

The Bitterness of an Unloving Brother, Part 1

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After being crucified, Jesus, with His lifeblood draining out of Him, prayed in Luke 23:34: “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” After all of th[e] persecution [He endured], after being beat[en], spat upon, falsely tried, falsely accused, shuffled from one place to the next, scourged, and all of that, some of Jesus’ last words were “forgive them.”

Stephen, a faithful follower of Christ in the early church was confronting some hardhearted Jews. Many had come to repentance and faith during Pentecost, and shortly thereafter the ones who had not come to Christ were hardened. So, [Stephen] hit them with a pretty hard sermon, tracing the salvation plan of God through history, and at the very end [of his sermon], he let them know that they had killed their own Messiah. These words pierced their hearts, and cut them to the quick. They began gnashing their teeth at him and rushed upon him in one impulse, picking up stones and [stoning] him to death. His dying words, as the last rock knocked the life out of him, [were], “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” [Acts 7:60].

St. Angelo was born in Jerusalem to Jewish Christian parents. He grew up and later went to Sicily to preach the gospel there. [In Sicily] there was

a very rich, powerful, and evil man. [St. Angelo] denounced him publicly, and shortly thereafter, that man, with a bunch of ruffians, came bursting in to one of [St. Angelo's] sermons and stabbed him. St. Angelo, lying on the ground mortally wounded, looked into the angry face of the man who had just struck him with a mortal blow, said, "I forgive you," and died.

All through Church history, Christians have forgiven those who have sinned against them. Why? [It is] because that's what Christians do. It's one of the manifestations of saving grace. When you realize what a great sinner you are, how you have failed the Lord so many times, and that Christ—through His death, burial, [and] resurrection—has given you complete and total pardon, then you find it in your heart to forgive others who have committed minor offenses against you. As we begin to grow as Christians, we see just how monstrous our sin is. We are really good at sinning. Our sins are like the sand of the seashore [and] the stars of heaven [in number] [see Hebrews 11:12]. They become more apparent as we grow in grace. We see more and more of sin in everything we do. As one Puritan prayed, "Lord, I repent of my repentance," [meaning that] even when we're confessing, we need to confess of our confessing because it is just not good enough.

This is why true Christians find it in their hearts to forgive: They know they have been forgiven such a great debt. Of course, God also commands us to forgive. Jesus, in Matthew 6:15, said, "But if you do not forgive others, then your [heavenly] Father will not forgive your transgressions." In Mark 11:25, Jesus said, "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions." Are we to love one another as Christians? Of course we are. We are even to love our enemies [see Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27]. What does love do? Love "does not take into account a wrong suffered," according to 1 Corinthians 13:5. In Ephesians 4:32, we are exhorted to "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." In Colossians 3:13, the Word of God says we need to be "bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever

has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.”

You see, refusing to forgive is the characteristic of someone who doesn't love God because those who love God forgive. Why? [It is] because they are forgiven. Paul describes unbelievers in Romans 1:31 as “unloving [and] unmerciful,” and in 2 Timothy 3:3 as “unloving [and] irreconcilable.” [This attitude is basically saying], “I refuse to show you mercy. I refuse to show you grace. I refuse to be reconciled with you. I will not forgive.” [However], if you're a Christian, you must walk in the Spirit [see Romans 8:4], which means you must love. If you must love, then you must forgive. I know that the greater the sin, and the more prolonged the sin, the harder it is to forgive, but this is what God calls us to do. And not only does He call us to do it, He gives us the grace to do it.

What does the world think of us when it hears of Christians getting a divorce because of irreconcilable differences? Think about that. Truth be told, in most cases, the reason for divorce should read, “I am a selfish, unloving, hateful person. I refuse to forgive my spouse even though I swore a solemn oath before God and witnesses to love [him or her] unconditionally 'til death, and I have broken my vow.” That's how it should read in almost every case. Other Christians will not speak to parents, siblings, friends, or even others in the church. Why? [It is] because they've been sinned against, or they think they've been sinned against, [or] somebody hasn't met up with their unspoken expectations. So [these Christians] become their own king, judge, and executioner, and they pass their own laws [and] judgments and execute their own sentences because other people have hurt them and therefore they are going to hurt them back by giving them the cold shoulder, ignoring them, not speaking to them, not being kind, not loving them.

