

The Confusion About Forgiveness

Lecture by Prof. B. Gritters on November 3, 2022

Introduction

I noticed on the program that—and you told me too—that I would open with prayer, and then I see that Reverend Guichelaar is going to close with prayer. What I would like to do to begin with prayer is pray what is sometimes called the evening prayer. The words of this song were going through my mind as I was preparing this speech, and it happens to be too not coincidental that ten years ago today my father passed away; and he with his quartet that he sang in for sixty-some years sang this song. And it's called an evening prayer. I'd like to make that our opening prayer. Let's pray.

If I have wounded any soul today, if I have caused one foot to go astray, if I have walked in my own willful way, dear Lord, forgive. If I have uttered idle words or vain, if I have turned aside from want or pain, lest I offend some other through the strain, dear Lord, forgive. If I have been perverse or hard or cold, if I have longed for shelter in the fold when thou hast given me some fort to hold, dear Lord, forgive. Forgive the sins I have confessed to thee; forgive the secret sins I do not see; O guide me, love me, and my keeper be. O Lord, forgive. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

The greatest blessing that God gives to his church ought not be hindered by confusion, but it is. It's both the greatest blessing that God gives to his church, and it is hindered by such great confusion. It's very, very sad; in fact, it's disastrous.

Just think of the Bible passages that talk about forgiveness, and you'll see that it's not difficult to conclude that it is the greatest blessing. Forgiveness, or remission—and those are the same things—John the Baptist preached repentance for remission (Mark 1:4). When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he said, “Ask for forgiveness” (Matt. 6:12). About to die, Jesus told his disciples, “I'm going to shed my blood for remission” (Matt. 26:28). And so before Jesus left this earth, he told his disciples, “Preach remission” (Luke 24:47). And so Peter's first sermon that he preached post-Pentecost was a call to the audience to repent unto remission (Acts 2:38).

It's not surprising, then, that when the Apostles' Creed succinctly summarizes our faith in twelve articles, it lists one blessing of salvation that we experience in this life—two in the life to come: that is, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting—one in this life: the forgiveness of sins. And then it's not surprising either that John Calvin—and John Calvin was followed by the Belgic Confession—said something this simple: “Our salvation consists in the remission of sins.” And so it's beautiful for us to be able to sing what we sang and sing often in Psalm 32: “How blessed is he whose trespass hath freely been forgiven.” What a blessing when I have peace with God because I'm forgiven, and what a blessing when we can have peace with each other, forgiving each other.

There mustn't be in the minds of God's people confusion about this most basic blessing. And yet there is. The evidence that there is comes out if I just ask a couple of questions about

God's forgiveness and then a couple of questions about ours because ours must parallel God's. Number one: when does God forgive? Now or in the past? There ought not be any confusion about that, but there is. How often does God forgive? Once, many times? Whom does God forgive? Everyone? Only some? And why is the answer one or the other? Why does God forgive? Is the answer in me, in my repentance, or is the answer in him? And most basic: what is this great blessing of forgiveness? Define it. And we want to do that tonight.

So the questions about God's forgiveness of us parallel some questions that we ask about what we may call horizontal forgiveness. God's is vertical; ours is horizontal. One of the questions is, what is it when I forgive you? Is it something I think? Is it something I feel? Is it something I say? And there ought not be any confusion about that. But there is. Whom must we forgive? Everyone? Some? Myself? There's confusion about that, and there ought not be.

And then, why? Why would we forgive someone? For our sakes or for their sakes? There's confusion about that, and there ought not be.

And the disaster—I refer to disaster that results from that confusion—is so great. Getting the answer wrong hinders us from receiving the full blessing and blessedness of God's forgiveness of us, and getting the answers wrong hinders me in my relationship to you and us in our relationship to each other.

So I'm very thankful for Grace Protestant Reformed Church giving me the opportunity to speak on this subject. It's their subject, and they asked me to speak, and I give this speech the title "The Confusion about Forgiveness." But I don't want to concentrate on the confusion; I want to concentrate tonight on the positive teaching about God's forgiveness of us and then refer to some confusion and try to correct it in the course of the speech.

There's really two simple things I want to ask, and the first is, what is God's forgiveness of us? And the second is, what is our forgiveness of each other? And because our forgiveness of each other must parallel God's forgiveness of us, we don't need to spend so much time with our forgiveness of each other when we get down clearly the definition of what God's forgiveness of us is.

What is God's Forgiveness of Us?

And in the course of God's forgiveness of us, I want to use the history of David as somewhat of a template. David and his sin with Bathsheba.

So, God's forgiveness of us. That's the first heading; that's the first of the two points in my speech tonight. What is God's forgiveness of us? And then I have four things to say. Number one: it's a declaration. Number two: it comes after repentance. Number three: it aims at reconciliation. And number four: sometimes there are consequences even when there is forgiveness. A declaration that comes after repentance that aims at reconciliation; and yet sometimes there are painful, lasting, humbling consequences.

Its Declaration

So let's start with that first: *God's forgiveness of us is a declaration to us from his mouth to our ears that goes down into our hearts that embrace that declaration by faith.*

God's forgiveness of us is not a decision. God's forgiveness of us is not a determination. God's forgiveness of us is a declaration. And the declaration that comes from the mouth of God, that comes into our ears and goes down into our hearts, is on the basis of the *provision that he*

makes in the cross of his own Son—not because of you but because of what he has done. And when God declares forgiveness to us, he says this: “I put away your sins.” That’s what he says, in the simplest language: “I put away your sins.” Or, to be more expansive, “I’m not going to hold you accountable for your sin. I’m not going to judge you in the light of that sin. I’m not going to make you pay for your sins. I put your sins away.”

So that first point has these elements: it’s from the mouth of God. God speaks.

What he speaks: “I will not hold your sin against you.”

How he speaks: often through the preaching, the voice of a prophet. And that’s why Christ could say to his disciples in John 20:23, “*You* are going to remit sins.” And “remit” is the word for remission. Forgiveness and remission are the same concept. Jesus said to his disciples, “You will remit sins.” He means, “You will be the mouthpiece of me to declare into the ears and down to the hearts of the people my forgiveness.”

Why he declares this: not because of you; because of his own Son Jesus Christ. And we receive that blessing as we embrace Christ by faith.

