

**Shouting Prayers** - Two young boys were staying the night at their grandparents' house. At bedtime they knelt beside their beds to say their prayers. The younger brother said in a really loud voice: "I pray for a new bike, a portable TV and a Nintendo!" The other brother said: "Why are you shouting your prayers? God isn't deaf. "No, but grandma is!"

In America, we're celebrating The Fourth of July—also known as Independence Day or July 4th. It's been a federal holiday in the United States since 1941, but the tradition of Independence Day celebrations goes back to the 18th century and the American Revolution. From 1776 to the present day, July 4th has been celebrated as the birth of American independence.

We live in a country that gives us freedom of religion but we also have freedom of speech. As I was preparing for today's message, I looked into the scriptures to find out what our Christian freedoms are.

In 1 Corinthians 6; **12** "I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but I will not be mastered by anything. 1 Corinthians 10;23 repeats this but ends with a little different twist, "I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but not everything is constructive. **24** No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.

Paul wrote the book of Corinthians because of conflict in the church and he's teaching that living a sin filled life will separate us from heaven. As Christians, we're guilty of these teachings. Chapter 9 & 10 talk about rights and I think we need to be very careful with how we use them. Thankfully, the blood of Christ cleanses us when we fall into sin and we all do.

Simply put, Christ forgives "ALL" sin. Forgiveness is unlike anything else and forgiveness isn't just about asking God to forgive. It's much more.

I would like to talk about 3 different forms of forgiveness. One form of forgiveness is when we need people to seek our forgiveness. If and when this happens, it's freeing but when we need others to ask us before we'll forgive, it can be very dangerous. When someone does ask us to forgive them, rarely will we hold onto the trespass and we seem to be able to let go of the wrong. Another form is when we need to ask someone for their forgiveness. This is harder to do. We need to do this more than we need to be asked. When we ask someone to forgive us, a huge weight is taken off our shoulders. This is hard to do because of pride and we fear suffering the consequence.

The third form of forgiveness is probably the most important form. In earlier messages we explored some of God's characters. For today, I would like to explore "God's" character of forgiveness.

The first two forms of forgiveness: giving and receiving require us to use spoken words with each other. Saying words like I'm sorry or I need to apologize to you. We have to become vulnerable to each other and having the Holy Spirit living in us requires that we speak these words. The Holy Spirit also helps us to receive the words. These two forms of forgiveness are strictly meant for us to use with each other. They're needed because forgiveness is what helps us remain in relationship with each other. Think of it like a code of conduct.

Most of us probably remember our parents making us apologize to our siblings as children. As a parent, Trish and I did this with our kids and we still train our grandchildren to do the same. Saying I'm sorry is very hard. It's a lot easier to tell Christ because we know that He already knows and then we don't need to say it to each other. In Matt 5;23 – 24 it tells us different **23** "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, **24** leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift. When we've wronged others, by asking for forgiveness, we're verbalizing to each other that we are children of God. As Christians, if we know that someone else is upset with us or that we've wronged them, our Spirit convicts us. We can't get it out of our minds and in our minds, we go through all the mental arguments about why we don't need to.

Because we've accepted Christ, the Holy Spirit won't let it go. Sin separates us from God and the Spirit is God in us. We've all had to say Lord, "please forgive me". That's when death was removed from us. The first two forms of forgiveness, re-unite relationships and bring comfort or "peace" back into our hearts. It gives us a feeling of relief and it deepens our relationship with God. We've been talking a lot about prayer and about becoming known as a prayerful church. Accepting of the lost, requires a forgiving heart. When we were lost, Christ forgave us. Some of us were really bad people and if it wasn't for Christ's forgiveness, we would have been lost forever. As Christians, an unforgiving heart stops our desire to "PRAY". I love James 5:13-16 **13** Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. **14** Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. **15** And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. **16** Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. The key word is "HEALED". When we only confess to Christ but don't confess our sin to each other, it can feel like a cloud is hanging over us. We've asked Christ and we are forgiven. Without confessing our sin to someone, many people never really feel healed from the scar.

