

Glory, Grace, and the Power of Forgiveness

Ephesians 4:31-32

“Be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

Introduction: There are plenty of things we desire and have experienced that different from others in this room: some are energized by being with people, others by hunkering down at home. Some don't mind spending money on good food and new clothes, and others are frugal savers. Some would rather read than watch, some play a sport rather than an instrument, and some like to vacation in the dirt while others prefer camping in a hotel. On these we may never agree within relationships, especially in marriages. But there are a few things that unite us together, that we all desire, regardless if you know Christ this morning or not. The **first** is that we all want to be loved. We may have different ways that love is expressed, but each has an innate desire for someone to care for them. The **second** is that everyone wants to be happy. Again, happiness or joy will be defined differently, but as the great thinker Blaise Pascal noted:

“All men seek happiness, this is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves.”¹

John Piper pointed out that striving after happiness is “a law of the human heart as gravity is a law of nature.” You WILL pursue your own happiness. The **third** area that we all share in common is the inevitability of being hurt by someone else, typically by someone we love. We all carry some level of wound inflicted by a misplaced word, an intentional slight, or outright and blatant sin (if this hasn't happened to you yet, it will). These wounds are made worse since it is in direct opposition to seeking the happiness we crave. **How people choose to deal with these wrongs is the difference between joy and sorrow, happiness and bitterness, broken relationships vs. reconciled ones.** Those outside of Christ have mechanisms and processes, but they all fall short of reconciliation: avoidance, move on, reparations, earning back, and trying to forget all end up in the same place of deep seated anger, bitterness, or resentment that can be camouflaged as healing but are betrayed by our own emotions. Add to this our inability to actually address real issues and talk honestly, and the result is much **brokenness and loss of joy in relationship.**

As we look at a simple phrase on forgiveness this morning, we would do well to frame it properly in terms of the source of true joy and happiness. John Piper coined an important phrase, “*God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.*” God's central passion in everything that He does is to uphold His glory, and the greatest happiness that can be found in life is sourced in HIM! The gospel upholds His glory and allows mankind to have a reconciled relationship with Him, and in that reconciliation we can glorify Him in all things (1 Cor. 10:31) to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14). “*We should seek to glorify God in how we work through broken relationships, knowing that even as we glorify God, we will maximize our joy. We ought to unpack forgiveness because it is both **right** (it glorifies God) and **best** (it maximizes my happiness).”² This is imperative to keep in mind because forgiveness is simultaneously **HARD and POSSIBLE, both IMPOSSIBLE on our own yet REQUIRED by God, and the pathway of both glorifying God and doing what is best.***

¹ John Piper, “*Desiring God*”, p. 16

² Chris Brauns, “Unpacking Forgiveness”, p. 38.

A quick review: We looked last week at what we are to put off in ourselves that are part of our “old self” (Eph. 4:22), which was part of our life before Christ since the gospel transforms us and gives us power to kill off our sin. One of the main struggles of the human heart is that of **anger**, which presents itself in many forms (bitterness, resentment, wrath, slander, complaint, malice, etc). There is no caveat or addendum, but ALL anger must be put away from us. The only way this can happen is both by **payment** (Forgiveness through Jesus’ work on the cross) and **replacement**, which comes in the form of putting on the new self (Eph. 4:24), which is created in the likeness of God and for righteousness and holiness.

The Grace of Forgiveness of Us

Replacing anger means we must first put on **kindness and compassion**. Kindness is something we learn in pre-school and kindergarten, treating others well. Here, however, the context demands that we are to be kind to those who we would naturally be angry or bitter with. So kindness is more than being nice, it comes out of a characteristic of God’s nature. *“But love your enemies and do good and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.”* (Luke 6:35) In fact, we are all recipients of God’s kindness if we’ve believed and repented of our sin. *“Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”* (Rom. 2:4). So we are to express the kindness of God to those who may seem ungrateful, and we do this with patience and forbearance, matched with **compassion** or being tender hearted. Compassion has the idea of empathy and understanding, seeing the other through the lens of mercy, which allows us to pray for the salvation of those who have wronged us. I talked to a friend recently about this as he prays for his estranged wife who has left him, and how he is fighting to pray for her restoration even as she runs hard toward her own passions. Kindness and compassion sees others through the lens of the gospel, meaning a goal of reconciliation with God, rather than retribution and vengeance.

