

Eraser*4/4 School Supplies Series*

Luke 6:37-38

08 22 2010 Sam Jones Memorial UMC

Scripture: Luke 6:37-38**Introduction**

Parents with children in primary, elementary, or middle school are very familiar with the letters “**CRCT**.” The initials stand for *Criterion-Referenced Competency Test*. Since 2000, all first through eighth graders have been required to take the annual tests to measure competency in the Georgia Performance Standards.

Systems are under great pressure to perform well on the CRCTs. Last year some schools’ tests contained an abnormally large number of erasures. Investigators suspected that teachers or administrators might have changed students’ answers to improve their overall scores. This has become a lead story in Atlanta news.

These are serious charges; however, the scandal has also had its share of irony and humor. For example, early investigations into the issue did not ask what would seem to be a basic question: Did the erasures change responses from the wrong answers to the right answers? And do you know what a number of principals and teachers gave their students as motivational gifts before the test? You guessed it—ERASERS!

I. School Supplies: Erasers

Today we are concluding our August worship series entitled *School Supplies*. In previous sermons, we’ve looked at *Pencil and Paper*, *School Clothes*, and *Ruler*. The last item in our pencil pouch is an **eraser**.

Erasers come in a variety of shapes, sizes, and colors. Most # 2 pencils come complete with a rubber eraser on one end. For the error-prone, larger erasers the size of Matchbox cars are also available.

Students know that erasers are an essential part of their school supplies. I knew an elementary school teacher who liked to say, “*There’s a reason why pencils have erasers.*” The reason is simple: Everyone makes mistakes.

In fact, there are times when having a pencil with erasers on both ends would be convenient—but then what would be the point!?! We all need the chance—over and over again—to correct our errors.

What works with pencil and paper, however, does not always work with heart and soul. Are we willing to erase the mistakes that others make in our lives?

II. Limited Forgiveness

One day Simon Peter asked Jesus, “*Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?*” (see [Matthew 18:21-22](#))

What a great question! Jesus had been teaching the disciples about Christian relationships and church discipline. Peter was trying to get a handle on the whole concept of **human forgiveness**—erasing the wrongs that others do.

Jesus said to forgive others as God forgives us. Pray for those who persecute you. Bless those who curse you. Turn the other cheek. But . . . what happens if the person slaps your OTHER cheek as well? Just how far does this forgiveness thing go?

The Old Testament taught “*an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.*” Although this sounds harsh, the principle actually attempted to LIMIT revenge and retaliation.

During New Testament times, however, the Jewish rabbis followed a more moderate doctrine. They taught this rule of thumb: One should forgive a neighbor up to three times. Then it was no longer necessary to forgive or forget. This seemed to simplify the matter. Forgiveness became something that could be quantified and measured.

No doubt Peter had learned this rule in Saturday School. But Jesus’ call to commitment went far beyond the rabbis’ teaching. The disciples were learning a new “*Law of Love.*” So Peter took the rule of forgiving someone three times. Then he doubled it and added one more for good measure. Here was REAL Christian living! Peter said, “*Lord, should I forgive my brother up to SEVEN TIMES if he sins against me?*”

It seemed like a generous proposal. However, Simon Peter’s well-intentioned effort to define and refine Christian forgiveness was fundamentally flawed. He attempted to place limits on love. Like the Pharisees, Peter tried to legalize, legislate, and codify God’s demands upon our lives. He spoke a language of limits: “*How many times? Up to seven?*” Lord, define how much forgiveness is enough . . . but not TOO much.

For the sake of argument, suppose that we could agree on a satisfactory number for forgiving our neighbor. Using Peter’s suggestion, let’s say that seven times is the legal limit for forgiving others. This solution immediately leads to another problem. How do we keep track of how many times someone has wronged us?

Well, you would need some sort of **accounting system** to keep track of others’ sins. An old-fashioned ledger book would work. For the technologically advanced, an *Excel* spread sheet on a computer would be even better. Once someone accumulated seven offenses, then we could close the account—one less person to forgive again.

