

# “Forgiveness is the Cure”

Ephesians 4:17-5:2

Christ our Lord once said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.” In the church’s mail, and throughout the media, we get inundated with messages that tend to focus on the problems of the world today. So many of the books written in recent years that deal with Christian issues tend to be aimed at solving the illness of our decaying society. However, it seems as if so much of what is written or preached to the masses focuses on diagnosing the disease, but does not offer the cure.

Many of the Christian writers and speakers whose work I have come in contact with are excellent doctors when it comes to diagnosing the problem. However, it seems that they are unable or unwilling to prescribe the cure.

Like St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians, these people tell their audience “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice,” but they tend not to give you the tools how to do this. And if they do offer the “How to’s” of Christianity, they tend to fall into the same error as the people mentioned in last week’s sermon who asked Jesus, “What must I do to get eternal life.”

There is a reason that popular publications are often not very helpful.

If you want to sell books or get yourself on TV, you need to make the reader or listener feel good about themselves, or you need to be creative and offer something new and different.

Both of these approaches do not serve the Lord's Word very well. When someone comes along with a new, creative interpretation of the Bible, I believe that it is our duty to be very skeptical. As King Solomon said: "There is nothing new under the sun." The fullness of God's revelation was complete in the days of the apostles. It is utter arrogance on anyone's part to say that we have achieved a deeper understanding than, say, St. Peter or St. Paul.

Therefore the new and creative interpretations of God's Word are not going to bring a cure for the disease that plagues the world. In fact, new and creative interpretations tend to be symptoms of the disease.

The other common approach for selling books or getting your face on television, as I mentioned before, is to make your audience feel good about themselves – to make us feel good that we are not the people St. Paul is talking about when he says to "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you" because, after all, we have already done that. We are the "good" people of society.

We are encouraged to be like the young man I mentioned last week who said of the commandments, "All these I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?" But we are reminded in God's Word that there is much that we lack. Like I said last week, being sinful is not something that we do. Being sinful is something that we are by nature.

When it comes to healing the disease of sin that plagues the world, Jesus did not tip-toe around the problem and try to make His audience feel better about themselves. Christ said, “I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.” Christ came as the physician who can not only diagnose the problem, but is also willing to prescribe the cure, no matter how painful the procedure may be that is required to bring about that healing.

Being truly repentant of our sins is often a very painful procedure. To be brought to repentance of our sins is the work of God to lead us to say three words that are oh so painful for us – to say: “I was wrong.” These words are especially painful if the person saying them does not trust in or understand forgiveness. Many people grow up never knowing or experiencing complete forgiveness – where your sins are forgiven and from that time on it is as if the sin never occurred.

In our text, Paul tells the church in Ephesus more than just to “Get rid of all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander.” He speaks to them about what it is that will truly make a difference in their lives. He continues by telling them: “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one other, just as God in Christ forgave you.”

Healing in your life comes through Christ. We now can approach God and say: “I was wrong,” and know that we will be forgiven. Knowing that God will forgive us – that may be the easy part. We know and believe that God is loving, merciful, and forgiving. The real test comes for us when we approach the people whom we have offended and say the words: “I was

wrong.”

Especially with our fellow brothers and sisters in the faith, you need to trust that in such cases you will be forgiven. For those outside of the kingdom of God, we can understand that they do not have any idea what it means to forgive. This does not mean we have the right to despise others or write off others as being of no consequence (be they believers or non-believers). To do so would be to deny the mercy of God who did not write us off or despise us even when we were despicable, unforgiven, haters of God. We have a history, a context of what it means for mercy and grace to be given and received when no such consideration is deserved.

Diagnosing the problems of this world is easy. By nature every human being is full of “bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander and malice.” However, as God’s people, we can approach God and should be able to approach one another with the words: “I was wrong,” and have the sure confidence that we will be forgiven and we will never have to hear about our sin ever again. The forgiveness won for us through the blood of Christ on the cross is the only cure for the disease that ails this world.

As Paul says, “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Amen.