

Freedom in Forgiveness Forgive Our Trespasses—Christian Management Styles
Saturday, November 17, 2007 8:00—9:30 AM **Business Breakfast Series** COR
Center (Sense of relatedness, living as a child of God, seeing ourselves as debtors,
freedom from feelings of being cheated, forgiveness—choosing to be free)

First of all, I have to start with a disclaimer: I don't know anything about business. So you're going to have to **apply what I have to say to business**, if you can. And we have to recognize that the world of **business may, in fact, clash with the world of faith** or the world of the Spirit. And so that's something that we have to deal with in terms of **being in but not of the world**.

Now there are certain ideas that Jesus brings to bear on life. Some of them are unique to him, but some of them are not quite unique to him. But they are recorded very clearly in the New Testament in different areas. I want to put a few things on the board for you to try to connect. They may not appear at first to be connected, but they really are all a part of the same vision.

- First, **"Forgive us as."**
- Secondly, **"What you measure out will be measured back to you."**
- **"I am the vine, you are the branches."**

You will recognize some of these are from—this is from John; this is from Luke; this is from Luke and Matthew. I'll have a few more in a few minutes. But what Christ talks about is **a sense of relatedness that belongs to us as children of God**.

Now let me make it clear that Jesus talks about being **a child of God as a potential**, not as an actual, condition of life on earth or of human beings. The potential is established in the creation itself when God creates human beings in his own image and likeness. What that means is that **our ability to reflect on ourselves**, to be aware of ourselves, **is itself already a reflection of the divine reality**: "I AM WHO AM." That is what God told Moses. When he said, "Well, whom shall I say sent me?" God said, "Tell them: I AM WHO AM." So God identifies himself as the ground of self-consciousness. Well, we have the capacity of self-consciousness, and therefore **we have the image of God within us**. However, **we do not necessarily live that image as a child of God** because to be a child of God means to share his will, **to have his will in our will**, to have unity of will. And the whole history of the world is exactly opposite.

In the garden the serpent told Eve, "Look, Eve, you can't trust God. He doesn't have your good at heart. He knows that you could become just like him if you choose for yourself what is good, what is bad, what is right, what is wrong, what is good, what is evil. You decide you will be equal to God and he knows it, and he doesn't want you to know this. So go ahead and take the plunge." And that creates **a rivalry with the will of God**. And this **is the opposite of being a child of God**. And that is part of the reality of the world.

Furthermore, it is possible for us to replace totally the image of God within us with pure **unadulterated egoism**. And I would say that that is often what we meet in the

world of politics, in the world of business, is unadulterated egoism. Well, this doesn't fit at all into the world of God. If you look at **"I am the vine, you are the branches," this is meant to be not simply a discussion of Church, but a real description of creation itself.**

In the Prologue of John's Gospel, it says, "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God. The Word was God. Apart from the Word nothing came to be." Now St. Thomas Aquinas says that the creation is something ongoing; it's right now! God is now creating everything, and it's not an event in the past! Often people think of the creation as something now thirteen billion years ago. No, that was the beginning of creation. Now **creation is still ongoing because God is now creating us.** And there's **nothing that exists that is apart from the Word.** It's impossible. **But that doesn't mean that everything is connected in the right way to the Word.**

Since the Word is the vine and we are the branches, and we include really, not only conscious reality, but all reality, all created reality, then our attitude toward other branches, to be proper, has to be the same attitude toward ourselves. If we will to a branch what we don't will to ourselves, we're kidding ourselves, because **whatever we will to one branch, we will to the whole vine and therefore to ourselves.**

But **we live with a sense of separation. This is a result of sin.** As St. Augustine says, "Sin creates darkness of the mind" or of the intellect. This darkness creates a sense that I am separate from everybody else. Partly this is a result of our being enfleshed in a physical, material body. As Aristotle points out, "Matter is the principle of individuation." But that in itself is not the problem. The problem is the temptation of the serpent to live as an independent being. We have free will, but that doesn't mean we are independent beings. There's nothing independent. Everything is in the Word. St. Paul says, "We live and move and have our being in God." There's no other way to live; there's no other way to be. So, **as beings we are in God.**

The question is: **Are we in God in spirit?** Are our wills connected to God? Well, if they are, we are pure of heart." So Jesus says, "Blessed are the pure or clean of heart." Why? "For they shall see God." And this means that if we are pure of heart, that is, if we live without this sense of separation from everybody else, then we see God in every part of the vine, and **we don't will to any part of it, to any person, what we wouldn't will to ourselves,** since it is, quote, "metaphysically, spiritually impossible." It's all connected. The pure of heart see the connections. They see God. They see God in everything! **For the pure of heart God pervades everything.**

- Now another thing Jesus said: **"It is not what goes into a man that makes him unclean."**

This, of course, is a reference to the kosher laws of Judaism. "It is not what goes into a man that makes him unclean, but what comes out of him." Well, what comes out of him that makes him unclean? Malevolence, ill will, injustice, adultery, sorcery, etc. We can go on and on. The idea is this: that in the heart of human beings—because the heart is formed by this sense of separation, which incidentally is what modern people call the

“ego”—a sense of self arises that is separated from everyone else and acts in a separate way. Because the heart is formed under the influence of the ego, there’s all kinds of ill will that can come out and spread toward others with no sense that there’s anything wrong with this picture, because **the sense of separation acts like blinders that prevent us from seeing God in others.**

Now the seeing God in others does not mean seeing God in the others who love us. Jesus says, **“Love your enemies.”** So God is in the enemy as well. It is a fundamental necessity for **God to be in everything because otherwise it couldn’t be.** The pure of heart see this; the impure of heart do not see this.