Jesus told the parable of the unforgiving servant to address this very issue. If you remember, in Matthew 18 Jesus talks about this master who had a servant [who] owed him [an] unpayable debt—a huge [debt] that [in] a whole lifetime [he] couldn't repay. It was just gigantic. The unforgiving

servant pleaded, and the master extended mercy and forgave him. Shortly thereafter, that same servant found one of his fellow workers and began to choke him. He had him thrown into prison because [the fellow worker] owed him a very small debt. Then the parable concludes with this rebuke in Matthew 18:33–35: “‘Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?’ And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him.” And then Jesus says, “My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.”

An unforgiving heart in the life of a Christian is an oxymoron, a contradiction, something that just can’t happen. It is not to happen. It does not give glory to God. It’s a disease, and it spreads to other people like leaven in the Church, and soon other people, if they see you and you aren’t forgiving, [decide], “Well, then, it’s OK if [I] don’t forgive, too.” An unwillingness to forgive hatches an entire zoo of vicious animals that tear the Church apart. We’re going to be seeing some of [those animals] this morning.

In Luke 15:1–2, what happens is [that] Jesus has been preaching, like He always does, and tax collectors and sinners are coming under conviction. They’re repenting of their sins, they’re coming to Jesus in faith, and He is receiving them. Meanwhile, the Pharisees and scribes are looking upon these sinners coming to Jesus, and they’re pretty incensed about it. I mean, after all, these people are the openly rebellious. These are the people [who] have sinned against the Law of Moses. These are the people who have, for years—maybe their whole lives—not submitted to God. [The religious leaders] see these people as highly offensive, even blasphemous. How dare they come to God after what they’ve done? Well, [the religious leaders] are blind to their own sin, aren’t they? They had the Law, they knew the Scriptures, and yet they weren’t living godly lives. Oh, they were doing all the external deeds, but internally, things weren’t right. They were kind of like [a] beautiful apple with a rotten core.

Instead of humbly repenting of their sins, they grew angry and bitter toward others who did. And so, Jesus rebukes them with three parables: the

parable[s] of the lost sheep, [the] lost coin, and the lost son. We're looking at that last parable, the parable of the lost son, the prodigal son. We've been working our way through the text. The prodigal started out very selfish, asked his father—a very shameful thing—for his inheritance early, and his father gave it to him. [His father] couldn't give him the land inheritance. (We're going to talk about this more next week.) He couldn't give him his land inheritance because that wasn't fully transferred until the father died. But [the prodigal] did get whatever liquid assets he could, and immediately left to a distant Gentile country to squander his inheritance on sinful living, which he made short work of, plunging himself into ruin.

Then, [he finds] himself in poverty as famine struck that land, all of his friends [have] abandoned him, and he was then alone, suffering the consequences of his own sin. [Then] he [comes] to his senses by God's grace, repent[s] of his sins, and turn[s] to home. As he approaches his home, the father is there. The father has been looking, watching, and waiting, and gladly receives him, hugs him, and kisses him. Not only that, he clothes him with the best of robes, puts a golden ring on his finger, puts sandals on his feet, has the fattened calf killed, and invites the whole town to the feast [see Luke 15:11–24]. This is all a picture of God's grace toward sinners who repent.

Then we come to our text for this morning. So, if you have your Bibles, look at Luke 15 and follow along as I read verses 25–32.

Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. And he said to him, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound." But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. But he answered and said to his father, "Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never

neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.” And he said to him, “Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.”

From this section, I discovered eight [warnings against the] ungodly attitudes displayed by the older brother. We’re going to look at the first four this morning so that you can know how not to act toward other sinners who have repented.

The first is: Don’t have an angry, bitter, unforgiving heart. Look at [Luke 15:]25: “Now his older son was in the field.” What was he doing there in the field? That means he was out maintaining the property, his inheritance. When you have a big piece of land, there [are] always fences to mend, irrigation ditches to clear out, trees to trim, and sheep to shepherd. Whatever he is doing, he is out on this large estate working the land, making it profitable, keeping it in good shape.

Look at [Luke 15:]25–26: “And when he,” that is, the older son, “came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be.” There was a party going on. The Greek word translated “music” here is the Greek word *sumfonia*. Guess what word we get [from that]? [The older son] approaches the house, [and] there’s a symphony, an orchestra, playing. It’s going for it, man. There’s a party. The whole town is invited. People are celebrating. And he’s tired. He has been out in the field; he’s been working. Maybe he’s been gone two or three days. He comes back, and when he returns, he finds the whole town in celebration at his house. He was never invited. Nobody told him about [the party]. He asked, “What in the world is going on?” He’s slightly offended that all this celebration is happening.

