

Study	Gamma 14
Topic	Forgiveness Part 2
Reference	
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Speaker	Dr Peter Ng

Proverbs 17:14 (ESV)

14 The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so quit before the quarrel breaks out.

A lot of people fight in church over small things, so basically the problem is very clear. So it is wise to overlook trivial sins.

1. Proverbs 19:11 (ESV)
Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.
2. Proverbs 12:16 (ESV)
The vexation of a fool is known at once, but the prudent ignores an insult.
3. Proverbs 20:3 (ESV)
It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife, but every fool will be quarreling.
4. 1 Peter 4:8 (ESV)
Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

So basically if you actually love like Christ love, you can actually cover a multitude of sins. So basically, it is wise to overlook trivial sins. Now the process, how important is this sin. Is it because you are oversensitive, someone just called you a little bit overweight, may be they are concerned about your health, so therefore they mentioned you that your belt size has changed. So it is wise to be not oversensitive.

Before confronting have I examined myself.

Proverbs 16:2 (ESV)

All the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit.

So before you actually go after the other person you have to examine yourself, don't hastily judge others.

Does this person show a pattern of behavior?

Is he always calling everybody fat or it just happened to call you fat, there is a possibility that we may have misrepresented the person.

What do wise people counsel me to do someone already aware of situation?

So if somebody did something to you and they are already aware, ask them their opinion because they may be able to tell you, hey that fellow really doesn't mean it, can you just drop the whole issue and also be aware of what is going on in a person's life. Some time a person will react badly if he has got

stress at home with the wife or with the children or financial stress. If you understand that then you will be able to discern.

Matthew 18:15-20 (ESV)

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 18 Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

So this is basically the teaching in Matthew 18. So Stage 1 is to GO. Don't fret, don't gossip and tell your cell group, go to the person because it says,

Matthew 5:23-24 (ESV)

So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Here is that someone has got something against you. You GO and try to reconcile.

Luke 17:3-4 (ESV)

Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, 4 and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."

So here is another situation where your brother sins against you and you rebuke you, that one he is upset with you, you also have to GO. So basically in the first stage, whatever the case is, we are supposed to GO.

Proverbs 27:5-6 (ESV)

Better is open rebuke than hidden love. 6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

So somebody who is always complementing you, how beautiful you look, how handsome you are, how wonderful talk you give, may not have your best interest in mind, someone who is a bit more sharp tongue and cuts you down and brings reality to your life perhaps that one is a more faithful friend. So forgiveness is not just a feeling, it is a transaction. You need to basically seek someone out to ask for forgiveness or settle the matter because there is something wrong, it is like accounting. You have got credit and debit, so there is a debit.

If it is just a feeling there is no need to interact just therapeutic forgiveness, it means you leave the mathematics as it is, you leave the debit on the debit side and you just deal with your feelings, that is not biblical forgiveness. Biblical forgiveness is dealing with the actual debt involved. Typical reaction for most of us, we blow up, say things you surely regret later on and that's my number one problem in life, blow up too fast. Others will be, avoid the matter and tell everybody else. That will be the best thing. You just go out and tell everybody else. So here the problem is there is no ownership, no true repentance.

Matthew 18: (ESV)

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone

The reason why you want to do this, you want to keep the circle small because it involves pride. This is the number one problem in an Asian context. In our context we tell everybody the sin, finally it comes and winds up to the person who sinned against you, it is a fact of life.

Some years ago I was in Australia and I met an Australian gentleman who is now lecturing in the University of Monash who used to be a pastor. He married a Malaysian girl. He was the pastor of a Chinese congregation. Firstly, they pay him very less and secondly everyone knew his sins before him. In the end he actually gave up being a pastor and went back to becoming a lecturer, he didn't really understand Chinese culture. So Chinese culture never tell you face to face, they always go behind and circulate. So that is something that FBC has to deal with.

Proverbs 16:28 (ESV)

A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends

Proverbs 26:20 (ESV)

For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases.

Proverbs 18:8 (ESV)

The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body.

Proverbs 25:9-10 (ESV)

Argue your case with your neighbor himself, and do not reveal another's secret, 10 lest he who hears you bring shame upon you, and your ill repute have no end

EXCUSES

Why don't Chinese people talk to each other directly?

