't, if you can't love him as your husband, then, then, then, then love him as your neighbor." She says, "I can't even love him as my neighbor." I said, "Okay, then, if it's that bad, then love him as your enemy because that's what you've got to do." See, there's no ground for a Christian for hatred outside the biblical process of hatred. Hate the things that God hates. You don't hate people. I've had people do some of the most horrendous things to me in my 40-some years in the ministry. I don't hate anybody. I'm not angry at anybody. You know what? When you understand how the concept works, you don't want, you don't want to go down that path because unforgiveness follows a biblical pattern of anger and hatred. And then it turns to bitterness.

Now, bitterness is not a biblical emotion. Bitterness is not a biblical emotion. Bitterness is a process of out of control, unforgiveness, uncontrolled hatred, uncontrolled anger. It's when you get unforgiven, it turns to anger, it's out of control, it goes to hatred, it's out of control. That level down will take you to bitterness. There's no place in the Bible or there's no place in your mind for my life for bitterness. Bitterness is a result of out of control, anger, and hatred. It's outside the biblical principles of the Word of God.

This last level that you get to when you don't learn to forgive, this is why the Bible says in Proverbs you're like a city broken down without walls if you have no rule over your own spirit. Your emotions control you. A person who hates out of control and a person who is angry out of control and who lets it get him to bitterness out of control is a person who is not operating in the biblical principles. This last level is the final level. It's the final level. It's the final step for a Christian. There's no lower to go than this. I might say that when you reach this level, most do not return because now the devil has absolutely complete full advantage over you.

## VII. The Root of Bitterness

Now, I want to give you the defining chapter on bitterness in the Bible. We're going to look at it for a minute, and this will help you maybe put it into context. It's over there in Hebrews chapter 12. I want you to look at this. I think it's very important.

*Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:*

*Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;*

Now, I want to talk about that verse for a moment, and I want you to understand the concept of bitterness because, let me tell you something, I can't ever hardly remember a problem that a couple didn't have or a person didn't have. There was a deep level problem that when you started peeling back all the layers like an onion and getting down to the core, that at the base of that was not the concept of bitterness based on something somebody did to them. Many times when husband and wives have very serious marital problems and they can't get through them, there may be a million things out there that we could talk about. But you know what the real aspect of the problem is? The fact that one or two, maybe both of them, are bitter at each other, and they're bitter at each other over something that probably happened 10 years ago that the other person doesn't even remember. Or maybe it's an ongoing thing or a series of things.

When men get into a relationship with a woman and they don't understand the difference between a man's spirit and a woman's spirit, and he tramples over that spirit and crushes it like an eggshell, let me tell you something. You're in for some problems with bitterness down the line. I guarantee you, unless you're smart enough to fix it on site, because that comes back to a man not having the ability to see his wife's spirit and realize that she is the weaker vessel. Where you and me can get in a fight, Joe, and after I whipped the floor up with you, you and me could get in a fight and then afterwards we'd just say, "Hey, it's okay, buddy." I mean, you know, every time I stuffed you in volleyball down there and you got upset about it, remember that? How you went up and I reached down and pulled your leg down and then you got, maybe afterwards you got me

in the parking lot and what did I say? I said, "Joe, what did I say to you?" Or I said, "Joe, you hit me and you're out of the church." You said, "Oh, I'm sorry, Bob," at that point. Two guys can get in a fight and say, "Hey, buddy, it was all right." We pick it up and go on from there. See, you can do that. That's what guys do. The problem is guys think that they can do that with their girlfriends or women or their wives.