I’m not going to quote the creeds tonight very often. I want at this point to mention what Lord’s Day 23 says. “I cannot receive and apply the same”—Christ’s righteousness—“to myself in any other way than by faith.” This blessing comes to me by faith. And that’s what Lord’s Day 31 says in question 84: “When they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are forgiven.” *When* they believe, that is.

So the example of David makes that first point very clear. When David committed the horrible double sin of adultery, which we ought to call rape, and murder—the adultery with Bathsheba; she had no choice; it was rape; and the murder of her husband—David lived for a year miserable. And we need to say about David, he was in that time unforgiven. And then God’s forgiveness came to him in the form of a prophet named Nathan, who convicted David of sin; and after David was convicted the prophet Nathan said, “The LORD hath put away your sin; you will not die” (2 Sam. 12:13). That’s why I used that expression that I did at the beginning: “I have put away your sin.” God’s declaration from his mouth through the voice of a prophet—often—into the ear of the guilty sinner that goes down into his heart that embraces that truth by faith. That’s forgiveness, first.

And that clears up some confusion that appears here already. *Forgiveness is not God’s decree to forgive us*, even though he’s made such a decree. *Forgiveness is not in eternity*, though God in eternity decreed to forgive. *Forgiveness is in time* when, by the voice of God through a prophet, he speaks into our ears, and we hear him say, “I put your sin away.” From that point of view, though, some have called that decree forgiveness itself. I understand that. So important is that decree, being as it is the eternal *root* of forgiveness, that it’s inseparable from forgiveness. And I see why some want to say that’s forgiveness. But it isn’t. *Forgiveness is in time and history and comes from the voice, the mouth of God to my ear.*

There are others who’ve said that 2,000 years ago was forgiveness in *the cross* and the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. I understand that too. That’s *the judicial basis for forgiveness*. That’s why God forgives me. That’s so inseparable from forgiveness; I understand why some say that’s forgiveness. But it isn’t.

The decree is the eternal root; the cross is the judicial ground; but forgiveness is in time and history—I’ll say this many times—when God speaks to me in my ear and my heart embraces that voice: “I put away your sin.”

If I can give some content to what God declares when he forgives us, it's something like this: "I won't judge you for that sin because I've judged my Son for that sin as a substitute for you." "I put away your sin" means that. "I will not look at you and think of you in the light of your sin because when I look at you, all I see is the blood of my Son that covers you and the righteousness of my Son that, as a white robe and garment, hides your sins. I won't remember your sins because I cast them to the depths of the sea." Micah 7:19 is a figure of speech intended not to tell us what we can't figure out—God can see to the depths of the sea. Why does he tell us that? Well, even you children can understand why he tells us that: because he wants us to think about that blessing of forgiveness that God takes your sins; ties them, as it were, in a bundle to a cinder block; goes out to the middle of the Atlantic Ocean; and drops them so that they go miles and miles deep, never to be seen. "I don't see your sins." In fact, Jeremiah 31:34 says, "I don't remember them anymore." And that's not because God can't dig up the memory to think about them but because God wants us to think in our terms. We forget something; it isn't in our mind. He doesn't have our sins in our minds [*sic*]. So he says to us, to put it in a pastoral way, "Don't feel guilt. Don't be ashamed. I put that on my Son as a substitute for you."

That's first: God's declaration.

Declaration of Forgiveness after Confession and Repentance

Second, that declaration comes to us after confession and repentance. God declares this blessing only to those who are sorry for their sins, confess their sins, own their sins. And that was David's experience too. You remember when David pressed—the convicted David—David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And *then* Nathan said to him, "The Lord has put away your sin" (2 Sam. 12:13). David, reflecting on that sin and his forgiveness in Psalms 32 and 51—we sang them; Jonathan Lee played them before the program this evening—when David reflected on that experience in those two psalms, he talked about acknowledging his sin. And we sing about that too. He said,

While I kept guilty silence, my strength was spent with grief. Thy hand was heavy on me, my soul found no relief. But *when I owned* my trespass my sin hid not from thee; *when* I confessed transgression, *then* thou forgavest me.

I see some children here; I can speak to them: did you ever have to own up to something? If your mom or your dad presented to you the fact of a sin, your first inclination is to back away from that sin and say, "That's not mine." And that's what David did too, for a whole year. And then Nathan came and convicted him, and David looked at that sin and says, "I own it. That's mine. It belongs to me." *And then, and only then*, did Nathan speak the blessed words from God: "The Lord has put away your sin."

So the New Testament makes that very, very clear—the same order. *First* repentance, *then* forgiveness. Always that order. John the Baptist preached repentance *for* remission, remember (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). After Jesus' resurrection and before he ascended, he said to his disciples, "Repentance *and* remission must be preached" and in that order. *In that order* (Luke 24:47). And so in Acts 2:38 in that first sermon of Peter, Peter said to the people, "Repent *for* the remission of sins." *First* repentance, *then* remission. And then in the next chapter in the book of Acts, after they healed the lame man and the people stood astonished—"How did you

do that?”—then Peter preached another sermon, and he said in that sermon in Acts 3:19, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, *so that your sins may be blotted out.*” They weren’t yet. God determined to do that in eternity; Christ, a little while before, had died for those sins; but they were not yet blotted out for those people who had not yet confessed and converted. And that’s why John Calvin could say without any argument or debate, “Forgiveness of sins can never come to anyone without repentance.”

That clears up some confusion too, doesn’t it? People ask, “Really? Wasn’t David forgiven for that whole year?” because they have in their mind the idea that forgiveness is something God *decided* to do in eternity or that Jesus *paid* for 2,000 years ago; and David prior to Christ presents another problem; but the fact of the matter is, people say, “Really? You’re saying that for a whole year David wasn’t forgiven?” and the answer is a very simple yes. Yes. Because forgiveness is the declaration of God to him about that sin, “I don’t hold that against you.” And for a year he did not hear that. *For those who don’t repent, God stands silent.* And that’s why David’s bones waxed old in their roaring. He was miserable on account of that.

So forgiveness is not God’s attitude toward David; it’s not God’s decree to forgive David in the end; it’s not God’s desire to do David good—none of that. Forgiveness is God’s declaration.

Now, at this point it’s important, before we go on to the third element of God’s forgiveness of us, to ask about that relationship. *Why* first repentance, then forgiveness? And the answer includes at least two elements.