He was hoping to just come home and get cleaned up, have some food, and get some rest, but now there's this big party going on and he wasn't invited. No one even told him [about it].

So he asks the servant what's happening, and in [Luke 15:]27, look there, we read: "And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' But he became angry and was not willing to go in." The word translated "angry" here describes a "swelling, rising, accumulating fury or wrath." It kind of begins in a stew and just ends in an eruption, which we're going to see. It irritated him that his brother, first of all, shamed his father, got his inheritance, squandered it in loose living in another town, and walked away from his third of the estate. (Remember, [the older brother] would [receive] two-thirds as the older brother, and the younger brother one-third.) When the younger brother left, they didn't know if he was ever going to come back. And so, now [the older brother] is taking care of the whole spread, and maybe he hopes he's going to get the whole [thing], and now the wayward brother is back. And not only is he back, but the father didn't go out there, and say, "What are you doing back?" but actually receives him back gladly, and has a huge celebration and invites the whole town.

Be assured that when Jesus is giving this parable, the Pharisees and scribes are feeling it. They are feeling the knife blade go in. Maybe you're feeling that way a little bit, [too]. Sometimes when people have sinned for a long time, out in the world, rolled in the mud of all that is out there, they just don't get cleaned up all of a sudden. Think about it. [Do] you come to Christ, and [then] you're perfect the next day? We just don't get that sanctified that quick[ly], do we? I wish we could speed up the process. [When] somebody comes to Christ, [and] he come[s] in [to church], he might not be dressed quite like you wish he was, or he might not have the habits you wish he did, and he just do[es]n't change overnight. He's messed up. He [has] issues, like the rest of us. You can't expect somebody to come

to Christ and be instantly perfect, instantly sanctified. It never happens that way unless he come[s] to Christ and die[s] right after that.

Spurgeon says:

Certain Christians that I know, who have always been very proper, [often] have little sympathy with those who have been great sinners. They seem as if they do not want to see such people as these brought to the Savior. “Why!” they exclaim, “There are girls from the street, and men [who] have been burglars, and all sorts of rabble being brought into the church.”¹

Amazing. Let’s just say it’s a Friday [and] you’re trying to get home so you can just take the weekend off. You’re rushing home, and you’re not being a very careful driver. You plow through an intersection, and all of a sudden there’s a car there that you didn’t even see, and it runs into you. There’s a huge crash, and you come spinning into the opposite lane, where a truck plows into you, knocks your car upside down, and you’re sliding down the road on the roof. Your car is mangled; you’re injured. You’ve got lacerations, internal bleeding, broken bones, and a severe concussion. There you are, seriously wounded, [with] glass everywhere. There’s gasoline leaking from the tank on your upside down car. You’re just hanging there, delirious from the concussion, upside down, suspended in your seatbelt.

Soon, you hear sirens, and you see all sorts of flashing lights, and people [in] uniforms walking around. You’re so glad that they’re finally there. You’re barely conscious, but you hear two policemen complaining that they wish you could have gotten in the accident just a little bit later because they were just about to go off their shift. You see several firemen standing back with disgruntled looks on their faces, [saying], “Listen, if we try using the Jaws of Life, [or] we use the cut-saw here, we might create a spark. We’ll burn ourselves up.”

¹Charles Spurgeon, “*Great Forgiveness for Great Sins*,” Sermon #2863, December 24, 1903. Available at: <http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols49-51/chs2863.pdf>

Two paramedics are peeking in the window, and they [say], “Man, there’s a lot of blood in there. We just got our new uniforms.”

The ambulance driver says to his partner, “Oh, man, this one is going to take forever. We’re probably going to miss several runs. We’re going to lose money on this one.” How would you feel if you were in that car? Cared for, loved? Listen, rescuing people [from] life-threatening situations is never convenient, and it’s never easy. It’s hard work. It’s dirty, risky business. Whenever you read in your Bible the word “save” or “saved,” you can substitute in every instance [the words] “rescue” or “rescued.” That’s what it means, to be rescued from sin, from eternally life-threatening sin. When people live in their sin for years, they’re messed up by it. You know [this] because you’re one of them. Sin messes you up.