This leads to one of the most powerful, difficult, glorious, and often misunderstood commands in all of Scripture. *“Forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”* The parallel passage in Colossians 3:13 says it similarly *“bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, you must also forgive.”* The typical Greek word for ‘forgive’ is *aphiemi*, which has the idea of send away, to set free, or take away. Here Paul uses a unique word (*charislomenoi* in terms of forgiving and *echarisato* in terms of being forgiven) which has at its root “Charis”, which means ‘Grace’. It is the exercise of grace that allows us to provide help to the undeserving and unworthy, just as God did with us. The reality is, that as we dig into the idea of forgiving one another, it will ramp up from general to specific, from easy to difficult, from shallow to deep. It’s one thing to forgive someone for an off-handed comment or verbal wound, quite another to forgive someone who lied to our face or committed adultery in a marriage. So if we are going to fulfill this command, we must first understand the second part, *“forgiving just as God forgave us in Christ.”*

God cannot forgive without payment: It is imperative to understand that God’s holiness and glory comes with demands. He demands that his creation be holy as He is (Lev. 11:44; 1 Pet. 1:16) and must attain perfection since He Himself is perfect (Matt. 5:48). Now, obviously our problem is that we have all sinned and fall short of His glory (Rom. 3:23) and thus fall well short of His standard. But why can’t God just waive a wand and forgive? If He did, He would no longer be JUST, since He would break His own standard. This is why Christ HAD TO DIE for sin. Look what Paul wrote in Romans 3:24-26, *“and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation (which means the “turning away of wrath”, cf. 1 John 4:10) by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in His divine forbearance He had passed over former sins. It was to show His righteousness at the present time, so that He might be JUST and the*

JUSTIFIER of the one who has faith in Jesus.” In other words, God could forgive only when He received payment (just) and needed One who’s death actually was worthy to justify. Christ provided the payment

God offers forgiveness freely (*but it ain’t cheap*): Grace is free in the sense that we cannot earn it, but it has been offered freely at a great price: **the blood of Christ!** We are justified by His blood (Rom. 5:9), have been redeemed (Eph. 1:7) brought near (Eph. 2:13), and made at peace with God (Col. 1:20), since it is the blood of Jesus that cleanses and scrubs us (1 John 1:7). God accepted Christ’s sacrifice on the cross as Jesus became a curse, satisfying the wrath God had stored up for all the sin that we have committed, past, present, and future. When God says He forgives us, its **ONLY** because He looks at the blood poured out by Christ on our behalf as the means by which we can be forgiven.

God remembers our sin no more: Does God forget our sin? Not exactly, since God cannot forget anything, but He does something with even greater implications: He remembers our sin no more! Forgetting is passive, remembering no more is active. He **removes** our sin as far as the east is from the west (Ps. 103:13), casts our sin behind His back (Isa. 38:17), **remembering** them no more (Isa. 43:25) casting our sins to the depths of the sea (Mic. 7:19). The difference is staggering and has great implications for our forgiving of each other. When His wrath is satisfied, He no longer sees us through our sins but through the righteousness of Christ as new creations (2 Cor. 5:17-21) so that we can be **RECONCILED to Him.**

God grants us faith and repentance: *Does God forgive everyone?* No, even though the offer of forgiveness is give to everyone. Only those who turn away from trusting ourselves (repentance) and turn to Christ for forgiveness (faith) will be saved. **Acts 20:21 says it this way,** “*testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.*” Forgiveness is activated when we understand our sin in comparison to a holy God, ask in faith for forgiveness, and turn from our selfish ways to Christ.

God uses consequences to train: *Does forgiveness imply we have no more consequences?* In a word, no, and this is an extremely important point. When King David repented of his sin of adultery, lying, and murder (Psalm 51) after being confronted by Nathan the prophet (2 Samuel 12), God levied heavy consequences to David: strife in his family (12:10 – in 13:1-22 his son raped his daughter; another son killed this son – 12:23-33; and Absalom tried to take the throne from David – 2 Sam. 15-18), as well as the son born to Bathsheba would die (2 Sam. 12:14). But through all of these consequences, David realized that his sin was against God alone (51:4) and that the restoration of a joyful relationship with God was his highest goal and value (51:12). We often, wrongly, equate forgiveness with a termination of any kind of consequence, but that is not the case. This will play when we examine forgiving each other.

The Grace of Our Forgiveness of Each other

Knowing how God forgives us creates a roadmap, a pathway, to move toward forgiving one another. We often are open to the idea of forgiving others when it has no personal or direct bearing on us personally, but here, it is clear that the forgiving is to be done when in replacement to the normal response of anger and bitterness. Again, this forgiveness is for ANY sin done to us, from the simple slight to deepest wound and betrayal. *So how do we move toward forgiving others?*

Forgiveness is Grace we both receive and give – As we looked at, God forgives us by receiving payment for the offense through the blood of Jesus Christ, and He commits to remember our sin no more so that we can have a reconciled relationship with Him. When we repent and ask for God’s forgiveness, He gives it to us. When someone asks us for forgiveness, we also are free to offer it the same way as often as they may ask. **“Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive**

him, and if he sins against you seven times in a day, and turns to you seven times saying 'I repent', you must forgive him." (Luke 17:3-4) The response of the disciples is the same as ours sometimes, "Increase our faith!" (Luke 17:5), since it absolutely requires faith to forgive someone who has wronged US! *How do we think rightly in this?*