The first, if I may say it that way, to do justice to justice. To do justice to God’s attribute of righteousness. To do justice to justice. You see, because forgiveness comes after confession, *not* because confession and repentance *earn* God’s forgiveness—Christ and his cross *earned* forgiveness. But forgiveness is for those who recognize that sin ought to be punished. And that opens up to an entirely new subject that ought to be developed in a series of sermons or lectures, and that is the righteous demands of God with regard to sin. God is a righteous God. Psalm 85:2 says, “All the doings of the Lord in justice have their birth.” That is, the womb from which all of the doings of God come forth is justice. Justice. And that means, then, in connection with God’s forgiveness of us, the sinner must recognize what God calls sin, sin; he must recognize that he ought to be held responsible; that what he did deserved punishment; and that he asks to be freed from that responsibility. And then God says, “*Now* you’re thinking aright. You deserve to be punished, but I put my punishment on my Son; and when you embrace him by faith, confessing that you ought to be punished, now I declare to you, ‘I have put away your sin on Jesus Christ.’” To do justice to justice; or, to use the language of the Heidelberg Catechism that most of us are familiar with, “God’s justice must be satisfied,” and everyone needs to live in the consciousness of that reality.

To do anything different, people of God, is to do greatest *injustice* to this central reality of God’s doings in the cross. Why the cross? You have to ask yourself that question. Why the cross? And the answer is, because your sins deserve what he got. And you’re going to get his blessing only when you acknowledge what he got should have come to you. *You’re not going to hear God speak unless you acknowledge that.*

The throne, to put it differently, from which God’s grace proceeds has justice as its cornerstone. Or, to put it differently, according to Psalm 85—that was Psalm 89—Psalm 85:10 speaks of mercy and truth that seem to be contradictory or kindness and righteousness have

kissed each other in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. And you must not ask for mercy unless you recognize truth and justice. You must not ask for peace unless you realize that our stripes went upon him so that we could have peace with God. Forgiveness comes after repentance, to do justice to justice.

But there's another—and maybe I can refer to David now too. Doesn't David allude to that when, in Psalm 51, one of those two psalms he speaks of it this connection—in Psalm 51:4, when he says, "That thou mightest be justified when thou speakest and be clear when thou judgest"? God's actions must be by us declared to be right.

But there's another reason why repentance always precedes that declaration of God, and that is because God loves us. And God's love is going to pursue us when we walk in our sins until we own them and repent of them. That's his love for us. Had God given David the peace of forgiveness without David's repentance, David would have imagined that he could have gotten away with that; no one would ever have known that; he denied it all his life. "That baby is not mine." And then maybe did it again because he got away with it. But God wouldn't, in his love for David, allow that to happen.

First confession, repentance; then the peace that comes from God's declaration.

Forgiveness Aims at Reconciliation

Third, God's forgiveness of us always aims at reconciliation. God's forgiveness of us first is a declaration that comes after repentance and confession; and third, that aims at a restoration of the relationship; that is, reconciliation because sin is a barrier. God forgives sin so that those who were distanced from him, from whom he had turned his face, now may be brought again back to him. And isn't that what David reflected also in Psalm 51? His greatest fear as he reflected on this was that God would cast him away from him again. So he says in verse 11, "Cast me not away from thy presence." David's greatest joy was God's fellowship, and his greatest fear was that this barrier would be built between him and God by his sin. He knew that.

So go back all the way to the beginning of human history, when God had Adam and Eve in his bosom, as it were; and then they sinned, and he said, "Away from me." And he put them out, and he put that barrier in front of the garden's entrance of flaming swords and said, "Stay away." And then God went to pursue Adam and Eve, clothed them with the skin of an animal, whose blood was shed as a picture of substitutionary atonement, and then said, "Now that you're covered, come back to me." Forgiveness always aims at coming back. The father says to the prodigal son, "Welcome home, son." The prodigal son, who returned in repentance, heard the father say, "I forgive you" and saw the father's open arms, so that he could come back.

The whole sacrificial system of the Old Testament pointed to that. It ought to be very clear to us that forgiveness always aims at reconciliation. When the people of God came in the form of a priest, who went for them to where God lived, they had to go past the altar of burnt offering to see there on that altar substitutionary atonement, satisfaction for sin, that God provided a substitute for them. And then when they saw that and embraced that blessing with believing hearts, they didn't turn around and leave, but they went *in* to God's presence. They lived *with* him because God is symbolizing in that: "I want you to come back and be with me. But it will only be via the forgiveness of your sins. Come back, come back."

Forgiveness and Consequences

And then in the fourth place, forgiveness does not necessarily eliminate all consequences. God's forgiveness of us is a declaration that comes after repentance that aims at reconciliation.

But. We must not emphasize that *but*, but we ought to recognize that *but*. Sometimes though the guilt is fully removed, and God receives us back into his favor completely, yet there may be painful, lasting, humbling consequences for sin. And if [there is] anything we remember about David's history, *that* we remember.

What did Nathan the prophet say to David? "You took Uriah's wife and slept with her in secret; your son is going to take your wives and sleep with all of them in public." Shameful, humbling consequences. Second, Nathan said to David, "The sword is never going to depart from your house. You're always going to be a warring family." And third, David was told by Nathan, "The baby that you conceived with her is going to die."

Consequences, not because he had to pay—the payment was all provided by the Lord Jesus Christ. Not as punishment—God punished the substitute; but as God's loving chastisement and as a reminder that sin does damage. Some of the damage that cannot be remedied until Christ returns and levels the mountains and raises the valleys and makes the rough places plain. Not until then. [There] may be consequences.

But let's not emphasize that. Let's emphasize the first three. God declares something beautiful to you and to me. He does that when we confess and repent, and he aims at saying to you and to me, "Come back to me."

Three Important Things about God, Us, and Forgiveness

Before we go on to the next point of our forgiveness of one another, I want to remind you of three very important things. One about God, one about us, and one about forgiveness.

First, about God: All of God's works from eternity to eternity have their center in the cross. Everything that God determined was *aiming* at the cross, found its climax in the cross, and everything *after* the cross finds its significance *in* the cross. The cross is central. All of God's works are aiming at that. This is what's important to him: the *provision* for us guilty sinners that he puts away our sins. And that's why you can read, for example, in Psalm 86:5 (we are going to sing that, God willing, at the end) that God is always *ready* to forgive. Do you want to know what kind of disposition God has that stands behind that declaration to you? It's a readiness to forgive. And that's why Micah 7:18 can say, "He delights in mercy." It's almost as though you can say about God, "There's nothing he likes to do more than show you and me the mercy of saying to you, 'I put away your sins. They are gone.'"

