

Free to Forgive (Because of the Gospel)

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, February 12, 2023
PASSAGES	1 Corinthians 6; James 4; Colossians 2; Luke 7; Hebrews 12
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:09:24 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Paul asks the Corinthians a question that sounds unreasonable until you know who is asking it: why not rather be defrauded? The answer is not that our injuries are small. It is that our debt was enormous and it was cancelled, and people who have been forgiven that much can afford to lose an argument. We are not squeezing forgiveness out of ourselves — we are free to forgive.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Paul assumes Christians will have grievances with one another. The question is never whether conflict comes, only where it goes.
- ◆ Keeping a dispute inside the church is not about hiding it. It is that people who share the same values and the same shepherd are actually equipped to help.
- ◆ “Why not rather be defrauded?” is a real option Paul puts on the table. Standing on your rights is permitted; preferring the good of the saints over your rights is better.
- ◆ James locates the source of our quarrels inside us — passions at war, wanting and not having, and not asking. Behind most fights is a fear that no one is going to take care of us.
- ◆ The list of what we were in 1 Corinthians 6 is a list of what the church *was*. We do not fight sin in order to be accepted and free; we fight it because we already are.
- ◆ Simon the Pharisee is the cautionary figure — not because he sinned more, but because he was sure his file was light.

- ◆ You cannot live under the law when it favors you and under grace when it does not. Choose which one you want to be judged by, because you get the whole of it.
- ◆ Forgiving is not muscled through. The motivation, the blueprint and the power are all Christ's grace.

► 1:09:24

It was Super Bowl Sunday and Valentine's weekend, the Girls of Hope had a bake sale waiting in the coffee room, and Matt promised to land the message early. Hope was still working through First Corinthians, and chapter 6 is short. It is also one of the more uncomfortable things Paul ever wrote to a church, because it takes an ordinary grievance — the kind everyone in the room has — and asks what a forgiven person does with it.

1. Keep it in the family

► 1:10:00

Paul opens with a question and, as Matt noted dryly, none of it is hypothetical: when one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Then the strange part — do you not know that the saints will judge the world, and even angels?

Matt did not pretend to have that one solved. But he pointed out it is not out of character for God. In the Old Testament he convenes councils of spirits and asks their counsel when he plainly does not need to; [Job 1](#) has them presenting themselves before him. God has every power to act alone, and he keeps including his creation anyway. Paul's conclusion follows: if we are going to be included in that, surely we can handle a disagreement about a car or a debt.

And the church already does this, all the time. A couple in conflict sits down with another couple — not because that couple is holier, but because everyone struggles and it keeps the thing from escalating. Matt's summary was that if you want godly advice and godly standards, it makes sense to stay where they are shared. "We want what's best for one another, even when temporarily we don't want what's best for ourselves in our anger and in our bitterness."

There is a second reason, and it is about the watching city. Jesus made the family resemblance the proof:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

JOHN 13:34–35 ↗

So brother going to law against brother before unbelievers is not just messy, it is a counter-argument. Matt’s illustration: imagine if every episode of a daytime talk show were Mormons throwing chairs. You would stop thinking about Mormon doctrine entirely and only think about the chairs. “Not because God is incapable of doing his own PR,” he said, “but because we don’t want to be a hindrance to people coming to the gospel.” Dysfunction in the church is real and God is patient with it — it just should not be the main thing we are broadcasting.

2. “Why not rather be defrauded?”

► 1:15:32

“To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud — even your own brothers!”

1 CORINTHIANS 6:7–8 ↗

This is the verse Matt kept circling. Somebody mistreated you, you are out real money or a real possession, you went to them and the response was not what you hoped. Going to court is within your rights. “But Paul’s saying maybe not consider your rights,” Matt said. “Maybe consider the saints.” Paul is genuinely entertaining personal defeat as the preferable option.

He was careful to fence it. Paul is nobody’s pushover — he gets into a fighting mood about doctrine and theology, and this is not a call to have no opinions. It is a call to hold a bigger view of what is good for the church than what is owed to you.

► 1:19:32

He put a sharp edge on it with an illustration from the back seat of a car. Later in this letter Paul deals with food offered to idols and with not wounding a weaker brother’s conscience — but Matt noted how easily that gets used “almost like calling shotgun.” Every family has its own rules for when the call counts. Claim weaker brother first and the other person now has to do it your way. Even there, the question stands: do I need my way so badly that I will use a spiritual argument to coerce you? Could I just prefer to be wronged?