Maybe people who have just come to Christ, their speech isn’t all that good, and their dress may not be all that wonderful, and they haven’t learned how to speak Christian-ese yet, [or how to] fit in to the church culture. So they kind of stick out a little bit. But helping them grow in the Lord is necessary. Think of all the people who helped you grow in the Lord. After you’ve known Christ for a while, look back at your life and think of those people who spent so much time with you, [who] were so patient with you when you thought you knew everything and you didn’t know anything. [Remember] how they kept talking to you, encouraging you, meeting with you, admonishing you, and reminding you over and over and over again.

That’s why we need to practice the “one anothers” in the Church because we’re all messed up by sin. This is no reason to despise somebody. [Don’t think or say], “Listen, man. That guy just came to Christ. Look at his hairdo! Look at her dress! I mean, could you call that modest? I heard that guy does this. I heard [she does] that. [He] work[s] at this place.” Listen, if you have known the Lord for a while, you’re the fireman, the policeman, the paramedic, the ambulance driver: You are the rescuer for those who come in this door. You’re to be out and about, trying to find people who are deaf, trapped in their sin, and who realize it, and bring them in, and then minister to them.

When you're a Christian, you grow to hate your sin, and this is good. Just think about whatever the favorite sin is in your life that you hate, that you wish would go away, but just can't seem to get over. Think of how many times you've dealt with that. For how long have you dealt with that thing? Sometimes when we have sins in our lives that bother us, and we fight against them, and fight against them, and memorize verses, and go to great extremes to pound those things back and get them suppressed in our life that when somebody else comes in and they display those sins, we can kind of despise him because he's just like we are. He's just like the part of us that we hate, and so without realizing it, we [think], "Look at that person!" and then we realize, "Oh, yeah, he's just like I am, only not quite as far along in his walk with the Lord."

Paul says in Ephesians 4:31–32: "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." Beware of that bitter, angry, unforgiving heart because that will lead to so many other problems in your life and in this church.

We see [the] second [warning against an ungodly attitude]—don't be self-righteous—[in Luke 15:]28: "And his father came out and began pleading with him." This is great. I like the father here. These parables are so precise. The father went out to meet the prodigal when he came back, and now [the father] is going out to meet the older son when he comes back [from the field or wherever he was]. The prodigal had sins of passion, the older son has sins of attitude.

Spurgeon commented: "I never know which to admire the more, the love of the father in going to meet the returning prodigal, or in going out to talk with this coldhearted elder brother."² That's kind of true, isn't it? That is right. It is amazing that [the father] would go out to either of them. But he goes out to both. Look at [Luke 15:]29: "But he answered and said to his

²Ibid.

father, ‘Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours.’” Now just stop right there. Notice [that] the older brother sees his labors as slavery. The word here “serving” in the Greek [means] “slaving.” He has been slaving. [The older son is saying], “Listen! You’re just a foolish taskmaster. You’ve been telling me what to do all of my life. I’ve been doing everything you asked me to do.” He is furious. He doesn’t even get it. He is missing this huge thing called grace. He has no understanding of that concept.

Not only that, he sees himself as perfect. I mean, the guy is in the running to be the Messiah and Savior of the world, [according to him]. “I have never neglected a command of yours.”

“Really? You’re perfect?”

“Yeah!” That’s self-righteousness—a pretty screaming case of it.

G. Campbell Morgan, commenting on the older son, says:

Look at this elder son, what do we find? He was devoted to his father’s law, and he was devoted to his father’s service; but he was entirely out of sympathy with his father’s heart; and therefore unable to set the true value upon his brother.³

In other words, he didn’t understand grace; he didn’t understand mercy. He had all the external actions, but no love of God in his heart [and] no love for his brother, his blood brother. He was your classic legalist, doing all the right things on the outside, but none of the right things on the inside. It’s not like all those good external acts he did were wrong. Those are good. When we love the Lord, and we’re serving, those are all good things. We need to do [them]. Grace doesn’t mean [that you] become an antinomian—one who doesn’t live by any rules, just does whatever he wants. But, I’m telling you, you have to have a heart to go with the actions. The actions must be driven by a proper heart. You worship God in “spirit,” your heart,

³G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1986), 184.

“and truth” [John 4:24], not just the truth part. There has to be the proper motive because you can have ungodly motives that drive the proper actions, right? [You can] do them all for the wrong reason—to earn your salvation, to try and show off before other people, to appear a certain way before men.