And then we are reminded of something very important about ourselves. The reason for God's forgiveness of us is not in us; it's in him, and it's in the provision that he made for us in his own Son.

And then we are reminded of something very important about forgiveness. And that is, it's not for God. It's for us. It's not because God needed something; it's because we need something. Don't forget that when we come to our forgiveness of each other.

What is Our Forgiveness of Each Other?

Ephesians 4:31–32 lead to the beginning of Ephesians 5, and these verses talk about this. Let me read verses 31 and 32 and verses 1 and 2 of chapter 5.

“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.” That is, that’s the negative side of the attitude we ought to have toward each other when we are looking at now, how do we treat each other? This is how God deals with us; this is how we must deal with each other. There is an attitude behind that. Here’s the negative part of it: Don’t be bitter; don’t be wrathful; don’t have anger and clamor and evil speaking.

The positive side is, “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted.” “Well of course,” you would say. “That’s what we want.”

Then he comes to this: “forgiving one another” and then this, “even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”

This is the justification for me putting in one column “God’s forgiveness of us” and in a column right next to it “Our forgiveness of one another” and making a comparison in all four respects because God says, “Forgive one another, even as I for Christ’s sake have forgiven you.”

And then he goes on in chapter 5 to say, “Be [ye therefore] followers of God.” In other words, “If you didn’t understand what I was saying, now you do.” “Be [ye therefore] followers of God, as dear children.” Children behave as their parents do.

“And walk in love, as Christ also [hath] loved us, and [gave] himself for us an offering” and so forth.

Its Declaration

Our forgiveness must be modeled after God’s. And our forgiveness, therefore, as God’s does, starts with a declaration. Our forgiveness of each other is not an attitude; it’s speech. From my mouth or your mouth to another’s ear that you pray goes down into their heart that they believe you mean it. And to put content to it: “I put away your sin. I am not going to hold you responsible for it. I don’t want you to have to pay for it. I am not going to judge you in light of it or treat you poorly because of it. In fact, I’m not even going to think about it. I am going to pray for the grace of God to forget it.”

And by the grace of God, every Christian understands that when we forgive someone, it actually happens that we forget it. Now, of course, you can dig it up if you look for it or if somebody reminds you of it, it will come back to your memory. But in the normal course of your life, you have to say, “I didn’t think about it. In fact, I forgot about it.” Because our declaration to our neighbor is like God’s declaration to us. Or to put it pastorally, what we say to each other is, “Please don’t feel guilty anymore. Please don’t be ashamed.”

And here is where our forgiveness differs from God’s because whereas God’s forgiveness comes because *he* paid, our declaration to each other is not because we pay or the sinner pays. But we say this, “Do not feel guilty; do not be ashamed because God forgave my debt of ten thousand talents, and now I want to forgive in gratitude for that your debt of a hundred pence.”

Now, do you see what stands behind that declaration? That's forgiveness—a declaration. What stands behind that declaration is a disposition to forgive. Don't be angry; don't be bitter; don't be evil speaking; be kindhearted and tenderhearted to each other.

And then comes the act of forgiveness. I, like God, want to be ready to forgive.

And if I can reflect on that just for a moment to pause to say, "Wouldn't that be a marvelous thing if all of us were committed to live that way, and we all *knew* that everyone else was committed to live that way?" The wife forgives her husband and says it to him. And he's at peace. And a brother says to another brother in the church, "I forgive you." And all of us live in that church knowing about every other member: That's their inclination; that's their disposition. They are all ready to forgive. It's right under the surface. They want to forgive me.

And that clears up some confusion here too, doesn't it? Probably the greatest confusion about forgiveness is here. There are a lot of books, a lot of articles, a lot of authors who get it wrong *here*. And though a lot get it wrong, I can provide you with a list of many books where the authors get it right. Thankfully. But you have probably read some of those books or articles by the men who get it wrong. One of them has sold millions. *Forgive and Forget* is the title of it. And he got it wrong. Because in his mind and the others who get it wrong, forgiveness is my decision *in* myself not to be bitter, not to hold a grudge, not to seek vengeance but to move on. In their mind that's what forgiveness is. So "I forgive him" means "You aren't going to control me anymore." And I'm going to say that to myself, not to you. Maybe to you, but I'm not declaring anything to you, except what you're not going to do to me anymore. That's, in their estimation, forgiveness. So in that person who forgives, it isn't love for the sinner but love for himself, isn't concern to help *him* but concern to help himself.

And that forgiveness has little resemblance to God's forgiveness. And the mistake is, they confuse an *attitude*, a disposition, which must be there, with an *act*, which forgiveness is. From my mouth to your ear that I pray goes down into your heart. "I put away your sin."

But because confusion here confuses also, or mingles with the confusion under the second point, let's go to the second point. But just to look ahead, in that kind of forgiveness, justice isn't a factor. The sinner isn't in view, and reconciliation isn't the aim—just to let you know ahead of time. That's wrong thinking about forgiveness.

Declaration of Forgiveness after Confession and Repentance

But go on. God's forgiveness of us: declaration, after repentance, aims at reconciliation, and maybe with leftover consequences. Our forgiveness is declaration that comes after confession and not before. That is very easy now to understand. The child of God declares forgiveness only to those who are sorry and confess their sins. It's wrong to forgive someone who isn't sorry. Just as with God's ways, so with ours: repentance precedes forgiveness. That's what Jesus said in Luke 17:3: "If your brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and *if he repents*, forgive him." There its clear the connection between God's and ours.

But there's confusion there today too. It's very common today to think that forgiveness needs to be automatic and immediate, that we need to forgive those who sin against us very quickly without regard to anything in them. Just forgive them. Has no connection to their repentance. In fact, it has little connection to the sinner at all, and it has almost everything to do with *me* again. And they call that "therapeutic forgiveness." Except it's not therapy for them, it's therapy for me who has been sinned against. Forgiveness, as a decision then in me, in this

wrong view of forgiveness, is not for healing a relationship but for healing me. It's not for blessing another but for blessing me.