When it comes to forgiveness, it’s a matter of whether we **recognize ourselves as debtors.** If we are indeed the beneficiaries of, first of all, creation itself and, second of all, the life of grace, the adoption into the Spirit of God himself, into the inner life of God, so that we can really be his children, share his will, share his heart, share his love, which is what he desires, which is what Baptism is supposed to be a sign of, which faith makes possible, if we are really debtors then, then **can we hold anyone to debt?** So the Latin prayer is, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive those who have debts against us.” That is actually more spiritual in a sense than the word “trespass” because “trespass” simply means a violation. But the idea of debts is closer to the reality.

We can easily feel ourselves cheated. Feeling cheated is one of the easiest emotions to come to. Why? Because we live in the world **dominated by ego**, and we think of ourselves distinct from everybody else. **We easily see what we contribute. We don’t easily see what is given. We can imagine ourselves as being injured. We don’t see how we injure others.** This is because, in fact, **we are not clean of heart.** And no one with a living ego is really clean of heart. So **forgiveness has to be**, not only a matter of **canceling debts**, but also **recognizing the completely inappropriate nature of our feelings of being cheated.** This is not to say we are not the objects of injustice—we are surely the objects of injustice; however, the way to deal with injustice is already defined by God in Jesus in his passion and death. **To be one with Christ on the cross is to be one with God in the dealing with the injustice of the world.** To feel cheated and to find ways of getting back are simply forms of uncleanness of heart.

Now that brings up, of course, the idea of purgatory, because purgatory is the idea of cleaning out what is not right. Well, what does it mean, for example, **to suffer the temporal punishment due to sin?** It’s very simple if you think of the vine. **It means to suffer what you will others to suffer.** So purgatory has got to be, or the purgative life on earth—because purgatory actually means experiencing life without a brain. Think about it, the death of the body kills the brain. The brain is the necessary instrument for our learning and choosing. So a soul that continues live without a body prior to the restoration of a glorified body has no brain, and therefore cannot grow, cannot decide. I shouldn’t say cannot grow, cannot grow in the normal way that we are used to growing, through our own choices. It can only grow through a grace.

Now even in our present physical life we grow two ways. **We grow through our own choices, and we grow through God's own grace.** And **God's grace both initiates activity within our souls and cooperates with activity we initiate.** Accordingly it's called "*gratia operans et co-operans*," operating and cooperating with ourselves, with the nature God has created to be his image and his likeness. This is a Catholic view. The Protestant view at the Reformation was very different. They did not see the human nature as something basically good, but as something basically depraved.

Now there can be depraved individuals, but according to the Catholic view the **human nature** itself is not depraved. It's **an instrument created by God for his own glory.** And so **God can cooperate with what is good in it.** So the graces are at work all the time. **But after death, then you are totally unable to do anything for yourself; you have to only accept the graces of God.** Toward what end? **Toward the purgation of the soul from every ill will, every form of malice, against any other branch of the vine,** recognizing that you are one of the branches and anything you will against one, you will against yourself. But more so, it's really **the disillusionment of the ego itself with its limitations and narrowness and sense of separateness.**

And **that can begin right now in life** and, in fact, Christ is constantly urging us to do so—not to identify with our roles. He calls that hypocrisy—*hypocrite*, the Greek word for "actor." He says, "Don't be an actor in life." Don't identify with your role. **Find out what your true position is from the point of God. That is your own personal "I,"** if you want to call it that, your sense of self. Not one given to you by life. Not one that is a product of the way you have been treated. That is artificial. But **the sense of self that is in the very basis of your own identity from God, from the mind of God—find that.** Live that. Free yourself of everything that gets in the way, of all uncleanness. **Cancel every debt against you.** Every debt you hold against somebody else will come back at you. Why? "The measure you measure with will be measured back." If you want to live in freedom, be free. Choose freedom, freedom from all debts, **freedom from all feelings of being cheated.**

Now does this lead to reconciliation? Not directly. Forgiveness does not directly lead to reconciliation. **Reconciliation is a mutual situation whereby two people, or groups of people decide to accept forgiveness for each other.** But we would be very foolish, and we would completely miss the whole point of the gospel, if we are only going to forgive people who are willing to be reconciled. **Forgiveness has to come first if we want to live a free life.** Forgiveness doesn't mean that we say, well, what you did is okay. No, it isn't. What you did may be actually very wrong.

But **forgiveness means I'm canceling the debt that I have a right to hold against you in justice,** because I don't want to carry that debt on my balance sheet. I don't want the burden it requires me; the emotional burden that such a debt would require me to carry because it will weigh me down. **I choose to free you, and I hope that you will see what you have done is objectively wrong,** objectively unjust, objectively evil. And I hope and I pray that you will see this and **that you will come to change your mind and to make a contribution in reparation to the common good.** I hope you will do this. But

while you wait, I'm not waiting. I'm letting you go. I'm not going to demand anything from you because then you're controlling me, and you're not going to. I am a child of God. I have a right to live in freedom, and you are not going to deprive me of it.

I don't know what you can do with this. But that's how I read the gospels, and that's how I think about forgiveness.