3. What is actually driving the quarrel

► 1:18:20

Matt stepped over to James for the diagnosis, because Paul is treating a symptom and James names the disease.

“What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.”

JAMES 4:1-2 ↗

Underneath the money or the words is usually a fear that we will not be taken care of unless we take care of ourselves. Matt’s answer was not to minimize the loss but to relocate it: there is a shepherd over us, and we have not because we ask not. Then the practical step — take it to an elder, take it to a brother or sister, and say plainly, pray with me for wisdom, I do not know what to do. “This is not only acceptable,” he said. “This is good behavior.” It may be embarrassing. It is still walking in the wisdom of God rather than within the parameters of your rights.

4. “And such were some of you”

► 1:21:01

“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-11 ↗

Matt would not let the room read that list as being about other people. That is us — the church, the people in the pews. And it is past tense, because our identity moved. The same cross that moved it also supplies the power to fight: Paul is not only saying stop living in the old false self, he is saying that by the power of Christ’s broken body we can actually contend with these things. “We don’t fight sin for acceptance and freedom,” he said. “By Christ’s death and resurrection and faith in him, we are able to, because we are free.”

► 1:22:14

Which is why the lawsuit question is really a memory question. If we have been forgiven all of that, why do we go back into justice mode — strategically, and only sometimes, and generally when it benefits us?

“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.”

COLOSSIANS 2:13–14 ↗

A record of debt with legal demands, nailed up and abandoned. That, Matt said, is the advertisement — enemies of God receiving total forgiveness by grace through faith. It cuts both ways, too: his death became ours, so we died to the world and the world died to us. And it sits oddly beside a congregation that files suit over a grievance. When the free and open invitation is what the city is supposed to hear and all it actually hears is complete chaos, that becomes “a stumbling block to faith.” Matt refused to make it heavier than it is — but he would not let it go, either. “It’s just the point remains. Let’s not make this all about us. It’s not an us show, good or bad.” Paul says it about himself as plainly as it can be said: “I have been crucified with Christ... I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, the law would have to be kept. We are not under the law with its demands; we are under the care of a great shepherd who corrects us and forms character in us. Our motivation is not earning favor by legal obedience. It is living out of favor already given.

5. Simon’s light file

► 1:25:22

Then the story that carried the rest of the message. Jesus is at a Pharisee’s table when a woman with a reputation comes in behind him with an alabaster flask, weeping, washing his feet with her tears and drying them with her hair. Simon watches and concludes that a real prophet would know what kind of woman this is. Jesus tells him about two debtors, one owing five hundred denarii and one owing fifty, both forgiven, and asks which will love the lender more. Simon answers correctly and reluctantly — Matt heard a man stuck mid-sentence, seeing where this is going: “The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.”

► 1:26:30

Then Jesus turns toward the woman and audits the host to his face. “I entered your house and you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in, she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head

with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.” By his own accounting Simon had done nothing wrong. That is precisely the trouble — he had also done nothing at all.

“Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven — for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.”

LUKE 7:41–47 ↗

And it does not stop at the lesson. Jesus says it *to* her, not about her —

“Your sins are forgiven... your faith has saved you; go in peace” — while the rest of the table mutters about who this man thinks he is to forgive sins at all.

Matt’s line on it was the one to keep: “When we’re pretty sure we’re pretty good, his grace seems okay.”

► 1:27:39

He set it next to the servant forgiven an unpayable debt, who walks out, finds a man who owes him petty change, grabs him — pay me back what you owe me — and has him jailed when he cannot. Matt was willing to grant the man his motives: maybe fear, maybe he still felt he owed the original lender somehow. It made no difference. The lender heard about it. “I forgave you all this. You couldn’t let go a little bit.” And in he went. The point is not that the second debt was imaginary. It is the proportion.