Well they will say

- He will never listen to me
- Its no use
- Its waste of time
- He will get even more mad

These are some of the excuses that we give but it is very-very important

Matthew 18:15-20 (ESV)

*If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 **But if he does not listen**, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses*

So you cannot say that I don't bring it to him because he wont listen. So the point is it is your initiative not the results, you have to leave that to God. Be gracious.

1. Willing to grant forgiveness as a gift not exact your pound of flesh.
Some of us we like to make the other person suffer, silent treatment at home, no dinner until they suffer and then only you cook dinner. You must be willing to grant forgiveness as a gift.

2. Do not expect the person to earn your forgiveness
 1. Ephesians 4:32 (ESV) Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

God gave us forgiveness for free, so therefore don't expect your spouse to make him earn the forgiveness.

3. Listen first and be prepared to ask for forgiveness too
4. Take the person at his word don't guess at his motives
 1. 1 Corinthians 13:7 (ESV) Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
5. Choose time and place carefully
6. Be patient and have modest expectations

So choose your words wisely

- Affirm why you are thankful for the other person
- Explain how you have been hurt
- Avoid using inflammatory words like you ..always, you never
- Avoid harshness and melodrama
- Carefully describe how you have hurt the other person
- Assurance of your true repentance with regret and determination to do better
- Avoid self justification words like , if , but or maybe
- Be specific of how you have been wrong not how you may have been wrong

This is all very easy to say but very hard to do. I have not lived up to this. I am still working on it.

STAGE 2 - BRING ONE OR TWO OTHERS

- Someone of the church leadership or close brethren
- Be prepared for their input they may ask you to drop it

Colossians 3:14-15 (ESV)

4 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body

1 Peter 4:8 (ESV)

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

- Go humbly -prayer
- Listen first don't assume you know all the facts

STAGE 3 - CHURCH DISCIPLINE

17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 18 Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

Serious sins and person is unrepentant and belongs to your church as a member.

The motive is not to salvage your honor where discipline is redemptive. Some of you want to have church discipline simply because your honour is affected. He insulted you, so I must have my pound of flesh, so you call all the elders, have a big court case and kick the fellow out. We are not here to salvage your honor. The reason why we have church discipline is that church discipline is redemptive. It brings the person to repentance. It doesn't settle debts as it were.

Galatians 6:1-2 (ESV)

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

So therefore when you actually bring this thing up, you escalate the matter, are you doing it because you hate the guy or you are upset with the fellow and you want to get your pound of flesh or you are doing it because you actually care for the person and if you did care for the person you do it gently. The moment I see you raise your voice, I know this is not gentle, this is not redemptive discipline, this is actually revenge, very simple, leaders in the church can actually see. The moment you are doing it out of anger, it is revenge and we are not here to do revenge for you. If you come gently and if you really care for the other person, yes we will get involved in church discipline. Dietrich Bonhoeffer says,

Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to his sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than a severe rebuke that calls a brother back from his path of sin

So although it is not a good thing to do but we always have to be loving enough to the person to point out the sin to bring him back. Discipline is always redemptive. Here is Paul talking about

1 Corinthians 5:11-13 (ESV)

But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? 13 God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”

So basically it is somebody who is a member of the church and who is involved in a habitual sin that is escalating in such a way that he may be in severe spiritual danger. So this is church discipline.

WHAT ABOUT THE UNREPENTANT?

Romans 12:14-21 (ESV)

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. 17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the

wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." 20 To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Romans 12:14-21 (ESV) Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. 17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." 20 To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

So here if you have got someone who is unrepentant, we are not to take revenge, subtle revenge like silent treatment, shouting, character assault, gossiping. We are not to take revenge. We are proactively to show good to people who are unrepentant as well. This is a farm house which in 2006, 2nd October, Charles Robert actually went inside there and took 10 people prisoner and he lined them all up and despite people pleading, they were only little girls. They were like 8 years old. Charles Robert shot and he wounded five and killed five outright. They live in an Amish community and it was a terrible-terrible thing that he did. He did it because his baby was sick and he prayed to the Lord and asked for healing. The Lord didn't heal and he got upset. God took my child, now I am going to take His child and he went and shot these kids. And some of these Amish kids are really brave. I remember one of them called Maryann, she put her hand up and told him, you want to shoot them, shoot me first. Another girl stood up and she said shoot me second and the third girl stood up and did the same and he did. He shot and killed all of them.