This older son is rotten to the core. Mark Twain described people like this, saying: “He was a ‘good man’ in the worst sense of the word.” There are a lot of people who are “good men” in the worst sense of the word. [The older son] was a card-carrying obeyer, but inside [he was] empty. So beware of self-righteousness because it is an expression of pride. The self-righteous person always thinks [he] deserves better. He’s always getting the raw end of the deal. The self-righteous person has this sinful heart attitude because he’s unforgiving toward others. He is unwilling to forgive others. Why? [It is] because [he thinks], “They’re wrong and I’m right. They’re sinful and I’m holy. They blew it and I obeyed.” [That’s] self-righteousness and it is blinding. We often don’t see it in ourselves because we’re “right.”

Matthew Henry comments: “By the elder brother here we may understand those who are really good, and have been so from their youth up, and never went astray into any vicious course of living, who comparatively need no repentance...” He goes on to say, “Those who are comparatively innocents seldom know how to be compassionate towards those who are manifestly penitents.”⁴

[Perhaps] you have grown up in a Christian home, and you never did that. You never went astray, or dressed like that, or spoke like that, or did those deeds. Somebody comes in [to the church], and he’s just beginning to get over those sins he has been entangled with all his life, and you [think], “Man, what is wrong with that person? Why are we letting that person in here? That person is a sinner!” and implied in that statement is, “And I’m not.”

⁴Matthew Henry, *Complete Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Luke 15. Available at: <http://www.biblestudytools.net/Commentaries/MatthewHenryComplete/mhc-com.cgi?book=lu&chapter=015>

Let's say it's a bright spring morning, when somebody comes in to the foyer. You've never seen him before. He's perhaps a visitor here for the first time, and maybe his dress isn't quite what it should be—he's a little flashy, or his hairdo is a little extravagant. His whole appearance kind of says, "Focus on me, not God!" You're instantly disgusted with him. You see him from a distance, and [your] first thought is, "Ugh. What is he doing here?" If that's your first thought, you probably have a case of self-righteousness.

Keep in mind [that] that person might not even know the Lord. Should we expect him to live like a Christian when he isn't, when he doesn't have the Holy Spirit, [and he] might not know the Word of God? He doesn't know the Lord, but you do. He doesn't have the Holy Spirit dwelling within him, but you do. He doesn't know the Scriptures, but you do. He's never heard a sermon, but you've heard thousands. So, are you going to condemn him because he is not like you? I hope not. [Do] you want to cast stones at somebody with a mere glance? He doesn't know Christ. He is held captive by Satan to do his will [see 2 Timothy 2:26]. He is blind. He is spiritually dead. He is in need of rescue, and you're the one who is supposed to rescue him, not kill him, not complain, "Look at him in the car! He's bloody! This could be a problem. This is going to take some time." We can't condemn him for being what we used to be, and still are, to some degree.

Spurgeon notes:

There are some kinds of Christians who always feel that when there is a sinner introduced into the church, "Well, I hope that it will turn out a genuine case," and always that is the first thought. They are afraid that it cannot be. They have never sinned in that way. They have been kept, by the grace of God, from outward transgression, and they are half afraid to hear of these outrageous sinners being brought in, and so much joy made over them.⁵

⁵Charles Spurgeon, "Justification by Faith," Sermon #3392 February 4, 1914. Available at: <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/3392.htm>.

Is there a wonder why he is the way he is? If you throw stones, then the preacher has to come up, and ask you some questions. “So, how is your prayer life? How is your Bible reading, study, Scripture memory [going]? How is your giving? How is your serving? How is your gospel sharing? Shall we talk about how you love the Lord your God ‘with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength and your neighbor as yourself’ [see Luke 10:27] all the time?”

You say, “Could we change the subject? I feel the temperature rising in here.” What’s the problem? [The problem is] self-righteousness: the delusion that you are all good and others are all bad, see[ing] yourself as sinless and other people as great sinners. But what does the Word of God tell us? In Genesis 6:5, describing mankind before the Flood, it says that “every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” That’s pretty bad. Then in Genesis 8:21, it goes on to say that “the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth.” In 1 Kings 8:46, Solomon says, “There is no man who does not sin.” In Psalm 51:5, David says we are “brought forth” and conceived “in iniquity.” In Psalm 58:3, [it says] that “The wicked are estranged from the womb; These who speak lies go astray from birth.” In Jeremiah 17:9, it says, “The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it?”