I read, maybe you read too, recently, about a bad fire down in the Smoky Mountains where a man lost his wife and his children in that fire that was started by arsonists. He went public and said, "I forgive those arsonists *because* I need to heal." And then he said this publicly to those men, "Forgiveness isn't for you; it's for me. It's for Chloe; it's for my son." Forgiveness "is to get those feelings off my chest." But that is not why we forgive. That's not how we forgive. We forgive by telling someone who is sorry, for the very same two reasons. Why? Because justice must be done to justice. If God's forgiveness of us never leaves out of sight the reality of justice, neither must ours. "Own it, please, or we can't have a relationship. I know you did it. You know you did it, but you deny that you did it; and we can't have a relationship restored until you own it. Recognize the fact that what you did deserves punishment. Admit that; not because I want to exact anything out of you but because I am standing before the justice of God, and this is the way he works. And in my love for you (that's next), but in my love for you, I want you to recognize that forgiveness means I'm not going to make you pay, though you deserve to pay. Admit that you deserve to pay, and then I can say to you because we must do justice to justice in this matter of forgiveness." Of mercy and of justice my thankful song shall be (psalter 101).

But the second reason parallels with God's second reason. He is not going to let us go on in our sins because he loves us, and we must not allow the neighbor to go on in his sin or her sin either because we love them. We love them. If I let him go, release him or her, that's the word for forgiveness in the New Testament—to let them go; I don't hold you accountable; you're free—if we release him when he or she is not sorry, then they go on in their sin, and I don't want that for him or her because I love him or her. An act of love for him is to keep on pursuing and keep on pursuing, so that they remain miserable until finally they own it and say, "Yes, that's mine. That's mine. All of it." Then the barrier is gone. But that's the next point.

But let me finish this one. I've heard from victims of terrible crimes that the one who sinned against them would always say to them, "You must forgive no matter what, automatically, unconditionally." And that false teaching about forgiveness was weaponized against them to hide the sin of the sinner, so that the one who was sinned against merely forgave and was supposed to forget and not say anything to anyone else. And then he or she could go on in his sin. We mustn't live that way together. Besides the fact that therapeutic forgiveness is easy—if I want to forgive by saying "In me I made a decision not to be bitter," that's easy. I let the sinner go; I don't have any more responsibility toward him or her. The love and walking in Christianity in the church of Christ means I need to work hard. They're not sorry. Got to make a phone call, got to make a drive over to his house or her house and say, "Brother or sister, we need to deal with this. There is a barrier between us."

Forgiveness Aims at Reconciliation

And that's the third element of our forgiveness that matches God's: declaration after repentance, aiming at reconciliation. So with ours. We aim at reconciliation. Sin is a barrier. That is why Proverbs 16:28 says that sin separates friends. Oh, how true that is. Or in Proverbs 17:9: a whisperer separates friends. Oh, how we know that when we hear about the whispers others have made toward us, about us. A big wall goes up. "I don't want to be by them." We

know that in our own homes and families and marriages. Every husband knows that who sinned against his wife. She doesn't want to be in the same room with him. And when they repent, he repents, and she forgives, then she comes back and says, "It's okay. We can be together." The wall is broken down. Sin is a barrier. And so the prodigal son returns in confession; he is forgiven and restored, as we say. Internal forgiveness, therapeutic forgiveness, doesn't do that. It doesn't aim at that. It can't accomplish that because therapeutic forgiveness, which isn't forgiveness but an attitude, can't reconcile.

True forgiveness is that declaration of God and a declaration by us.

Forgiveness and Consequences

But fourth, sometimes consequences follow. Not always. Sometimes. Just as with David in his relationship with God, there were consequences: painful, humbling, lasting consequences. Similarly, in our relationships to each other, though there may be forgiveness, it may not be possible to restore what was before. Now, that's why I don't want to make point four in each of these columns so highlighted because it ought not be that way. We must aim at reconciliation. When a wife commits adultery and comes back begging her husband for forgiveness, he needs to do everything he can to receive her back.

Nate [*sic*; I think this is supposed to be Steve, because Nate was the one killed by the Inca] Saint, a son of one of those five missionaries in Peru, I think it was, who were killed by those Inca Indians. Nate Saint, a son of one of those murdered missionaries, spent years traveling the world with his father's murderer because forgiveness makes reconciliation possible.

Consequences don't always follow. Great blessings usually follow. We pray that they do, but not always. And I have examples listed here, and I am going to forgo looking at those examples because I don't want anyone to think about them.

Conclusion

People of God, what a blessing is that gift, that central gift, of salvation for us. What a marvelous blessing. You can't overestimate it. Forget about the consequences now; look at the declaration God makes to us, and we make to each other. And I can go to sleep at night, knowing that there is nothing between me and you. And I can sleep peacefully even when I wake up in the middle of the night because I know there is nothing between me and God. He has declared to me forgiveness. What a great blessing. So blessed that the songs of thy salvation my heart with rapture thrills. That is how we sing. I can go back to God. I have everything. The battle is done; the storm is quieted; and I have peace with God, and my soul can rest, and I am not afraid to die. Imagine the look in the eyes of people who have to die not right with God and not right with you. It's good, my relationship with God. It's good, my relationship with you.

And I can speak personally now and plead with you. If I have sinned against you, please come to me and show me my sin, so that I can say, "Yes, that's mine. I own it. I'm sorry about that. Please, please forgive me." And then we stand together in the shadow of the cross and thank God for this fundamental blessing. And if you've sinned against me and I think about it and I can't stop thinking about it, then I assure you I am going to come to you. And you need to

know that right under the surface is a disposition to forgive, a desire to forgive, an eagerness to say what must be said when you are sorry: "I put it away; it's gone."

Let's pray, people of God, for grace to be of that kind of forgiving disposition—ready to forgive. And let's pray to get that disposition by keeping our eyes focused on this central act of God in human history that everything led up to, and everything now in AD finds its significance in. Let's get that disposition to forgive by focusing on that one central act of God in the cross. Let's learn to humble ourselves and repent to each other, to own our sins.

Shall we teach our children to speak aright? When they sin, they must say, "I am sorry." And we must say not "It's okay," but "I forgive you," which now binds me. In that promise I have put away that sin. That promise, "I forgive you," binds me never to bring it up again; never to think of them in the light of it; never to use it against them in the future; and actually forget. Let's learn to live that way with one another. So though I don't deserve to be forgiven by you, and you don't deserve to be forgiven by me—we all deserve to be judged and punished—we stand in the shadow of the cross: God forgives freely, graciously. And I beg of you, "Forgive me."