Later on the Amish community instinctively provided forgiveness. They reached out to the widow, they attended. Half the parents of the children who were killed attended the funeral of the murderer, to stand with the wife. It was amazing. Charles Robert's wife wrote,

Your love for our family has helped to provide the healing we so desperately need. Your compassion has reached beyond our family, beyond our community and is changing the world

Marie Roberts

This is the tremendous testimony of the love of Christ. So if you have people who are unrepentant, you leave room, do not avenge yourself, leave it to the wrath of God. When they went to the Amish community later on, the problem here is that the guy does not have a chance to repent because he died, he shot himself. But when they discussed it, the Amish community said, yes we will forgive him but we would also want justice. Forgiveness does not mean no justice. I forgive you but you have to bear the consequences and have justice roll on.

A lot of Christians have this wrong idea that grace cover everything, you can do whatever crap you like and you can get away with it. No you actually have the scales of justice. Justice and mercy must come together. So here God does not forgive everyone and Israel rests in that.

Deuteronomy 32:35 (ESV)

Vengeance is mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; for the day of their calamity is at hand and their doom comes swiftly.'

Deuteronomy 32:43 (ESV)

Rejoice with him, O heavens; bow down to him, all gods, for he avenges the blood of his children and takes vengeance on his adversaries. He repays those who hate him and cleanses his people's land."

So all the evil people who actually attack Israel; Assyria, Babylon, Persia, every single one of them got punished, even though God used them to discipline the people of Israel, God still meted out punishment to every single one of them. So therefore don't give me this crap that God forgives everybody unconditionally, because if everybody is forgiven unconditionally then will there be a Judgment Day. What is hell there for? So this idea of unconditional forgiveness because we are supposed to forgive others as God forgave us.

It is very important to have judgement because when you have judgment and justice, when you are suffering, when you are being persecuted, when you are being raped and killed and they cut off your child's head you can look to God that one day God would make things right. That is very-very important. If you live in a world where there is no justice, it will be a disaster.

- There is no place where a human can sit in judgment
- Revenge is usurping the prerogative of God
- Our refraining from revenge is a reflection of our faith on the justice of God

When we refrain from revenge it means we trust God and hell is a terrible terrible reality that faces the justice of God.

2 Timothy 4:14-15 (ESV)

Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. 15 Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message.

So here is someone who is used to try to sabotage Paul and he warns the church about Alexander the coppersmith and he tells the church to be careful about him and the Lord will repay him one day. Now then people will inevitably point to the fact that Jesus was on the cross

Luke 23:33-34 (ESV)

And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. 34 And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments.

This is a little bit troubling because here you have Jesus hanging on the cross, the people who are nailing him to the cross and then some people who say, "ha, this is unconditional forgiveness". He says, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Is this unconditional forgiveness? Now let me show you something. Why Jesus is asking God to forgive?

Luke 5:19-20 (ESV)

They went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus. 20 And when he saw their faith, he said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you."

Luke 7:49-50 (ESV)

Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" 50 And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Jesus can forgive if he wants to. The other one is that

Luke 23:41-43 (ESV)

And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” 42 And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” 43 And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

How to go to paradise if you have sin, Jesus must have forgiven him. You must understand that thief didn't come down and say, I repent, I repent. You know, forgiveness is a coin that has got two sides. One side is repentance, the other side is faith. So you cannot repent in absence of faith. You cannot have faith in the absence of repentance. They are two sides of the same coin, because repentance is turning away from your sin and turning towards God. So you cannot repent without faith. They are two sides of the same coin. So the thief turns and trust in Jesus, he must turn away from his sin. If the guy who is paralysed is let down through the roof because he trust in Jesus, so therefore repentance and faith are two sides of the same coin. So when someone demonstrates they have faith means he has demonstrated he has repentant. So here you actually have a situation where Jesus didn't forgive them, he asked his Father to forgive them because he is expecting the father at some stage in their life to respond to the forgiveness and this is why, if you look here, Paul was standing there and they were killing Steven and Steven says,

Acts 7:60 (ESV)

And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

So here is Steven in a scene not unlike that of Jesus Christ, but Steven can't forgive like Jesus and then you know this prayer was answered later on when Paul, Acts 9 repented that's the answer to Steven's prayer. Steven prayed, don't hold this against him, later on Paul responded by repentance and he was saved and he got forgiveness of the sins. So that is how we deal with that particular passage. So unconditional forgiveness, NO.