In Romans 3:23, it says, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” James 2:10 says, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.” First John 1:8 says, “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.” That’s just a sampling. We’re all sinners and there are only two kinds of people in the church: great sinners saved by grace, and sinners who have not been saved by grace. That’s all there is, and you’re one of them. Beware of that self-righteous heart that condemns others for being what you at least were except for the grace of God, and probably still are to one degree or another.

[The] third [warning against ungodly attitudes is]: Don’t be jealous of what God gives others. Look at the end of [Luke 15:]29. The [older] son

says, “And yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends.” Notice he didn’t even mention the calf. “You gave him the fatted calf and you didn’t give me a goat, a scrawny little goat.” He’s jealous, isn’t he? All this attention is being given to the prodigal, who was the one who was openly rebellious and did all these outward acts of ungodly behavior, and now they’re celebrating his return, his repentance. But [the older son doesn’t] see that [he has] always done inward deeds of rebellion. Our thoughts, our hearts, are corrupt. We always do sinful deeds.

The word translated “jealousy” describes an “intense, fierce, zealous envy and covetousness, or desire to have something that someone else has.” There are a couple of degrees of jealousy. There is a good jealousy. God even calls Himself “jealous” in Exodus 34:14, [saying]: “[I am] the Lord, whose name is Jealous.” God is jealous for His glory. A husband should be jealous for the affection of his wife. We should be zealous to see God glorified. Those are the things that are good. But there is another kind of jealousy that begins to covet what somebody else has. [Then] the worst degree [of jealousy] is not only to covet what somebody else has, but to wish they [didn’t] have it and you [did] have it. The Pharisees [to whom Jesus is telling the parable] and the older brother [in the parable] didn’t like it that these sinners were being received. They wanted that attention. They wanted that celebration to be given to them. Beware of jealousy.

Maybe you have grown up in the church all your life, and you have served faithfully. This is your home. You know everybody here. You know every story that ever happened. This is kind of your turf. You [teach] your own Sunday school class. Then, all of a sudden, some young sprout, whipper-snapper, comes popping into church. He has only known Christ for two years, and he’s on fire for the Lord. Truth be told, he is a far better teacher than you are. He’s just new in the Lord, and somebody asks him to teach. Everybody is [saying], “Man, he is good,” and there are all these people commenting over and over. You keep hearing people saying, “Man, that was great. That was great. That was great. Oh, wow.” But you never hear them saying that about your lesson[s]. As he teaches more and more, you

notice [that] whenever he teaches more people come than when you teach. Pretty soon, he is getting advanced, and you are being set aside. You're kind of jealous because God's grace has given him that gift, and God hasn't given you that gift. He is getting attention and you're not. He is getting praised and you're not. That's jealousy. Not only do you want it, you don't want [him] to have it.

Do you remember the parable of the laborers in the vineyard in Matthew 20? Jesus went after this so clearly. These parables are great. The master [in the parable] says, "Yeah, go out there and hire some people to work the vineyard. It's harvest season and we've got to get these things in." So, they go out, hire a bunch of workers, they come in and they're working in the vineyard. The owner says, "You know what? This isn't good enough. Go hire some more." A couple hours later they hire some more. He says, "You know what? We're not going to get done. Go get some more." They get some more. All day long they're hiring people, and some people are only hired an hour [or so] before it's the end of the day. Then at the end of the day, do you remember what happened? The master says, "I want you to pay all the workers and I want you to start with the ones who have only been here an hour." And so, they're all there, and the people who have slaved all day are all tired and worn out. They see these ones who have only been there one hour getting a full day's wage. This is how Jesus concludes the parable. These laborers say [in] Matthew 20:12-16:

"These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day." But he answered and said to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?" So the last shall be first, and the first last.

You have to realize [that if] you want fair, you get hell. [If] you want grace, then be quiet because grace is undeserved and unearned. So if God has given you a gift, praise [Him] for that. If He has given you a great gift, praise God for that. If He has given you a ministry behind the scenes, praise God for that. If He gives you one up front, praise God for that. Why? Because it is all of grace, [that's why]. It's not like you deserved it, [not like] you earned your spiritual gift. It was given to you. Not only were you saved by grace, you were given gifts by grace, and you're sanctified by grace. So, what are you complaining about? [Are you complaining] that God was generous with that which is His own? [Are you] envious because someone else has some sort of gift, thing, blessing that you don't have?