You know, you say something to your wife. You've got to be careful what you say. When your wife comes down and says, "Do I look fat in this dress?" No, you just simply say, "Honey, have you lost weight?" Put a mental note. When she goes to get her hair done, mark it down. First thing you say when she walks in the door, "Whoa, I like your hair." Don't make her say, "Do you like my hair?" You want to know what a bad hair day is? A bad hair day is a day you don't recognize she got her hair done. That's a bad hair day. Trust me on it. That's a bad, bad hair day. Men are supposed to be smarter than that, but they're not, unfortunately. They don't understand that you trample over a woman's spirit. You just don't say, "Ah, come on." It happens all the time. You do something really stupid and you really hurt her. Then you simply say, "I'm sorry." She says, "I've said, I'm sorry." She's still crying. "Well, I said, I'm sorry. Come on, let's go do something. Why don't you want to go do something? I said, I was sorry." See, that's what me and Joe did when I whipped the on him. That's what me and Joe did. Doesn't work that way with her. Different spirit, different spirit. The quicker you learn that, the quicker you're going to be better off in life. I guarantee you.

But that's just the way it works. I mean, it's a thing where when you get to that point, when you start dealing with people, when you start peeling off the layers, I guarantee you down in the bottom of that, down there is a bitterness spirit over something that happened that maybe the guy didn't know when he did it, still doesn't know when he's doing it, and has continued to do it until you fix that root problem. If it can be fixed, until you identify that and deal with it, you aren't going anywhere. You're not going anywhere at all. You're just like a four-wheel drive with all four wheels stuck in the mud up to the hubs. You aren't going no place. You are stuck until you understand that.

This is why it's so important for you to realize what I'm getting ready to tell you, because you're going to use this over and over again. I guarantee you, I've met Christians that didn't go to church anywhere and were saved people. That's where I'd start to talk to them, and I'd find out, "You know, well, I used to go to such and such church. I was faithful in it for years and years and years." I thought to myself, "Wow," I said, "you know, that's an incredible thing." I said, "How come you don't go to church?" Then he goes on to tell me how the pastor or the deacons or somebody said something to hurt his feelings 25 years ago. He's bitter about it and hasn't been to church since.

Now, to me, I know I've got to deal with people's problems, and I'm sympathetic to that. I talk to them and work them through it. But deep down inside my heart, and I would never say this, but I'm teaching you, I think that's about the stupidest thing you could ever do in your life. Let one thing in life ruin the rest of your life when the people you hate and are bitter against have long forgotten the event. Don't even know.

I had a friend of mine. He's dead now. Some of you would know who this guy is, so I won't tell you, some of you old people been around for a while. This guy was saved, and I liked him. He's kind of a bully, but I liked him. One time years ago, a kind of little riff went on in a church, and he kind of took the wrong side. Everybody else left the church, and he stayed, and publicly in a deacons meeting—back then we had 175 deacons, we only had three people in the church, but we, boy, we had leadership up the gazoo. There must have been 40 guys there that were deacons and pastors, and we probably had 30 pastors. He ripped him. I was going to say a new one. That's not very kosher. He ripped him a new one. Sounds like new one. He ripped him to shreds in front of these deacons.

Now, personally, I don't think the guy had that coming. I knew the inside of the story. I knew that that should have never happened, but I had nothing to do. I was like, you know, I have no responsibility here whatsoever. I was just a new guy on the block. But this guy, he never forgot that. He kept coming to church. But I watched him over the years. I ran into him before he died. This had been 20 years since this happened. We met at the gym. I saw him there. We talked for a little bit. We were walking around the thing together, and I'm just talking to him. I always kind of liked this guy, and I always felt sorry because I thought he got a raw deal because the pastor that did it to him was a wuss, and he was trying to make himself like he was a leader, and he was no leader whatsoever. So he just, it's not the one you're thinking of, but he just, you know, it was a tragedy, and I felt bad for him.

So we're walking around 20 years after the fact, we're walking around the track together, and we're just talking out of nowhere like a lightning bolt, like a meteor coming through the atmosphere. He just jumped right back 20 years, and I saw he had never, never, never got past that day in his life. He was angry. He was bitter, and he was absolute all because of one thing in his life that he could not get over. You talk about the devil getting advantage of him. He'll do it to you too. If you let him, he will. He will.