We smile at such a ridiculous scheme; but we are all guilty to doing just that. We keep a ledger book with tallies of how we’ve been hurt. A running record of wrongs is continually reviewed. Old offenses are given new life. Embers of hurt and hate are stirred into flame. We nurse grudges—because they would die without intensive care. The scabs of old wounds are regularly torn off. Rather than forgive and forget, we remember and repay. The results are disastrous—not only for others but also for ourselves.

In 1881, James Garfield was inaugurated as the president of the United States. Six months later on July 2 an assailant shot him in the back. A doctor attempted to remove the bullet at the hospital. First he used his fingers and then a silver probe, but he was unsuccessful.

Throughout the summer, other doctors probed the wound repeatedly with unsterilized fingers and instruments. Alexander Graham Bell even designed a metal detector to locate the bullet, but it didn’t work.

President Garfield died eighty days after the attack on September 19. However, the original bullet wound did not kill him. The cause of death was septic infection from the constant probing of the wound.

An unforgiving spirit is a toxic shock of the soul. Bitterness, anger, and hatred are deadly infections. The constant probing of wounds prevents healing. Carrying a grudge in our hearts and a chip on our shoulders are heavy burdens that sap our spiritual health. It ultimately warps our identity and relationships.

The Jewish rabbis told a fable about **two shopkeepers** who hated each other. Each rejoiced when the other suffered and grieved when the other succeeded.

One day an angel appeared to one of the men. He said, "I will give you whatever you ask; but there is one condition. Whatever you receive, your neighbor will receive twice as much. If you ask for money, your competitor will get double the riches. If you ask for long life, the other man will live twice as long. So what do you desire?"

The shop owner twisted by a lifetime of hatred paused only for a moment before saying, "Strike me blind in one eye."

Here is one of the harsh lessons of an unforgiving spirit. We may harm others, but we also harm ourselves. By reacting to what others do, we place the control of how we live in the very hands of the person we profess to hate.

II. Limitless Love

So Peter's sincere question managed to miss the Lord's point entirely. "*How often should I forgive my brother? None? Once? The rabbis say three times, but I'm willing to stretch it to seven if I have to.*"

Jesus answered, "*I do not say to you seven times . . .*" No doubt Peter along with the other disciples was relieved. Seven times really was a bit much. Then Jesus continued, "*I do not say to you seven times but seventy times seven!*"

Seventy times seven?!? That's . . . 7 times 7 and carry the 0 . . . that's a lot! A CPA could not accurately record 490 separate offenses for every person in our lives. It would be impossible to keep score.

Exactly. Jesus wasn't talking about numbers here. Forgiveness is not an earthly arithmetic of the mind but a divine calculus of the heart. Forgive your brother: 7 times . . . 77 times . . . 70 times 7 times . . . 70 times 7 times plus 1

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul wrote that "*love keeps no record of wrongs.*" We are called to forgive as often as we are wronged. For God's sake, for our neighbor's sake, AND for our sake. In order to illustrate the lesson, Jesus then told the disciples a story.

Once upon a time a **king** decided to settle accounts with his servants. So he called in all of his loans and demanded payment. A man was brought before the king who owed millions of dollars; but the servant had no money to repay his debt. So the ruler ordered the man and his family to be sold into slavery to recoup part of the loan.

But the servant fell on his knees and begged, "Please be patient with me. I will pay back everything if you give me a little more time." The king was so merciful that he not only released the man but also cancelled the debt!

While the forgiven man was leaving the palace, he saw a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed the other man by the throat and demanded, “Pay me the money you owe!”

The second servant said, “Please be patient with me. I will pay you back soon.” But the man refused. Instead, he had the second servant thrown into jail until he could repay his debt.

Other servants witnessed the event and were scandalized. They told the king all that had occurred. The ruler was FURIOUS. The first man was brought back before him. The king said, “You wicked servant! I canceled your debt when you begged me to do so. Why didn’t you treat your fellow servant the way I treated you?” Then the king ordered the man placed in jail until he repaid the entire amount.