Paul says in Romans 13:13–14: “Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.” Paul, describing the deeds of the flesh in Galatians 5:19–2[1], says: “Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy,” and he goes on to list some more, and then says, “of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” It's not Christian behavior. James makes this clear in James 3:14–16, where he says:

But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

We don't want demonic disorder [or] “every evil thing” in the church. Jealousy is the black plague that strikes on Sundays at high noon. Don't let it strike you. Remember that everything you have is by grace. You never earned it and you never deserved it. Jealousy is demonic, and it's not from God.

[The] four[th warning against ungodly attitudes is]: Don't hate others. Look at [Luke 15:]30: [The older son says], "But when this son of yours came. . . ." Now just stop there. Notice how he doesn't even call him his brother, [but] "this son of yours." He won't even admit he's related to him. He's not loving his brother. Maybe he never did. I've sat in my office and talked to married couples who referred to each other in that way, in the far demonstrative sometimes. Do you know what that is? [The far demonstrative is] "that" and "those." They refer to each other as "that man" or "that woman." There's a near demonstrative—"this man" and "this woman"—speaking of [something or someone] close by. So, you can say, "This woman," and that means at least they're close, but they don't even use that. Not only do they not acknowledge, though they're married, that they are married, but they don't even acknowledge the person is in the room.

[I might ask], "So, what do you think the problem is?"

"Well, that man. . ." or "that woman. . ."

"Hold on, wait a second here. Do you mean the person that you're married to, sitting a foot away from you in that other chair? The one that you swore to love and cherish until death do you part? That person?"

"Mmmm."

"OK, carry on."

But that's what happens, isn't it? When we're unforgiving, we begin to have this hatred. The absence of love is hatred. We're humans, and so we all have feelings, and feelings get hurt, and emotions go up and down, but listen, love is a decision of the will. If you look at Paul's definition of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4–8, you will see that "love is patient." In other words, love *chooses* to be patient. Love *chooses* to be kind. Love is not provoked. It *chooses* not to be provoked. All those things [those verses] say—"it is not jealous," [meaning] it *chooses* not to be jealous in an evil way—it does all of those things by choice, by the exertion of the will. There [are] no emotions in the list, and it's a big list. [There is] not a single emotion. Now, we're going to have emotions because we're people, but love is not defined by emotion. So, when somebody says, "Listen, I'm mad at you," or "I'm

going to give you the cold shoulder,” what they’re really saying is, “I refuse to love you.” And the opposite of love is what? Hate.

The Apostle John addressed this head-on in his first epistle. You can’t read through the book without seeing it all over the place. He said in 1 John 2:9–11:

The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

He can’t even see what he’s doing because he is in the dark. He goes on to say in [1 John] 3:15: “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.” Where did he get that? Oh, from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. First John 4:20 [says], “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.” Hatred toward one’s brother or sister in Christ and unwillingness to love somebody, forgive them, [or] be kind to them, is not Christian behavior. It is carnal, wicked, selfish, and we need to deal with it in our own lives. Jesus said in John 13:35: “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” They [have] to see it. People have to see your love for one another. That is how we make a visual impact on the world.

Well, that is four of [the warnings against ungodly attitudes]. Beware of an angry, bitter, unforgiving heart. Beware of a self-righteous attitude toward others. Beware of being envious about what God chooses to give others. Don’t hate your brother or sister in Christ. That’s half the list. If you’re struggling with these things, all you have to do is just confess your sins to God, and God will forgive you. Then keep pressing on. If you find

they keep springing up, then get some help—memorize some Scriptures, have somebody hold you accountable. You need to have people [in your life] who love you enough to say, “You know, that’s not kind. That’s not loving. You need to just deal with it and humble yourself.”

If you’re sitting out there and you realize, “You know what? I’ve been unloving all my life. I have been bitter all my life. I’ve been jealous all my life. Everything you’re [saying] about this older brother is [like] me,” then maybe you need to come to know Christ. You [probably] don’t know Jesus.

You say, “I know Jesus.” Well, I’m sure you probably know *about* Jesus. I don’t think I’ve ever run into somebody who said, “Jesus who?” Everybody knows a little bit about Jesus, but even the demons, James says in James 2:19, believe in God, but they’re terrified. They have an orthodox view of Jesus, but having an orthodox view, coming to church, reading your Bible, serving in ministry, giving, or doing deeds doesn’t make you a Christian. I hope you understand that.

