

God's Sweet Sixteen – Part 6

Welcome to God's Sweet Sixteen, Part 6, July 23, 2008. We, of course, missed five consecutive weeks for holding this session related to the floods here in Cedar Rapids; but we received clearance from this building to restart today and here we are. Some of our attenders you know are reassigned from downtown Cedar Rapids, so not able to be here; but they were notified and will join us whenever they're moved back to this location.

In the first five parts of God's Sweet Sixteen we had covered pray, praise, seek, surrender, rejoice, repent, rest, humble, obey, and give. We had gone part way into the subject of "forgive" and we'll continue that process today. To set the stage, remember that these are not sixteen works of the flesh for us to accomplish. These are sixteen things which will be occurring in the heart of the Christian if he is walking according to kingdom life. And remember at the conclusion of the Kingdom Progression series we covered the stage of Kingdom Life. That is to say where our gaze is fixed upon Jesus; we're regarding Jesus as the source of all, Jesus as the basis of all, and building upon that Rock with our gaze so fixed regarding the cross of Christ as the means by which He purchased for us through grace every spiritual blessing. If we don't function that way, we'll constantly turn to the system of law where we're functioning in works based on our performance in the power of self. The one will lead to victory; the other will lead to defeat, failure, and death; death meaning dead works, dead testimony, dead abundant life, dead glory given to God and so on. So it isn't that we accomplish these things so much as these things are accomplished. So our part is to work out our salvation by fixing our gaze upon Jesus as the source of all spiritual blessings. God then wills and works within us to accomplish for His good pleasure to bring glory to Himself by transforming us into the very image of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. So that's a basic summation of where we are in this series.

We'll pick it up with the next poster now where we'll continue the subject of forgive. This poster is written in a simple mnemonic L-E-F-T, spelling the word left. I wrote this poster to help me keep straight in my own mind four things that are different, but are often confused because they overlap. The first is, of course, love. We're to love always. Our love is never to be conditional depending upon the response or behavior of others toward us. We simply set our love upon others as God set His love upon the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 7:7-8. Love, remember, is a passion for oneness. To say that I love God means that I have a passion to become one with Jesus Christ, thus with God through Jesus Christ. To say that I love another person in an ultimate sense is to say that I have a passion that that person become one with God through Jesus Christ. That never changes. It's not dependent on someone's response or behavior including things that we are called to give them forgiveness about. So we love always.

The second, the "E" stands for excuse. We never excuse sin. So something may need forgiveness from us; but that's different from excusing the behavior that needs forgiveness from us. Why do we not excuse sin? Because it's not excused by God and we're called to be like God—that is to say transformed into the image of His Son. If sin were excusable, then God had no need to send us a Savior. We'd have no Son of God (Christ) come to Earth in the flesh to pay the price for our sin. Recall Habakkuk 1:13 (speaking of God) – Thine eyes are too pure to approve evil and Thou cannot look on wickedness with favor. Well if we're called to grow into the image of Christ, then we cannot excuse evil and we cannot look on wickedness with favor.

The third is the stage of the "F" standing for forgive. We forgive; but the mechanism of forgiveness is the critical point here. We forgive by the empowering grace of God. And here's how it works and I'll go through this because it's such a vivid example of the two different systems of law and grace. I can try to forgive my neighbor who has violated me by saying I ought to forgive, I'll try to forgive. I'll muster up all my energy to forgive. I'll quit being angry. I've got to forgive. It's my duty before God to forgive in which case, you'll never forgive because you're functioning in the power of self to accomplish the will of God. And that brings no glory to God. The mechanism and the pathway for true forgiveness is to live in the light of your own forgiveness and how it was accomplished. I earned nothing before this Holy God. This God is Holy, He is totally pure, He cannot approve evil, He cannot look on my wickedness with favor...but God came to Earth in the form of His Son, went to the cross to pay the price for my sin so that He could forgive me; because all sin has to be paid for. And it's paid either by me or by a Savior; in this case for us, of course, Jesus Christ. So when you're living in the light of the Holiness of God, living in the light of your magnitude of your own sin when compared to the Holiness of God, living in the light of...but God coming to Earth in the form of His Son to pay the price for my sin so that He can forgive my sin so that I can have relationship and communion with Him for all eternity future, Oh, I'm smitten by that. And then how can I not forgive my neighbor when I look at the magnitude of that which I am forgiven by my God. And my God loves my neighbor who violated me just as much as He loves me. He has a passion to be one with my neighbor just as much as He has a passion to be one with me, you see. So then we take up our cross and deny self and follow Jesus by saying forgive them for they know not what they do. That's the mechanism of forgiveness and that's tapping into the system of grace where the source is Jesus, the means is the cross, and the power is the Holy Spirit; not a work of self based on my performance of a specific task to forgive my neighbor, you see. So that is a vivid example of the contrast between the system of law and the system of grace.