We all hurt each other and unless we're willing to say "I'm sorry or please forgive me" we allow others to hold onto grudges forever. We're all the same. Our minds can work overtime and we can blow things so far out of proportion. Jesus came to forgive and to heal. He came to carry all of our sins away. Forgiveness is part of God's character and we've all received forgiveness even when we never asked for it.

Recently, I did some investigating about what the Holy Spirit is. I went to my counselors and asked for their advice. I asked my grandkids what they think the Holy Spirit is. Then I asked them what does the Holy Spirit do? I also asked some others and the answers were pretty much the same. They described the Holy Spirit as God living in us. The answers for what the Spirit does left me with the impression that the Holy Spirit is like a truth meter. Words like conscience, guilt and teacher were used. What the Holy Spirit does had a universal thought. The Holy Spirit reveals our sin. The Holy Spirit makes us more sensitive to things of God. God uses the Spirit as a way to help us individually but we seem to use it for finding wrong in others. We use the bible as a weapon. Christ didn't come to condemn, He came to give life. When we first came to believe that Jesus died for our sin and that He is Lord, we received the Holy Spirit as a gift. We all needed Christ's forgiveness really bad and at that moment, we weren't thinking about others. When we accept Christ, we become adopted by God. The Holy Spirit is God living in us. It becomes our "new" DNA. If we remove the need for God's character of forgiveness in our own life and develop the need to get others to ask us to forgive them, the peace of Christ can go away and our intimate relationship with Christ suffers. Matthew 18:21 **21** Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" **22** Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. [g] Jesus is telling us to make forgiveness part of our character. Just forgive and stop holding on! We cannot serve two masters. We live in a society that is free to speak and full of people who broadcast others sin. God tells us nothing is new under the sun. In Ecclesiastes 1:9

**9** What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. **10** Is there anything of which one can say, "Look! This is something new"? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time. We're all guilty of "committing sin" and when we look inward and pray through the Spirit for forgiveness, we don't quench the Holy Spirit. I was listening to a sermon from Joyce Meyers this week and she made a great point. She said that in the church, the least little things can get people totally divided. Do we forget how much we need forgiveness? She shared how at one church, when she would go to lunch after church, people would use things they heard in the sermon just to cause strife.

As Christians, we become experts at others faults and we allow Satan to keep us divided. If you ask yourself how many times you've wished or needed others to ask you to forgive them vs. how many times you've asked others to forgive you, it may be pretty lopsided.

Christ came to forgive! He's the only example we have for how we should become. It's not about others, it's about our own need for Christ's mercy. Taking our thoughts captive and seeing how much mercy and grace we need can be sobering. The bible never says that anyone finally lives without sin. The church is supposed to be where we come to have unity in Christ. It's through the blood of Christ that we've all been forgiven. I'd like to read John 8; 1-11 **1** but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. **2** At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. **3** The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group **4** and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. **5** In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" **6** They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. **7** When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." **8** Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. **9** At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. **10** Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" **11** "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." Sexual sin is probably the hardest sin for us to forgive and Jesus takes the women caught in adultery and convicts all the others. It's only through God's character of forgiveness that Jesus did this. That's what we need to learn and to copy. Throughout the bible, even the Holiest of people failed and did terrible things. Look at David, he committed every sin and yet God washed that away. By having the character of forgiveness it keeps us free from the bondage of anger, rage, malice, hate and all the other mental sins that we see around us. Most important, the character of forgiveness is what keeps us united with our Spirit.

How do we become thankful in all things? How do we learn to be content in all things? How do we learn to forgive the way Christ does? We pray and we pray and we pray. We pray that God makes them a part of our character. Three words; Thankful, content and forgiveness.

Matthew 7:7-9 says **7** "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. **8** For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. **9** "Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? **10** Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? **11** If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! **12** So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. Ask seek and find. It's all about prayer. As we celebrate Independence day, may we all use the freedom to have God's character of forgiveness in our hearts.

If you have a need in your life or if you need to connect with the blood of Jesus, please don't wait anymore. Come forward and claim your peace.