There are many churches out there today [that] aren’t telling people how to become Christians. They tell them what to do. There’s always a confusion [about this] because whenever [we] hear the Scriptures, it’s always telling us to do these things and not do these [other] things. Then, if you don’t do these things, like we read in John, then you’re in the darkness. You can think in your mind, “Well, that’s because I need to do these things so I can be a Christian.” No, no, no. You become a Christian and then do the things, which show that you have the saving grace of God working in your life. Those things don’t make you saved, they’re manifestations of being saved.

We’ve had quite a few people come to our church, especially recently, who have told me, “You know, the church I used to go to, they never preached the gospel. They talk about the love of God, and receiving the love of God in your life, [but] where’s the gospel? How does a person get saved?” Paul did say that the gospel is “the power of God for all who believe” [see Romans 1:16], so if you don’t know the gospel, you can’t be saved.

What is the gospel? The gospel is this: God is a holy and just God, and He must punish sin. And guess what? You're a sinner. I'm a sinner. We're all sinners, as we just learned. That's the beginning of the gospel. Why? [It is] because if you don't realize you need [to be] rescued, you aren't going to try and get saved. You're in a lot worse condition than a person upside down in a mangled car. You are on your way to hell if you don't know Christ, and you need [to be] rescued.

The question is: So, how is it that I get rescued, anyway? Well, first, you need to realize that God is holy and must punish sin. You are the sinner, so you need [to be] rescued. Second, you need to realize what Jesus did. God became a man in the person of Jesus Christ. He was born of a virgin, escaping th[e] sin nature we all have because we are in Adam. Christ has God as His Father. He then lived a perfect life on this earth—taught, healed the sick, gave the teaching that we're now studying. Then He willingly gave Himself up as a sacrifice for sinners. He died in our place. He died the death we should have died. He died as a substitute. The wrath of God was poured out on Him, as I like to think of whenever we're having communion. "He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed" [Isaiah 53:5]. In other words, Jesus took upon Himself the punishment we deserved. He became the Lamb of God, dying in the place of sinners, "who takes away the sin of the world" [see John 1:29].

Now, that's the other part. You need to understand the work of Christ, that He came, willingly offered Himself up as a sinless sacrifice, died, and then rose again on the third day. There are still people who understand all of that. If you were to give them a quiz, they would get all that right. They're still not saved. Why? They understand [that] they need [to be] rescued. They understand the gospel, but then when it comes down to appropriating the gospel, how do you get a hold of that saving gospel message? Instantly their minds run to, "I've got to go to church. I've got to read my Bible. I've got to be good." That's not how you get saved. [The Lord] never saves anybody by works. He only saves them by grace. No one can be saved by works.

We're saved by Jesus. We're saved by faith in Jesus, believing in Jesus. [It is] not just an intellectual belief, but a trusting belief, a belief that grabs on to Christ, and says, "I am trusting in You and Your work alone to save me because I am a sinner. Please save me because I cannot save myself." Now, when you do that, you are born again. You become a new creature in Christ [see 2 Corinthians 5:17]. All of a sudden the Bible starts making sense. You find this joy in your heart that you never had before. You're excited to be at church. You're excited to learn about God. You want to serve. You want to tell other people about Jesus. Your whole life changes. It's just so cool!

If you don't know that, and you just come to church, go through the motions, and there's no joy, no love, no victory over sin, it might be that you just know [about] Jesus and you need to *believe* in the Lord Jesus Christ and get saved because He came, died, was buried, and rose again. He shed His blood so that sinners, like the prodigal, like the older brother, could go free. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for this text. We just pray, Father, that You would continue to grow us more into the image of Christ. Father, all of us see the sins of the older brother in our lives, whether we know Christ or not. We all are those sheep who go astray, each turning to our own way [see Isaiah 53:6], and though we may do it less than others, we still do it, and we're still guilty. But, Father, we also know that Jesus died for sinners, He did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance [see Matthew 9:13], and that once we have Jesus' blood applied to us, we are justified, we are declared to be right in Your sight. Though we are still sinners in practice, yet we have all the grace we need to live for You, and all the forgiveness we need to cover our transgressions until that time we die or are called home to be with You in the Rapture. Father, I pray that if there is somebody here who doesn't know you, may he or she turn his or her heart right now to Christ in faith, and just say, "I believe in Jesus. I believe He lived a perfect life. I believe He died for me, was buried, and rose again on the third day." And, Father, may You cause him or her to turn from his or her sins, to believe in that truth that You might cause him or her to be born again to a

new and living hope [see 1 Peter 1:3]. Father, we pray all of this in Your precious name, Amen.

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