Now what I'm going to give you today in this passage is there are eight principles on dealing with and understanding the sin of bitterness, and you want to get these down. These are not great theological terms that you're going to find, but they're great practical things. They're things that will help you always remember what you're dealing with when you're dealing with somebody who's got a problem of bitterness because bitterness goes back through hatred, goes back through anger, goes back to what we're talking about in this chapter, the inability to forgive.

Now it says down here, verse 15, it says the root of bitterness. The root of something is where it starts. So what we're going to talk about here is where does bitterness start? The root of bitterness. The root of bitterness lies in the sin of having an unforgiving spirit and giving the devil the advantage in your life or my life by violating the physical principles on forgiveness. Remember now, you're a priest. It's your job to forgive and work through that just like Christ.

*Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;*

Here's the root of bitterness. When you have bitterness in your life or you're dealing with somebody that is bitter in their life, here's the root problem. Don't get caught up with the

symptoms. Go right to the root problem, and the root problem is defined for you in verse 15. Anybody see it? Raise your hand if you can think you know what it is. Verse 15, this will show and tell. Look at verse 15. Anybody? What do you got, Tabby? Absolutely. The root of the bitterness is that the grace of God was a failure in your life.

So what does that mean, Bob? He means I'm not saved. Absolutely not. Failure of the grace of God in your life or my life in any particular problem simply means this: the reason why bitterness gets an advantage on you and the devil gets an advantage on you is because of the failure of the grace of God. You failed to give that person the same grace that God gave you, or you failed to give that person the same grace, and I love this one, we give ourselves. There's a lot of things I'll allow me to do whatever you do. I'm you're in trouble. That's the failure of the grace of God. The failure of the grace of God is that if you knew the truth today and you understood what God should do with us today, we'd all be dead. We wouldn't just die of heart attacks. We all need to die in the most grotesque manner you could ever think of. Some of you need to be burned to death slowly. Some of you need to have your fingers cut off one at a time. That's what God ought to do to us because of all that we've done to Him and how wicked we've been in our lives. But you know what? He doesn't do that. You know why? Because by grace are you saved, and God gave us grace. When that grace fails in your life, in my life, it's the failure of taking the same grace that God gave us in our wicked life and then us having the ability to give that grace to somebody else in their wicked life. That's the root. That's the root. The root is the failure of the grace of God. When that happens, "lest the root of bitterness springing up."

## VIII.Eight Principles of Bitterness

Now there are eight things about roots I want to talk to you about, and I'm an expert on roots. Because every time I go to my bedroom to find my clothes, I'm rooting around for it for an hour. Did you ever study roots? Did you ever study roots? Root of bitterness. Now this is why when you understand these eight things, there ain't nothing theologically razzle dazzle about them. They're just practical things that I got one day reading my Bible in this passage sitting under a big tree.

- Roots always grow under the surface.
- They grow best in darkness.
- Roots always grow in dirt.
- The more roots get fertilized or contaminated, the faster it grows.
- Roots grow swiftly.
- Roots grow stronger every day.
- Roots grow deep.
- In time, the root of bitterness will attach itself to every aspect of your life.

I'm going to leave you with one key concept, and I'm going to be done. Just take a second here. This is the key concept. This is something you want to remember. You want to remember it when you're helping with people. You want to remember it in your own life. There are many times in your life when people will do something to you or say something to you that you deserve it. We already covered that. That I deserve it. But in any case, the bottom line is this: you may many times not be responsible for the situations and the circumstances that happen to you, that people do to you, that transpire into your life because of other people or other circumstances. You may not be responsible for them in that case. But let me tell you this: as a Christian, you may not be responsible for it happening to you, but you are responsible for how you deal with it. It has to come back to the biblical principles. When you work with people, that's the way it's got to be. When it deals with your own life first, that's the way it's got to be. When it's not, you can just get your check card out, and you'll take a list of the bitter people who are bitter, wicked, go to churches, but they are the most wicked, bitter people, angry at everything in life simply because it started with a root and it started with their choice of not forgiving somebody. Next week we'll get on the second half of that verse and we'll talk about his devices. Let's pray.