And then let's ask God to forgive all our unforgiving attitudes, all our unforgiving spirits and actions, especially of our unforgiving attitude that goes something like this: "They don't deserve my forgiveness." And I hope those words, if we ever speak them or think them, choke in our throats. "They don't...what?" Deserve forgiveness, as though I do? Then we haven't learned the basics of what it means to be a Christian. Of course you don't deserve my forgiveness. But I give it to you because God forgave me, and I want to be a follower of God as a dear child, putting away bitterness toward you, who don't deserve my forgiveness, who deserve to be punished. And I do too. And I am tenderhearted and loving and God-like in all my attitudes and in all my actions.

Let's be the kind of people who know how to forgive.

Thank you for attending. We have questions and answers that we will take now after we sing. Zach and the others on the committee are going to be collecting those during the singing, and then I will come back up here and take those questions.

Thank you very much, Professor Gritters, that was really, really interesting. I think I can speak for everybody here, we all learned quite a bit tonight.

Sing 140, three verses.

Sing 233, drawing special attention as Professor Gritters did, to verse 3: "and ready to forgive thou art." For, indeed, our God is always ready to forgive. Sing all six verses.

Sing 143, all four verses.

Questions and Answers

When the committee didn't hand me any questions for the first song, I was feeling pretty relieved; but then they handed me twenty-two questions. We're not going to be able to deal with all of them, but I'm glad that in the providence of God in the course of my speech, I decided to handle it the way I did. I left a third of my speech out because it was an answer to many questions. And I think a good number of the questions that I planned to answer in my speech are asked here.

One of them that isn't asked and is in the advertisement that I would like to answer just briefly is, may I forgive myself?

That is a very common expression. My neighbor forgives me; God forgives me; but I just can't forgive myself. You've heard that before probably. And we have to understand that in tonight's speech, the word of God that was explained just knocks that idea completely in its head. There is no such thing as forgiving yourself. But I can understand at times why you might think you need to. Just imagine that you as a Christian man one night had a drink more than you ought to have had. And then your wife and your children got in the car with you, and you missed a curve, and your wife died, and your child was mangled, so that you had to take care of her the rest of her life. And your in-laws forgave you for killing their daughter, and your other children forgave you for killing their mother and mangling their sister. And you believe that God forgave you and you can't get over it, and you *think* that you need to forgive yourself. There's some real pressure to ask that question, may I?

But I want you to ask a couple of questions: number one and then we ought to be finished. Does the Bible ever speak of forgiving yourself? It doesn't. Number two, what does forgiving yourself mean? What is it in a person that needs to be addressed or removed or remedied that the gospel doesn't remove or remedy?

And then this question: will you really say that after all the people you hurt forgive you and after you are convinced that God forgives you, are you really going to say that now God can't help me; I need to help myself and forgive myself? That really is a matter of pride. You mustn't go there; you mustn't imagine that you are able to enable yourself to go on. What you need to do is probably two things: number one, first, rest in the shadow of the cross; bask in the knowledge that God says, "Don't feel guilty. My Son took it; don't be ashamed. My Son bore it for you. Rest in the cross more and more." And probably your problem is that you haven't heard from God what you ought to hear. "I," God says, "forgive you." And then maybe it's the case that though your repentance before God was genuine, it was only this deep and over the course of your life you need to make it go deeper. And the deeper it goes, the more you'll be able to hear God again say, "Yes, I forgive that too. You're sorry for drinking too much that night. Are you also sorry for the kind of life that led up to that terrible mistake?" and so forth.

So please don't ever adopt the thinking that there is such a reality as forgiving yourself. What are you going to say to yourself? It's not biblical.

But now we need to get on to twenty-two questions. I tried to put them in a little bit of an order, but it's even impossible to do that in a few minutes, and I'd like to say what I said before: "I like questions, and I can usually think of a good answer to the questions, but the answer usually comes to me tomorrow morning." And that's not nice.

So let's start.

1. What is the best way to approach someone that has sinned against you but has not repented?

Well, first start with Matthew 18 because Jesus said, "You have to approach them." If a brother sins against you, go to him by yourself. So that's the first thing as to the best way. And I wrote about that in the *Standard Bearer* recently. If you have been sinned against with sexual abuse, you don't go by yourself. That is an exception. But any other sin, you go by yourself, and

you, with a disposition ready to forgive, try to show them their sin and say, “I want to forgive you. Do you own that sin?” And then it is finished when they say, “I’m sorry. Yes, I did it. It’s mine.” And it’s gone. If they don’t repent, if they don’t take the admonition well, how do you respond? Or if they try to shift the blame, how do you respond? Well, that’s when Matthew 18, as Jesus say[s] to you, “Take one or two with you.” They can help you, and they can be a witness to what you’ve said to them and what they’ve responded to you. There is a very biblical way to approach that. I’m not saying that it’s easy because it isn’t easy. But there is a way. And if you need help, advice, then talk to a pastor or a parent.

2. Is restoration sometimes impossible?

Yes. Yep, that’s one of the consequences I think at times. I believe that the Bible teaches that there’s one permission for divorce and that’s adultery. And sometimes the restoration of the marriage is not possible. So I think the answer to that question needs to be yes.

3. Is there a distinction to be made between reconciliation and restoration in relationships?

I think that’s similar. Reconciliation, maybe before God you can say, “I’m right with you, but I won’t be able to live with you any longer. We can’t have the relationship that we used to have.”

4. Oh, I didn’t mean to have that one there.

5. Since God pursues me and is my perfect example, what attitude should I then have toward my abuser if, number one, he is not sorry and if, number two, he is ungodly? May I desire justice, or must one seek that person’s salvation?

There are a lot of questions in that big question. What should my attitude be toward someone who hurt me if he is not sorry? Well, your attitude always needs to be the same: love, desire for good, tenderhearted, an inclination to mercy—always. That doesn’t mean that you don’t seek justice. You turn justice over to the authorities; you give justice over to God, to the elders. But you always seek their good. If they are not sorry, the way of Matthew 18 is there. You may desire justice, and you must seek that person’s salvation. Those aren’t contradictory.

6. What’s the biblical basis for defining forgiveness as primarily a *declaration*? Colossians 2 and Ephesians 1 seem to indicate that forgiveness is at the cross.

