

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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Forty Lashes Minus One

Charles Fry

Paul recounted in **2 Corinthians 11:24** that among his labors and sufferings for the sake of Christ, he'd been beaten five times by fellow Jews with *"forty lashes minus one."* That description was uniquely Jewish. Neither the Romans nor any other ancient nation had a similar limitation. God's word in **Deuteronomy 25:3** stated that a person convicted of a crime that deserved being beaten with a rod could be struck no more than forty times. Jewish tradition in the days of Paul had set the limit at thirty-nine, lest a person administering punishment accidentally exceed the prescribed limit, thus losing sight of the actual purpose of the limitation. While there is a measure of mercy in the Law, setting boundaries for appropriate punishment, the actual stated purpose of the Law prescribing *"not more"* than forty stripes was so that a brother, a fellow Israelite, would not *"be degraded in your sight."* God knows very well that humans readily degrade one another, making it easier to justify abuse, violence, or generally take advantage of others.

Jesus in **Matthew 5:21-24** went from the commandment *"you shall not murder"* (**Exodus 20:13**) to don't be angry with your brother, to don't insult your brother, to don't say *"you fool"* to another person, lest we face judgment and the fire of hell. Jesus, consistent with God's word in the Law, forbade degrading a brother not just physically but also verbally. Therefore, don't hold anger against a brother and don't demean them with degrading comments or insults. Instead, if we have an issue with a brother or know that a brother has an issue with us, we are to make it our top priority to be reconciled even before approaching God in worship. As disciples of Jesus, we should understand his teaching to forbid degrading other people who, like ourselves, are made in God's image and worthy of God's gift of life. Our circle of "brothers" isn't just siblings or fellow believers, but rather as in the story of the Samaritan (**Luke 10:25-37**), whomever we may encounter, including foreigners, and also extending to those we might only know by reputation or report, including ruling authorities

(**1 Peter 2:17**).

As noted above, the Jews who opposed Paul had beaten him with thirty-nine lashes five times. The thirty-nine was a Pharisaic concession to avoiding divine judgment by potentially miscounting, but had Paul deserved any of those beatings? Had they, in fact, observed the stated intention of the Law, not to degrade a brother in their own eyes? An unfortunate attribute of the Pharisaic religion was described by Jesus in **Luke 18:9-14** when a Pharisee was described as loudly praying, *"I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector..."* His words demeaning the tax collector, the very notion that *"I am not like other men,"* were damning in the eyes of God, as Jesus

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had taught in **Matthew 5:21-24** and repeatedly taught in both word and deed. Jesus stated in **Luke 18:14** that the tax collector who pleaded for mercy and admitted being a sinner was *"justified, rather than"* the Pharisee. *"For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."*

Describing godly love in **1 Corinthians 13:1-7**, one of the attributes Paul affirmed is that *"love is not rude"* (**verse 5**). Right away, that characteristic of genuine love excludes degrading other people, whether friends or enemies, rich or poor, obscure or famous, either by word or action. (The Greek word rendered *"rude"* in **1 Corinthians 13:5** happens to be the same Greek word used in the Septuagint version of **Deuteronomy 25:3** for not abusing or degrading a fellow Israelite with excessive punishment.) Love does not have room for rudeness or degrading others. Remember that *"love does no wrong to a*

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neighbor" (**Romans 13:10**).

When Paul reminded Titus of universal Christian obligations that every believer should know and practice (**Titus 3:1-3**), he included "to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people." Notice that Paul wrote of words and attitudes including "courtesy toward all people." Not the people we like, or the people we agree with, or the people who look or talk like us, but "all people."

As human beings in the flesh, we all share an inclination to harbor and justify "anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language" in our thoughts, words, and deeds related to those we perceive as disagreeable or wrong or making life difficult. These attitudes and the speech accompanying them contribute to degrading other people and thus justify subordinating them, like the Pharisee, to an "other men" category that is inferior, less valuable, less important, less worthy, and thus more disposable. All of this God rejects. Whereas eliminating those attributes and practices from our lives (as in **Colossians 3:5-8**) and treating everyone with dignity and respect and courtesy leads to seeing the genuine worth in other human beings made in the image of God, for whom Christ died, and generally living a better, more godly, and peaceful life of service to the Lord.

Love is not rude.

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God's Cement for Marriage

Joshua Riggins

The King James translates **Genesis 2:24**, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." Other translations render the word "cleave" as "be joined to" (NKJV), "hold fast" (ESV), "cling" (NRSV), "bond with" (HCSB), and "unites" (NET). Cleave carries with it the idea that you are stuck. The Septuagint footnotes that in Greek, the word literally means to "be cemented." It is the same word in **Ruth 1:14**, "but Ruth clave to her" (KJV, emphasis mine).

When a marriage begins, the vow cements the husband and wife together. "I do" is synonymous with "I Gorilla Glue." The vow leaves no room to exit the same way you came. One is no longer "never married" again. It is a step that unequivocally renders both parties STUCK.

Paul, in **Ephesians 5:22-33**, outlines the relationship agreement each party makes through his or her vow. The woman accepts her relation to the husband, to be his helper and companion, comparable to him. She is his counterpart, designed specifically by God to complete the familial relationship and perfectly partner with her man in their journey together. Through the power of choice, she submits. The man, in turn, vows to love her with the love of Christ. He uses his position in the relationship to sacrifice. Just as he would rest his body when it fell ill, he considers her good before his own.

The passage concludes in **verse 32**, "this is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church." The cemented relationship between husband and wife is centered around the same principles described in the relationship between Christ and the church.