The last stage in this mnemonic is the "T" standing for trust. Trust is maybe some day. Trust requires a track record of trustworthiness. Therefore it is not true to say that if I forgive my neighbor, I must obligatorily trust my neighbor. We may forgive a thief; but we do not immediately put the thief in charge of the church treasury. We may forgive a pedophile; but we do not immediately put the pedophile in charge of the church nursery. Forgiveness and trust are related; but they are separate by time. Forgiveness is to let go of the past and not think in terms of condemnation for the person who committed the violation; but trust is to embrace the future with confidence and that takes a track record. An abused wife may forgive her abusive husband. She may be thinking no thoughts of condemnation toward her abusive husband. But that doesn't mean that she has to trust him so as to move back in with him because he may not yet have been delivered of his abusive nature and behavior. Thus we love always. We excuse sin—never. We forgive as we walk in the light of the empowering grace of God in the light of what we have been forgiven; and we trust maybe some day. So these are four categories that I think people have a tendency to have them overlap to such a point that it becomes murky and people start thinking, well if I forgive that means I must have to trust. No. Separate function.

We do not have to forgive. We get to forgive. We're earthen vessels; and we're earthen vessels not to display ourselves. We're earthen vessels to display God. When we think in terms of displaying God, how can we think in terms of having to? We are to be thinking in terms of

getting to. I get to display the Holy God, Who in the beginning created the Heavens and the Earth. We will know we're displaying God when someone is provoked to come up and ask us, how do you forgive like that? How do you not take offense like that? How do you simply set your love continuously upon them in spite of behaviors like that? How do you maintain peace when you are wronged like that? That's how we'll know that we're functioning in the system of grace bringing glory to God and displaying God and His character rather than living in this system of works based on self, taking offense and living in unforgiveness.

That's when we'll fulfill I Peter 3:15. That's when we get to bear witness of Jesus. We get to explain then when asked such a question the reason for the hope that is within you, the reason for the love that is within us, the reason for the forgiveness that is within us. But it's done by forgiving; by living in the light of the grace of God which becomes empowering to us to do so. It is not done by not forgiving. For to not forgive is to behave like mere men, not the God-men that we are, indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. When crossed, my choice is to be cross or to display the cross. I will either display the cross or be at cross purposes to the cross. My choice is to reveal to my transgressor and to others in observation one of two things: my flesh in all its glory or my Savior in all of His glory. My transgressor and others will judge my God by how I function in judging my transgressor. When I respond with anger, unforgiveness, bitterness, and revenge, then they will say we can do that without your God. Why would I need your God? I can do those things with no help at all. I do not see anything different about you that would interest me in your God. But when you forgive them, take no offense and bless them instead of cursing them, then they may well say would you explain to me the reason for the hope that is within you? We can't do what you do. Clearly you have accessed something that is not natural. Then you can only smile and say I only do what I see my Savior do. I only speak what I hear my Savior speak. So His character is speaking to you, bearing witness of Himself through me as an earthen vessel because I'm modeling for you how your God feels about you. And that's why I say, Father forgive them for they know not what they do.

Why do they behave this way? Because they are veiled. They don't see. They don't know. They don't understand; because truth for them is something other than what God is and how God views everything else. So, therefore, they are veiled. Well why should I react with defensiveness, anger, and bitterness and unforgiveness toward the veiled? Because, properly viewed, the veiled are simply who we were, and, thus, our present reminder of God's grace for us. We only know they are veiled because we see truth and we only see truth because it's been revealed to us by the grace of God. So why should I respond in unforgiveness and anger toward the veiled when the veiled simply represent who we were before the grace of God came to work upon us. I'm even blessed by the process as God causes all things to work together for good. As I deny self, take up my cross, and follow Jesus and say forgive them, then I access even more of the abundant life and a crescendo of delight. That's because of the following truth. My greatest revelation of the grace of God is not His grace for me. My greatest revelation of the grace of God is the revelation of His grace toward the one who has violated me the most. So what's the greatest revelation to the Jew of the grace of God? It isn't the grace to the Jew. The greatest revelation is that if Hitler had converted and repented and believed, then Hitler would be occupying eternity future with the Jew. That's the revelation of the grace of God that is the greatest. So when we start thinking in terms that the grace of God is somehow that which is manifest to me about me, then we're limiting our view; because the grace of God in its greatest

revelation here on Earth is the grace that God has stored up to bestow on the one who repents and believes including the one who has violated you the most. Then it becomes hard to remember that I forgave because I'm too busy fulfilling Ephesians 1:6 and singing praise to the greatness of the glory of the grace of God. And only forgiveness is the song of such praise to the glory of the grace of God. Unforgiveness is not singing praise to the greatness of the glory of the grace of God. Likewise unforgiveness never gives thanks to God.