Yeah, that’s a great question. Uh, I did talk about that somewhat in my speech. Let me clarify: Colossians 2 and Ephesians 1 seem to indicate that forgiveness is at the cross because there is such a close connection between the *judicial ground of forgiveness* in the cross and the *forgiveness that God declares* to me in my lifetime—sometimes such that that’s called *forgiveness*. Just as sometimes God’s *decree* is called forgiveness, but if we would be *careful*, though those are the root of forgiveness and the basis for forgiveness, this is forgiveness: this declaration. Remember that song: “*When I confessed transgression, then thou forgavest me.*” When was that? When Nathan the prophet came and spoke; he declared.

Maybe a different perspective I didn’t use tonight is that forgiveness is the *negative half* of justification. Justification has a negative side—God forgives sin—and a positive side where God imputes to you the righteousness of Christ. He says, “I take away your sins; I give you the righteousness of Christ.” That’s the concept of *justification*.

When does justification take place? Well, it takes place as the Bible says by faith. When the judge declares to me, "Not guilty," and the judge also declares to me, "You're righteous."

Justification has its root in eternity, its basis in the cross, but takes place *when* God speaks to me. That is why in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, the Pharisee went home unjustified. And the Bible says that the publican went home justified. He came to the temple miserable; he left the temple justified because he *heard* God say to him when he beat his breast and said, "God be merciful to me a sinner," he heard God say to him, "You're justified."

7. We don't receive forgiveness of our sins until we *own* them. What about those sins we don't even know are sins, also sins of omission?

Yeah, that gets at the heart of what I'm saying too. I'm thankful for this question because it seems to indicate that we're forgetting that forgiveness is God *speaking* to me, "I don't impute that sin to you. I am not going to hold you accountable for that sin" *when* we say about that sin, "God, I'm sorry for that sin."

There are other sins that we never confess. Some of them we don't even know we committed; some of them are sins of omission we never think about. Now, remember about those sins, God *decreed* not to hold them to our account. Jesus Christ died for them and paid for them. They are fully paid for. If we die not thinking about some of them, you might say that *you're not forgiven of those sins*. That just means you didn't hear about that sin God saying to you, "I forgive you." They're paid for though. You're going to go to heaven.

That's why it's possible for a baby who dies in infancy, who's never committed one actual sin, to go to heaven. *He's not been forgiven in the sense that he never heard consciously* God say to him, "I don't hold that sin against you." He's an infant; he died in his mother's womb maybe. But Christ died for his sins; God determined to take him to heaven, and he went to heaven though he didn't *hear in his ear* and embrace with his believing heart that declaration of God.

But as I was thinking about that today, I thought hmmm. Maybe that needs to be clarified a little bit in this way. When that little infant, who never spoke one word and never thought any thought gets to heaven, he is able to speak. And this is what he is going to say: "God, forgive me of my sinful nature. Forgive me of my connection to Adam." And then God is going to speak to him and declare, "I don't hold that against you because I put that responsibility on my Son, and he's forgiven."—if we may imagine that. That's when he would *hear* God say it to him.

So forgiveness is in my ear, embraced by my believing heart while I'm living.

Let me give another example of this. I think this is pretty important. It's possible that on the way home one of us gets in a wreck and dies and didn't confess a certain sin that we've committed. We didn't think about it; or maybe we did, and we were ready to confess it when we got home tonight, but we died before we confessed it. We die *unforgiven* of that sin, that is, not that Jesus didn't die and pay for that sin, but that *I didn't hear God say to me*, "I don't hold it against you." Forgiveness, again, is God's *declaration* to us, "I forgive you."

8. If we have to repent from our sins, then we are forgiven; then do we have to repent from future sins, in case we die before that happens? Otherwise, we die in our sins unforgiven?

I think that is what I was just talking about too.

9. What happens in a marriage when a husband and wife disagree on whether one sinned against the other? How do you maintain peace without forgiving someone who isn't sorry?

Yeah. You disagree on whether one sinned against the other. If you think that your spouse sinned against you, and your spouse doesn't believe that they sinned against you, then you have two choices really. You drop it because you can't agree, or you get help from someone else to help you see that *you're* wrong in accusing him of sin or *they're* wrong in denying sin. But if you're not willing to get help, then you must cover that sin by your charity.

This is an easy answer to a hard question. Follow up if you'd like.

10. A similar question: How do you forgive and forget and move on if the person doesn't ask for forgiveness, for example, the person that sinned against you died or refuses to own it?

If they don't ask for forgiveness, then you deal with them as much as you can through church discipline. If you can't through church discipline, then they are not a part of your life anymore, and you move on by committing to have that disposition of forgiveness. You're not bitter; you commit them to the judgment of God and leave it to him. That's where some are on to something when they say, "Let it go." And they say that is what forgiveness is. They're wrong in using the word *forgiveness* for that action of letting go, but they're right in the need to let it go. They are not sorry; you can't do anything about it anymore. God says, "Let it go; justice and vengeance are mine." "I will repay," says the Lord.

11. Two questions here: Remember it no more? Forget? Amnesia? Please explain more.

I can only explain this, that it is one of two things.

One is I refuse to think about it, and then it's in the back of my mind and not in the front of my mind; and maybe it comes up once in a while, and I have to confess that as a sin. I promised them I wouldn't think about it, so I ask God to forgive me.

The other possibility is really my experience. It is my experience; I pray it is yours. When someone has sinned against me, a family member, and later on brings it up and says, "Do you remember that?" I honestly can say, and this is not because I am 67 years old, "I didn't remember that. I didn't remember that. God gave me the grace to forget it." He did. "Now that you bring it up, I recall it; it's back there. You dug it up in my memory for me. Yes, I wish you hadn't. But I want you to know it's done. I don't think about you in the light of it. I truly have forgotten it."

12. I want to hear of the consequences. They warn us, "Don't do what I did!"

I think that does not need an answer. I think what you say is very right. I just didn't list the consequences because they're painful, and we don't...Yeah. All right. Hmm.

13. Then there are a number of questions about repentance, whether it's genuine or sufficient.

Is true repentance always obvious, or can we wrongly think someone has not yet come to full repentance?

14. And this one: If someone says that they are sorry but through their walk show that their repentance was not genuine, may we judge it if it is true repentance?

There are a number of them like that. I don't know if I can find all of them yet. Hmm. How do you respond when repentance is not genuine?