Jesus concluded the story by saying, “*This is how my heavenly Father will treat you unless you each forgive your brother from the heart.*” (see [Matthew 18:23-35](#))

OUCH! Did anyone here miss the story’s sharp point? I don’t know about you, but I’ve found myself in the first servant’s shoes a few times. Okay, I fibbed a bit. I DO know about you, and you’ve worn the same shoes!

III. Divine and Human Forgiveness

The Golden Rule teaches us to treat others the way that we want to be treated. Jesus’ story calls us to treat others the way that God treats us! Whenever we recite *The Lord’s Prayer*, we say: “*Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive others who trespass against us.*” Hmm . . . that’s a rather bothersome request when you think about it! There are at least two ways to understand Jesus; and both interpretations have merit.

1) First, there is a linkage between divine and human forgiveness. God’s forgiveness of us is dependent upon our forgiveness of others. Jesus said: “*For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you.*” ([Matthew 6:14-15](#)) The vertical and horizontal relationships of our lives cannot be separated.

2) Second, a bitter and unforgiving spirit may be incapable of receiving God’s forgiveness. It’s not that the Lord is unwilling to forgive us, but we are incapable of receiving forgiveness. Hearts filled with bitterness and hatred have no room left for forgiveness and love.

Today’s Scripture lesson comes from [Luke 6:37-38](#). I typically use this passage during Stewardship Sunday! Don’t worry—I’m not talking about money . . . today! However, the passage contains a universal, spiritual principle. Jesus said:

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

Hear the last sentence again: “*For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*” This is a fundamental principle of God’s kingdom. We receive what we give. Don’t judge and you won’t be judged. Don’t condemn and you won’t be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and it will be given to you beyond all measure.

Conclusion

Occasionally we see such Christian forgiveness exemplified in the lives of others. Their example inspires us to forgive those who have wronged us.

In 1966, Air Force Captain **Pete Peterson** was shot down during a bombing raid over North Vietnam. He became a prisoner of war in the infamous Hanoi Hilton camp. His existence was an endless cycle of interrogation, isolation, torture, and malnutrition. He was not released until six years later in 1973.

Peterson eventually returned to Hanoi in 1997. He was appointed as the first United States Ambassador to North Vietnam. Asked how he could forgive his former tormentors, he responded:

"After the war I had two choices. I could go home angry, disenchanted, depressed. If I followed that path, I would always be walking backward. Or I could get on with my life. I woke up one morning and realized I had no control over yesterday. But I had full control over and responsibility for tomorrow. My choice was obvious."

Some people would have remained in a prison of anger, bitterness, and hatred for the rest of their lives. However, Pete Peterson chose the freedom of forgiveness instead.

Forgive and forget. Frankly, forgetfulness may be beyond our human abilities on occasion. Even after you use an eraser to correct a wrong, the impression of the error may remain. But by the grace of God who forgives us, we can learn to forgive others. Forgive others as God forgives us. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

Peter asked Jesus, *"Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"* No, not 7 times. 77 times. 70 times 7 times. 70 times 7 plus one and one and Today we pray, *"Forgive us our trespasses AS we forgive those who trespass against us."*

In a jungle war of survival, they learned sacrifice. In a prison of brutal confinement, they found true freedom.

A true story about four Allied POW's who endure harsh treatment from their Japanese captors during World War II while being forced to build a railroad through the Burmese jungle. Ultimately they find true freedom by forgiving their enemies. The moral messages of forgiveness and sacrifice are so compelling we highly recommend this movie for all mature audiences.

Human Beings

After being bombed by Allied troops, Ernest makes the choice to help the injured enemy soldiers.

<http://www.wingclips.com/movie-clips/to-end-all-wars/human-beings?play=1>

Men in Black

Test Scene

Begin: 24:20 OR 25:35

End: 26:58 "Y'all want get down on this?" Final shot of men looking at Will Smith.