Matthew 6:11-12 (ESV)

Give us this day our daily bread, 12 and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Matthew 6:14-15 (ESV)

For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Matthew 18:21-22 (ESV)

Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” 22 Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.

So basically there is no forgiveness if there is no repentance but if there is repentance, you are not there to ascertain whether the repentance is real or false. If he comes and asks you, you must forgive. Whether or not it is not your job to determine whether he is repentant or not but your job is basically to offer forgiveness. So the pattern given of father's forgiveness is conditional. Here you have got the man who was forgiven of a huge debt and then at the same time somebody else owed him 100 dollars and he pleaded with him, forgive my debt but he said no, no, no. As a result the king turned around and put him in prison and he says

Matthew 18:32-35 (ESV)

Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ 34 And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. 35 So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

Here the master responded to repentance. This cements the case of conditional forgiveness. You have to forgive because God forgave you, that a debt that you owe.

3. WON'T CONDITIONAL FORGIVENESS FOSTER BITTERNESS?

If you actually have unconditional forgiveness the offender will actually go free, so every time he does whatever and he is not repentant at all and he gets away with it, actually it will foster forgiveness. We are actually asked to give conditional forgiveness by offering grace and forgiveness unconditionally, which means you are not forgiving, you are offering forgiveness. It is like I am giving you a present, you have to open it. If you don't open it, it is not enacted. You offer it unconditionally and the justice you leave to the wrath of God and actually that will lead to love and compassion rather than bitterness.

This is a story of Scott and Janet Willis. Scott Willis is a Baptist pastor. Back about 20-30 years ago they were driving their van on their way to a place called Watertown in Milwaukee and as they were driving there was an either illegal immigrant or a new immigrant to America from Mexico. His name was Ricardo Guzman. Ricardo Guzman had bribe the states authorities to get his license to drive a huge truck. So he was not really qualified. In fact, he doesn't even know a word of English. So as he was driving this big truck, the mud flap was held in place by a 30 pound metal bracket and so this was shaking, shaking loose and all the other drivers going past him were shouting to him, hey something is coming off, you better stop. The fellow didn't know what they were saying as he only knows Mexican. So he kept on driving and the metal bracket fell off. As it fell off it bounce several times on the road and here we have Scott and Janet Willis with five children in their car driving along in a van and of all things this little metal bracket bounce a few times on the road and hit the gas tank on one end of the van and the other end of the metal bracket is scrapping on the ground causing sparks. The sparks went into the petrol tank and it exploded. Four of the children died on the spot, burnt and roasted alive. The fifth one was brought to the hospital in critical condition but expired. The father and mother were also killed.

Now they died. What did they do? They wrote a letter and it turned out the corruption at the state level went all the way up to the governor, he is like big mafia king and it was all corrupted and this is what they did when they wrote the letter.

Principle	Willis Letter
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1. Resolve not to take revenge	“My husband and I have prayed and asked God to keep us from bitterness and to help us be faithful to him and he has.” “Janet and I have prayed to not have a bitter or revengeful spirit. These feelings have only occasionally flared up but have not consumed or dominated our thoughts and are not the motive for this letter.”
2. Lovingly and proactively offer grace	“The real tragedy is that no reconciliation has yet been attained between George Ryan and Janet and me. My wife and I have a strong desire to forgive Gov. Ryan but it must be on an honest basis: sorrow and admission. ...Then forgiveness and mercy can be graciously
3. Don't forgive the unrepentant but leave room for the wrath of God	“But there is a time to speak. I am sharing these facts only because I believe if justice rules, wrongdoing will be deterred. I have learned ‘when [God’s] judgments come upon the earth, the people of the world learn righteousness. Though grace is shown to the wicked, they do not learn righteousness; even in a land of uprightness they go on doing evil’ (Isaiah 26:9, 10).”

Here he doesn't forgive the unrepentant but he leaves room for the wrath of God. That's a proper Christian response, they don't go into revenge, they offer forgiveness and reconciliation but you leave the unrepentant to God and in fact at the end of it our friend went to jail for six and a half years, but that is small comfort for the loss of five of their children. So the Williss actually won the largest pay out of civil litigation ever in the United States, 99 Million Dollars for the loss of their children but it is something that was right and it should be done. That's a very classic example of offering forgiveness and yet sticking to righteousness.