I've said recently that there's an important expression in the Church Order, article 75, that says that the elders need to reconcile with the sinner upon sufficient evidence of repentance. Repentance, you know what that is: saying, "I'm sorry," showing I'm sorry, turning around from the sin. Now, the Church Order says there needs to be *evidence* of that, not just that they say something, but that they show something. Then the Church Order says that there needs to be *sufficient* evidence of that repentance.

A consistory needs to judge that. It's not an easy judgment to make, and probably you need to make that judgment too once in a while.

Let me urge you to be charitable as much as you can with regard to the sins against you. If they become public sins and others must judge, then you must yet be charitable. But others help you make that judgment.

I was anticipating someone asking the question, what about seventy times seven? Don't you just have to keep forgiving, keep forgiving? Doesn't it show that you have to forgive automatically and immediately? And doesn't that show that you can't wait for repentance?

My response was going to be another question. And the question is long, and it goes like this: If your neighbor rapes your daughter one day and that afternoon says he's sorry, and you forgive him. And he rapes her the next day, and you say, after he says he's sorry, "I forgive you." And he does that seventy times seven. That just doesn't make sense, does it? To forgive someone without the evidence of repentance.

How that relates to this question: Be of a forgiving attitude, but don't be naïve. And the reason you mustn't be naïve is because you love him or love her. And if they are not truly sorry, and you're convinced that they are not truly sorry, their relationship before God is in danger. It is. And so this must not be a flippant activity of yours to say, "Well, I'm sure he's genuinely repentant" or "I'm sure she is truly sorry." You need to be a prophet of God and make a judgment like that.

Zach said, "8:30 or a little bit after." There are a lot of questions here. Um, I think I've answered a good number of them. Let me take just a half a minute to look through and see if I can...

Fruits of repentance as parents you can fall into forcing our children to repent and forgive each other. "Tell your sister you are sorry." "Now, tell your brother you forgive him."

Ha ha. I like that. But you better do that, and you need to use that language. Please train your children to use that language. "I am sorry" requires the one who believes that they're sorry to say, "And I forgive you." So it's not bad. They're kids, right? They're little children.

"Say you're sorry."

"I am sorry."

"Not in that tone, but in this tone."

"I'm sorry."

And now say, "I forgive you."

And then instruct them both in that beautiful reality that this one is genuine, and this one makes a promise: "I promise that I'm not going to punish you for that. I'm never going to bring it up again. I'm not going to think about you in the light of it." And then those little

children grow up in the church and live that way, using that good language: “I am sorry. That’s my sin, and I own it.”

“I forgive you.”

Sigh. Yep, there are a half dozen yet. I think we are going to limit it to that. I’ve got questions that I wanted to answer myself. That was the third part of my speech. Let me see if there is anything that I think is important to go...Yep, very good. And Reverend Guichelaar is going to close with prayer.

Again, thank you Grace church for the invitation to speak and thank you all for coming and your attentiveness, and I pray God’s blessing on you.

Well, on behalf of Grace’s evangelism committee and Grace church, I want to thank you again, Prof. Gritters, for your willingness to give this speech and for the time and the work you put into this very pertinent and spiritually profitable subject. So thank you. On behalf of Grace church, thank you to everyone who has come out tonight. And if you are a visitor, this is an evangelism effort. And if you are a visitor, please stick around and we’ll have, I’m sure there will be evangelism committee members who are willing to interact with you and introduce you to our church a little bit more.

Let’s go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father who art in heaven, we give thee thanks, and we give thee praise for thou art an awesome and a glorious God in every way. All things are of thee and through thee and to thee, to whom alone belongs the glory forever.

The repentance, which is worked within thy people, so that they are truly sorry for their sins and they hate their sins and they flee their sins and they turn unto thee with sorrowful hearts, confessing and acknowledging their sins from the heart—all of that is only of thee, Lord. The knowing, the knowledge, of thy word of forgiveness spoken to our hearts, so that we have the peace that all our sins are blotted out and that thou dost not impute to us our iniquities, but thou dost see us as righteous in Jesus Christ—all that is of thee too.

And, Lord, the gracious disposition which thou dost work within us, so that knowing our sins and knowing our great forgiveness, we are glad and desire to be able to forgive one another. And we have that disposition. That is of thee too, Lord. And we thank thee for that.

We thank thee for the cross of Jesus Christ through which all these blessings have been purchased for us. We thank thee for his Holy Spirit who applies all these blessings.

And we pray, Lord, give us more of Christ. Give us more of his Spirit. Give us more of that heart of repentance, so that we truly see our sins and we do not treat our sins as a light thing—our sins against thee and our sins against each other. Work within us, Father, that we might be a community characterized by repentance, characterized by true sorrow over sins and a hatred for sin and a fleeing from the sin, even having such an attitude that we would not have our garments spotted by sin. Help us, Lord.

And then, Father, cause us to be a people who know the gospel, who know not only how great our sins are but who know thy love for us and thy disposition, that thou art the God who delights to show mercy. What an awesome God, a God far above our imaginations and a God far above our thoughts! For thou art not like us, Lord. Thou art the God who dost showcase thy power and thy majesty, not just in creation but in forgiving us. We pray, Father, that our whole lives might have that as our chief joy and our chief happiness—that our sins are forgiven. Give us that assurance more and more. And where we are struggling, Lord, show us Christ.

And we pray, Father, work within us as thy people a forgiving disposition that we might know how to forgive, that we might be ready to forgive. And we pray, Lord, give us all humility that we might have these open and honest interactions, that we might be able to confront one another, that we might receive that confrontation and we might experience the gospel in our interactions with each other. Help us, Lord, in all these things and show us mercy here too.

We pray, Lord, that as we go home tonight we might, indeed, be like that publican who went home justified.

And through all this discussion, Lord, we pray that thy name might be exalted in the name of thy Son Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of our faith and the one who was the shepherd who laid down his life on the cross for us. We pray that his name might be exalted.

And we pray that as we go to work tomorrow and in our daily labors, we might be a people who know the gospel and who rest in it.

Keep us safe on our homeward way and bless us in all our relationships. And we pray, Lord, that with even all this discussion those who are visitors and those who don't know Christ might see the beauty of Christ and might find in him a relief from the burden of their sins and know the joy of being at peace with thee.

In Jesus' name we pray, amen.