And we'll move into thanks as the next one of the Sweet Sixteen. Simply put thanksgiving is the language of faith. Recall that we're to worship our Holy God and we can only do that in the precious present. So how does Scripture teach us to enter the presence of God in the precious present? Psalms 100:4 – Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him and bless His name. If you want to enter the presence of God, you can't enter it with the absence of thanks and the absence of praise. Well, why is it done that way? Because if we say that we have nothing to be thankful for, then we're displaying ignorance and rebellion, not truth; because apart from Jesus, the truth is we have only the fire of Hell to look to for eternity. But in Jesus we have the glory of Heaven to look to and the communion presence of Jesus through the function of the Holy Spirit within us even here on Earth. So simply ask yourself which side of Hell am I on? If I'm on this side, then I have much to be thankful for. At a minimum thanksgiving is to acknowledge that. If we do that, then we'll always have an attitude of gratitude. Remember Jesus said rejoice, not that you cast out demons. Rejoice that your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life. That's always a cause for rejoicing and always a cause for thanksgiving.

Next poster. Well let's look at the opposite of thanksgiving so as to understand thanksgiving. Recall that we tend to function in what I call the cocoon of carnality. In the cocoon of carnality we're constantly evaluating and assessing and prioritizing according to these four frames of reference: Comfort, convenience, cost, and control

Next poster. I remind you of that because the cocoon of carnality is the root of grumbling. In Exodus 16:8 when the children of Israel were grumbling to Moses and Aaron, Moses said you don't grumble to us, you're grumbling unto God. The point is all grumbling that human beings do is unto God and not unto man. So, comfort, convenience, cost, and control, the cocoon of carnality is the foundation of all grumbling. Underneath that are such things as fear, pride, and laziness. Why do I worry about the cost of something? Because I fear if it cost me something I won't have enough in the future. Or, in pride; why do I think that I'm to have control? Because in my pride, I think I'm the best one to have control. In regard to laziness, why do I want anything to cost me something to interfere with my comfort and convenience because I am in love with the status quo? Because laziness loves things the way they are. Laziness has a passion to remain one with the things as they are. But the Christian is called to get all the unholy elements out of things as they are which you never accomplish by laziness. But the cocoon of carnality is under girded by such cardinal sins as fear, pride, and laziness; and underneath that there are two sides of the same coin that are self worship and unbelief because unbelief in Jesus Christ is self worship. There are only two choices and those are the two choices. So at the root of all is unbelief in Jesus Christ.

So any time that we're grumbling, we are walking in unbelief in Jesus Christ. Why is that? Because grumbling is to shake your fist at God and say I deserve better than You're giving me at this very moment. At its root; grumbling is the language of unbelief in Jesus as the source, the cross as the means to purchase for you every spiritual blessing for all eternity. No Christian ever has cause to grumble before a Holy God. Lamentations 3:39 – Why should any mortal or any man offer complaint in view of his sins? So to grumble is to say I am not holding in view my Holy God and the magnitude of my sin and the grace of God accounting for the difference between the two to give me eternity in Heaven. At any moment we will primarily have an attitude oriented toward thanksgiving or an attitude oriented toward grumbling. Jesus said in Luke 11:23 – He who does not gather, scatters. Those are your two choices. Thanksgiving is gathering; grumbling is scattering. Perhaps we can provoke someone to say how do you give thanks like that under these conditions? You see the world doesn't need instruction and modeling in how to grumble. It needs to see the other worldly attitude of thanksgiving in spite of circumstances. I Thessalonians 5:18 – In all things give thanks for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. We tend to perpetually cry out to know the will of God while perpetually ignoring God's revealed will which is to in all things give thanks. Why? Because we're in Christ Jesus. We are in Christ Jesus positionally no matter what is going on in our lives circumstantially. So we always have the foundational truth of Christianity and our salvation to rejoice and give thanks in totally independent of circumstances.