6. Which mood do you want him to be in?

► 1:28:57

Here Matt staged a small comic prayer, and it landed harder than the laughs suggested. Father, I want to talk to you about somebody. Brother so-and-so called me a jerk, just thought you would like to know. I love your mercy, Lord — but your justice side is cool too. Hasn’t it been a while since you smote somebody? Remember, he stole my bike ten years ago; I still haven’t forgotten that. If you pull his file I’m sure there is plenty more in there. Stealing, lying to a relative — say, about how much he put in on grandpa’s gift. *Whose file did you just pull out?*

The exit line writes itself: first of all, it’s all about context. Second of all, I’m the home team, remember. Behind the bit is whatever measure we use being measured back to us. So when someone grieves him, Matt said, he thinks about what mood he wants the Lord to be in for himself. “On my account, I don’t want anything to do with their prosecution. Not for me. Release them.” You can still be irritated. You just decline to press.

► 1:31:26

And he sat in Simon's chair himself before putting anyone else in it. "Mine was a light file, you know. I probably would have gotten a wink and a nod into the paradise anyway. Just a wink and a nod. I mean, those people though, like brother so-and-so — that's a different story." The correction is arithmetic: we have been forgiven a lot, a lot, a lot, and by comparison the ways we harm one another really are a lot smaller.

7. A smaller shame, for a joy set before you

► 1:32:03

Paul describes the apostles as fools for Christ's sake — homeless, hungry, slandered, treated as the scum of the world, and blessing when reviled. Matt was careful here: they do not take pride in the pain. The pain is not the point. The joy of the grace and the calling is.

"...looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

HEBREWS 12:2 ↗

What shame are we actually being asked to endure? Being thought wrong. People finding out we were wrong. Having to apologize. Or simply being defrauded and letting it stand. Set against the warm welcome of a Father who gave us everything in his Son while we were still actively opposing him, these are, in Matt's framing, smaller shames — endured in a kind of worshipful imitation of the one who endured the great one. He left it as a question rather than an order: "Can we endure some shame for the joy of our warm welcome in his presence set before us?"

8. Free to forgive

► 1:24:06

The application was concrete and unglamorous: church conflict, family drama — "other people, not us, we don't have that" — marriage trouble. When something looks unresolvable, bring in another saint with wisdom — it does not have to be a pastor — and pray for wisdom together. And if that third party helps you get to the bottom of it but your pride takes the hit, take the hit anyway, "for the joy and the honor of being able to release and forgive, because we've been set free." The payoff runs in both directions he has been working all message: "This will reduce stumbling within the church. It will also reduce the city around us being scandalized by our weird message."

► 1:35:19

Matt closed on the danger of selective law. When we are angry we run back to the law, because the law is where our rights live. But you do not get to dig up part of it some of the time. If we exhume it to win a war against one person, we are choosing to be related to on those terms across the board. Better to decide in advance which we want: the whole law, or Christ put on through faith — “immersed in his love and grace, embracing grace for us, but that also means for others.”

That is the sentence the title comes from. We have been freed from so much and given so much, and that, not willpower, is where the ability to forgive comes from. “It’s going to be hard,” he said, “but it’s his grace all the way. It’s the motivation. It’s the end goal. It’s the blueprint. And the power behind it is his very person and his grace.”

Then he prayed the message rather than restating it — fill our minds with your grace, fill our hearts with your affection, give us the freedom and the power and the love to forgive others, and give us wisdom as we settle disputes among ourselves, so as not to bring shame to the community in front of the city. Amen, bake sale in the coffee room, prayer teams down front. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- 1 Corinthians 6:1–3
- Job 1
- John 13:34–35
- 1 Corinthians 6:4–6
- 1 Corinthians 6:7–8
- James 4:1–2
- 1 Corinthians 6:9–11
- Colossians 2:13–14
- Galatians 2:20–21
- Luke 7:36–39
- Luke 7:41–47
- Luke 7:48–50
- Matthew 18:23–35
- Matthew 7:2
- 1 Corinthians 4:9–13
- Hebrews 12:2

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Where do you take a grievance first — to the person, to a wise brother or sister, or to everyone except them?
What does your default say about what you actually want out of it?
2. Paul puts “why not rather be defrauded?” on the table as a live option. Where would taking that option cost you something real right now, and what makes it feel impossible?
3. James says the fights come from passions at war inside us, and from not asking. What is the thing you are afraid you will lose if you let a conflict go unresolved in your favor?
4. Matt talked about “calling weaker brother” the way kids call shotgun. Have you ever used a spiritual argument to get your way? What would it have taken to prefer being wronged instead?
5. Whose file are you keeping? Name one person you could release this week — and say out loud what releasing them will actually look like on Monday.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CriLsqwlzSA&t=4164s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.