We learn about this relationship in **Isaiah 42:1-7**. The Servant in whom the soul of the Lord delights (note **Matthew 3:17**) will be given to the people as a covenant (especially note **verse 6**). The church is in a covenant relationship with Christ. He was given as a pledge of God's love. **John 3:16** reminds us, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son...." God promised this covenant to Abraham (**Genesis 12:3, 15:5, 17:7**) thousands of years before Christ arrived. And when he came, Zacharias could see God's promises fulfilled (**Luke 1:71-73**). The Lord keeps his promises, being faithful to fulfillment.

A covenant relationship means that the promised vow, agreement, or pledge is kept through to its fulfillment. There is no time constraint. There are no qualifications for service. One party's non-fulfillment does not prevent the other party from fulfilling. In **Leviticus 26:40-45**, God prophecies to the people that a day is coming when they may break the covenant with him and thus find themselves in their enemy's land. Yet, God expresses a great truth in **verses 44-45**,

Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, nor shall I abhor them, to utterly destroy them and break my covenant with them...but for their sake, I will remember the covenant of their ancestors....

Even when the Israelites did not hold up their end of the relationship, God was faithful. The promised covenant

remains that we might enter a relationship with him. It is a relationship based on covenant, with the cornerstone founded on faithfulness and forgiveness.

Marriage is this type of covenant relationship, with faithfulness and forgiveness cementing its foundation. And when done with faithfulness and forgiveness, being stuck is a marvelous gift. It means that marriage provides companionship and support through the ebb and flow of life. To be "stuck" is to be stable through good and bad, abundance and poverty, health and illness. It is to know that God is always with us, no matter our circumstances, so our spouse will always be by our side, regardless of the current situation.

It is also to know a relationship of forgiveness as God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness, so we enter a covenant of sacrifice where forgiveness and renewal constantly avail themselves.

Therefore, we must heed Christ's warning in **Mark 10:5**. The cement broke in scripture because of the *"hardness of [man's] heart."* Man considers his wants, his own interests, his own rights, and he forgets the words of Paul in **Ephesians 5:21**, *"submitting to one another in the fear of God."* The hard heart refuses to compromise. It holds itself as superior. It demands and never concedes. It kills the relationship. How is this the love that suffers long? How is this the love that does not seek its own? (**1 Corinthians 13:4-5**)

If you find yourself cemented by a vow, renew that vow in the love of God through a love that bears all things and expresses itself by kind words and deeds. Fill your foundation once more with faithfulness and forgiveness. Be humble enough to recognize the great blessing God gave in joining you two together. Rejoice, knowing that you are "stuck" through God's glorious design. You cemented perfectly because God desired that two would come together with tender hearts toward each other, join themselves in a covenant of sacrificial love, and experience the goodness overflowing from Him. Monogamous matrimony makes mankind marvelously STUCK in a relationship designed by God for our benefit.

Therefore, what God has cemented, let not man separate!

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Glory to God!

The brethren in **Martinstown, MO** were overjoyed when **Haden Stanley** was baptized for the remission of his sins on July 5.

The church which meets on **Murray Road, Lee's Summit, MO** rejoiced with the heavenly chorus when **Maylee Proudfit** was buried with Christ in baptism on July 6.

The church which meets on **Riverside Road, Ozark, MO** praised God when **Paige Morris** and **Nora Overstreet** were raised with Christ in baptism on July 6.

What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.

Here and There

A digital edition of *The Gospel Message* is close to becoming a reality. In late June, your **editor** and **publisher** met with **Richard Garbi** to discuss his progress on designing an online payment system and subscription service for *The Gospel Message*. As you may recall, Richard is the Chief Technical Officer for a tech startup in Kansas City that specializes in designing software applications for payment processing. Once Richard's work is complete, subscribers will be able to pay online for their subscription to *The Gospel Message* through www.gospelmesssage.net. (Please note: If you prefer to subscribe the traditional way, your publisher, **Doug Twaddell**, will continue to receive checks and update subscriptions through the mail for the foreseeable future.). When subscribing and paying online, you will be able to choose to either receive a print copy in the mail or a digital copy in your email inbox. The email version will be delivered in the form of a digital newsletter the first of every month. More announcements will follow in future issues.



Please check your expiration date!

Special Meetings

The churches in **Unionville, MO, Martinstown, MO, and Memphis, MO** have planned a **Fall Campout** for **September 30-October 2** at Unionville City Park and the Putnam County Fairgrounds. The weekend begins with a fellowship event on Friday, September 30 at 7 p.m. **Joshua Riggins** will lead a study of “Christian Hospitality” the morning of October 1. **Michael Eldridge** will lead a gospel singing Saturday evening. The Sunday morning worship service will include speakers **John Lee** and **Louis Garbi** who will speak on “Do Not Worry” and “Standing on the Rock.”

All camping and events for the weekend will take place at the Unionville City Park. The park has forty-five camping sites with electricity available. Some sites also have water and sewer. The city of Unionville does not accept reservations, so it will be first come, first served. For tent campers, shower facilities are available onsite. In the event of rainy weather, the meeting will take place inside the county’s 4-H building on the Putnam County Fairgrounds that sits adjacent to the city park. For those who are not interested in camping, rooms can be reserved at The Square View Inn and the Alamo Inn, two local establishments whose contact information can be found online.

A flyer with more information should have reached your congregation by now. If not, please email your editor, Wade Stanley, for more information. Please make plans to join the churches of Northern Missouri in this new venture.

2022 Meetings

August 28.....White Oak, rural Ethel, MO
September 3-4.....Pleasant Hill, IA
Sept 30-Oct 2.....North MO Fall Campout, Unionville, MO
October 15-16.....Nixa, MO

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The Gospel Message

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