The last subject for today in the Sweet Sixteen is tremble. Genesis 1:1 – In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth. Next poster. That says these two things about this God Who in the beginning created the Heavens and the Earth. God is the only uncreated thing in all of existence and God is the only self determined thing in all of existence. He's the only being Whose meaning and value are intrinsic within Himself. Every other being has its meaning and value assigned by the Holy God that created it. That alone sets God apart as Holy—other than—not just different from every other being by slight degree or variation in quantity; He is so fundamentally different from everything else in all of creation, He's simply other than. And our minds cannot wrap around the other thanness of this God Who could speak the Heavens and the Earth into existence. That is an other than being. Our only proper response to that Holy God is what the Bible calls the fear of the Lord. And that means to regard that God with awe and reverence. And here's the flow as to why that's the only appropriate response. There's nothing bigger than that God. There's nothing equal to that God. And there's nothing that even approaches that God. So if you are not in awe and reverence of that God, then you can't be in awe and reverence of anything because there's nothing that even approaches the magnitude and awesomeness of that Holy God Who created the Heavens and the Earth. And if you cannot be in awe and reverence of anything, then you're in awe and reverence of yourself. And that's called self worship. The most foundational revelation about God is that He is Holy. And the most foundational revelation about yourself is that you are not. The only proper response from that which is not holy toward that which is Holy is to regard that which is Holy with awe and reverence. That is to say with the fear of the Lord.

Trembling is another word for the fear of the Lord. Ultimately to tremble is not only to fear God; but it's to fear only God; because that which I fear I am giving glory to. And Isaiah 42:8 tells us, I will share My glory with no one; because God should not share His glory with anyone; because it's the only thing in all of existence worthy of true glory. Not to tremble before that

Holy God is to refuse to see God as He is so as to be allowed to continue in self worship. Not to tremble before that Holy God is to live in the light of your falsely self-designed god; because you have designed him not to be worthy of awe and reverence so that you can continue in your unbothered self worship. That helps us understand Isaiah 66:2 – But to this one I will look to him who is humble and contrite of spirit and who trembles at My Word. God looks to that one because that's the only one who is truly worshipping. The only one who's relating to the true God as God truly is, rather than as one has designed God to be. Without that revelation of the fear of the Lord being the only proper response from a created being, you will not access the abundant life that Jesus came to purchase for us. Matthew 6:9 (The Lord's Prayer) – Our Father Who art in Heaven hallowed be Thy Name. The connection is this. What you do not hallow, you will not follow.

Now connect this to the Sweet Sixteen. What you do not hallow regarding with awe and reverence toward your Holy God the fear of the Lord, what you do not hallow, you will not fully pray to in belief. You will not fully praise. You will not fully seek. You will not fully surrender to. You will not fully rejoice in. You will not fully rest in. You will not fully repent to. You will not fully humble before. You will not fully obey. You will not fully give unto and in the name of. You will not fully forgive others who violated you to display His character. You'll not fully thank. You'll not fully tremble before. You will not fully trust. You'll not fully testify for. And you'll not fully teach about. That's the Sweet Sixteen. And none of them will occur except it be standing on the foundation of the fear of the Lord regarding this Holy God with the awe and reverence that is His due. You'll either fear your Holy God or you'll live a lukewarm, apathetic, passive Christian life. That life does not glorify God and doesn't testify accurately to others about the holiness of your God. Proverbs 1:7 – The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Proverbs 9:10 – The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. At its root, recall, the fear of the Lord is the basis of even properly defining truth; because truth isn't what your natural mind uncovers through the scientific method. Truth is what that Holy God is and how that Holy God views everything else.

So how will we know when we're trembling before this Holy God? Well one way to know is to assess your every thought, word, and deed to see if you can trace a direct connecting link all the way back to Genesis 1:1. In the beginning God created the Heavens and the Earth. Because that verse and your response to it in your daily life separates men into two categories. Those who are going to live in the fear of the Lord and those who are going to live in awe and reverence to something else which means usually themselves. Living in the light of Genesis 1:1 is to forever settle the issue of who is to be held in awe and reverence. Any confusion about that issue is not confusion. It is willful rebellion. And rebellion (take note) is not one of God's Sweet Sixteen. God made that so plain by putting that as a simple sentence in the first verse of the Word of God so that man could not miss it. He made it so plain that it, in fact, takes great effort to miss it. And that great effort to miss it is called rebellion.

The fear of the Lord is not just an OT concept. I think that many of us tend to fall back into the default position that that's more of an attitude toward God in the OT. Philippians 2:12 (Paul writes) – Work out your salvation. How? With fear and trembling. I Peter 1:17 (Peter writes) – Conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon Earth. And these epistles, remember, are written to Christians. The cross of Christ is the means by which every spiritual

blessing is purchased for us. But we will not have awe and reverence of the cross of Jesus Christ if we don't have awe and reverence of Jesus Christ. And we will not have awe and reverence of the Son of God if we do not have awe and reverence for God. A little view of God causing no fear and trembling equals little trust; because you can't really trust fully in a God Who is not worthy of awe and reverence. Little trust equals little fruit; because our walk is all by faith. Little fruit equals little glory to God, little valid testimony to others and little abundant life for us. So is it any wonder that to tremble is one of God's Sweet Sixteen?

So my time is up for today and I thank you for yours.