4. WHAT IF CHRISTIANS CANNOT AGREE?

Acts 15:36-41 (ESV)

*And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” 37 Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. 38 But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. 39 And there arose a **sharp disagreement**, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, 40 but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. 41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.*

The word, sharp disagreement is *parozemos* which means shouting, cannot agree. Don't know who is right and who is wrong, and the reason why they didn't want to take Mark because Mark actually abandoned them at some age. So here you have Paul and Barnabas, you have got 18 months before that there was a big fight. Paul confronted Peter and Barnabas offer hypocrisy. John Mark was Barnabas cousin. Barnabas was one of the churches largest financial backers, better not go and fight with him because he got money. So here you have all the politics. So Silas was stuck in between to which side he should take.

Colossians 4:10-11 (ESV)

10 Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him), 11 and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me

How Mark became comfort to Paul

Philemon 1:23-24 (ESV)

Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, 24 and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

2 Timothy 4:11 (ESV)

Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.

So here it seems that Mark and Paul are on good terms, there is no permanent enemy. They had a disagreement, they went aside. So:

1. Impasses do happen
2. Fix your eyes on the Lord and continue with the mission
3. Say less, without gossip the quarrel dies down
4. Submit to God ordained authorities
5. Be hopeful that time heals where reason and emotions cannot

5. WHAT ABOUT THE UNFORGIVEABLE SIN?

Matthew 12:31-32 (ESV)

Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. 32 And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

Now this occurs in the context of a larger context of a demon possessed man

Matthew 12:22-29 (ESV)

Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw. 23 And all the people were amazed, and said, "Can this be the Son of David?" 24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons." 25 Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. 26 And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? 27 And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. 28 But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon

you. 29 Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house.

He tells this parable because he obviously cast out demons and the Pharisees are so stubborn, they say he must be chief demon that's why he can kick out the demons. In fact that is such a stupid statement because if Satan keep on casting out Satan the whole thing will collapse. So therefore what he is saying here is that these people are so hard-hearted, there is unforgiveable sin is a sin when a person is so hardens his heart that he paints himself in the corner away from the grace and forgiveness of God. So that's what unforgiveable sin means.

6. HOW CAN I STOP THINKING ABOUT IT?

It is like a rat running around a metal circle. I remember Chevy Chase, even though his mother had died years later on every day he wakes up with a nightmare because she use to torture him, wake him up middle of the night and slap him. For years even though she died she continue to torture him and he use to continue to think of all hateful things against his mother. Miroslav Volf talks about, he is a Serbian prisoner who escaped from the war of Yugoslavia. He talks about his interrogator

My mind was enslaved by the abuse that I had suffered. It was as if the person (who had abused me) had moved into the very household of my mind, ensconced himself in the middle of the living room and I had to live with him

This happens, you get bitter against the person who hurts you. You rehearse it in your mind:

- What were the events that led to it
- The discovery, the confrontation ...real of imagined
- How could he do that to me
- What did I do wrong?
- How could I have prevented it
- Why didn't he show any shred of mercy
- What kind of person is he?
- What will I say to him do to him if I saw him today
- How I would like to make him suffer

That's what bitterness does to us. So Peter says,

1 Peter 5:8 (ESV)

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

1 Peter 5:9-11 (ESV)

Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. 10 And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. 11 To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

So basically when you are suffering unjustly like Miroslav Volf, being tortured by someone else, he is going to leave the revenge to basically God, because the devil will make use of his bitterness and make you take upon yourself that mantle of judgment. Jesus did not run on gerbil wheel

1 Peter 2:20-25 (ESV)

*But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. 21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. 22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, **but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.***

So we are not to replay it over and over again, we have to trust God who will deal with the person, but it will take a process. You need to entrust yourself to the Lord, focus on him, let him deal with the justice and be the judge, but it was an active process

Hebrews 12:14-15 (ESV)

Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. 15 See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;

The word strive is pursue with great intensity as battle with mind not easily won. So basically you are not going to naturally leave your bitter thoughts, it is actually going to be an active process where you are actually striving. C.S. Lewis letters Malcolm

Last week while at prayer, I suddenly discovered or felt as if I did –that I had really forgiven someone I had been trying to forgive for the last 30 years

Even the great C.S. Lewis got problems in forgiveness. In fact one of the fathers of the Amish children who was shot dead wrote these words. He wrote,

“It’s a journey. I still made that immediate choice in principle. But it took me a few years until I could feel that I really meant it inside me, to forgive Charlie.”

At the point when he did find the compassion, he said, “I felt a great weight falling off me. I felt lighter.”

That feeling does not arrive if you forgive merely out of obligation,

Christ Stoltzfus

Here is a father whose daughter is shot dead by Charlie Roberts and it took him a long time to actually forgive. So never trivialise, forgiveness takes time and for maturity and growth, it is a slow healing process for your soul.

Realise what kind of fight you are in

2 Corinthians 10:4-5 (ESV)

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. 5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ

So it is a spiritual warfare that we are in. The practical steps are

1. Immerse yourself in the passages about forgiveness
2. Take a long good look at Christ
3. Pray

We need to understand, forgiveness in the context of God's purposes. Some of us might think we are supposed to forgive because God ordered me to forgive and if you do that you become a legalist, you don't really understand why. I want to give a theological overview, why we have to forgive, why forgiveness is so important.

Shalom is the Hebrew word called peace. It is wholeness, inner completeness, fullness, a type or wholeness but this wholeness is a little bit different. If you look at Neil Plantinga, he writes,

The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in equity, fulfillment, and delight”—[this] is what the Hebrew prophets call shalom. We translate it “peace,” but in the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight. It describes a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts are faithfully and fruitfully employed, all under the arc of God’s love.

It is an ideal situation in the world where everything is working exactly as if it was designed under the ark of God's love. It is like taking a whole tangled web of fibres and weaving it to look like the front of a tapestry. If you look behind it, it looks like a mess. Every thread there is in contact with multiple threads; in, order, over and above, and the more intricately it is woven, the more beautiful the picture becomes. So the more independent, interdependent they are, the more beautiful they are, the more interwoven they are, the stronger and warmer they are. This is God's universe, whether it is physical, emotional or spiritual, how we all interact with each other, how we interact with God, how we interact with nature, it all fulfils its purpose.

When God created the world, every time he said it is good because it was shalom. It is like driving your new BMW. It works perfectly and that is called shalom but there is an interconnectedness in the world, that is shalom. So the sin is the vandalism of God's shalom. So it means complete reconciliation, a state of fullest flourishing in every dimension, physical, emotional, social and spiritual because all relationships are right, perfect and filled with joy. Imagine a man who abuses his children because he drinks alcohol, he has got liver disease, he beats his wife, he has an affair, he is not doing well in his job. When he brings the gospel of Jesus Christ and he has acknowledged his sin, he has asked for forgiveness, he stops drinking alcohol, he has got physical shalom because his liver starts to get better.

When he stops drinking alcohol he is not controlled by alcohol then his social interaction with his workmates improve. His psychological attitude towards his family starts to flourish again with love. When the gospel comes into the world, when the forgiveness comes in the world, when he has forgiven all, every aspect of life; emotional, spiritual, psychological and social, all starts to function perfectly. That is shalom and shalom can only happen when we forgive then we reach back to Genesis chapter 1 when God said, it was good. The whole of creation can be redeemed back to shalom because of what Jesus Christ has done. Walter Brueggemann writes,

Shalom is not only an incredible gift; it is a most demanding mission

So when Jesus died and he rose again, the first he said to his disciples was shalom, my peace I give you. So we are the people of shalom, how can we bring shalom to the world where we don't know how to forgive. We live frayed apart, we are not interdependent, we are not using our gifts for other people, we are using our gifts for ourselves, we are using our riches for ourselves, so therefore we are actually oppressing other people, it is where we learn to forgive when we learn to use our gifts for other people.

Our gifts are given to us so that we could actually bless other people and the more you bless other people you function in the optimal kind of level which God created us for. God created us to love, because God created us for shalom.

The church is a microcosm of what shalom will be. In Isaiah chapter 2, one day all the nations will go Mount Zion, they flow upwards, they will throw down their weapons which is a picture of shalom and that can happen, it starts with Jesus Christ in our church, so that's why it is very-very important to have forgiveness.