- **We must view ourselves properly as a SINNER** – Far too often we see wrongs done in relationships in terms of percentages: I'm willing to admit SOME wrong, but not a majority or most of the wrong! If we are to truly offer forgiveness to another we must see ourselves on equal footing with the one who's done us wrong. Paul saw himself as the least of the apostles, since he persecuted the church (1 Cor. 15:10). David saw himself as an abject sinner from the inside out (Ps. 51:2-5), needing cleansing that began with his heart (Ps. 51:7). When we fail to see ourselves as a sinner who is forgiving another sinner, we will take the artificial high ground, putting ourselves **above** the other, seeing them as somehow worse than us. It is only when we see our sin in its fullness that we can comprehend the length and depth of what we've been forgiven. When we come to grips with this fact, we can look on another's sin properly through the lens of compassion, rather than pride.
- **We must be motivated by love and humility** – Love moves us toward others, and humility keeps us dependent on God. *"Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive."* (Col. 3:12-13). When we know we are loved by God, it gives us confidence and security to love others, since that love is no longer tied to **performance**. Since we are fully loved in spite of our sin, we can love out of an overflow of how we are loved. Biblical humility is seeing ourselves completely dependent on God, and the only way we can truly grow in humility is to be increasingly absorbed in the greatness of the Triune God. Humility gets the focus **off ourselves, off of our feelings and offense, and focuses on God's glory**, which puts us in a proper place.
- **We must release our desire for payment – no quick offer** – There is a great cost in offering forgiveness. What we are declaring is the fact that the offense has been paid for in full on the cross: *"And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, **having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross.**"* (Col. 2:13-14). Why is this so important? When people say, 'forget about it', they really can't and often reserved retribution at a future time (silent treatment, bringing it up, talking about it in public, responding in kind, etc). We say we forgive, but we want our pound of flesh to make the person **pay, or feel as bad as we did**. When we offer forgiveness, we recognize that the pound of flesh deserved was pounded out on Christ as the nails held Him on the cross!

The Goal of Forgiveness is RECONCILIATION

- **Forgiveness is a Commitment over a feeling** – Forgiveness is the doorway that is open to be reconciled with another. When God forgave us and made us a new creation, He reconciled us to Himself through Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) and thus gave us a ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18). We looked earlier at God's commitment to put away our sin, to remember it no more. That is what the commitment is in relationship when we forgive: we make a choice, a commitment, to no longer hold that sin against another, to **remember it no more**, which is categorically different than merely forgetting about it. **Remembering no more** says that when it comes up in my mind

and heart again, when I want to mete out justice again, I remember my commitment to no longer view the person through the lens of sin but through the work of Jesus Christ and His blood shed to wash clean.

- **Forgiveness is Conditional on Repentance (1 Cor. 5; 2 Cor. 2:5-11)** – Since forgiveness is about reconciliation, and though the **offer of forgiveness is unconditional, there must be a recognition that forgiveness is dependent on repentance.** In 1 Cor. 5, there is a description of the church disciplining out a member of the church because of pervasive, ongoing, known, and unrepentant sexual immorality. The last tool in the toolbox was to put this man out of the church, delivering him to the sphere of Satan, to stop associating with him, even refusing to eat with him (5:11). Why? He had to feel the weight of his sin, so that he would hopefully turn and repent. In 2 Cor. 2:5-11, it describes the church turning to **forgive, comfort, and reaffirm their love for someone.** I believe this is the same man in 1 Cor who had come back to the church. Forgiveness for the purpose of reconciliation is always willing but there must be repentance to begin a pathway of reconciliation.

Forgiveness still must account for CONSEQUENCES – but that with grace

- **Grace over earning** – Some wrongly believe that if they are forgiven, there should not be any consequence and things should just go back like the incident never happened. But that is not the way sin works, nor is it what the Bible teaches. **Sin brings consequence. Forgiveness brings back relationship.** Just as David felt the weight of the consequence of his sin, we bear the same in relationships. Remember, David's whole point in repentance was the restoration of joy, not the cessation of consequences. Often what we lose is **trust** from the people/person we love. Trust is a commitment and something we give, just like forgiveness, that comes out of trusting God with all our heart and mind (Prov. 3:5-6). Rebuilding trust is a two way commitment: one chooses to trust, the other chooses to be trustworthy. No one can **do enough to earn back trust, just like no one can do enough to be forgiven.** So grace must be lavished, or else we default back to works based relationships, which zap the joy out of everything. How are things like trust regained?
- **Time + Truth** – Being forgiven should motivate us to obedience, not to earn, but to bring pleasure to our Father through continual dependence on Him. This is why walking in the truth over time is so important. The sin is paid for and forgiven, but healing comes over time, just like a wound that's been bandaged. It means that both parties commit themselves to the realities of the gospel: Seeing God's glory and holiness, realizing that we fall short in our sin, fixing our eyes on Christ who has taken away our sin, and by God's grace, we walk by faith in obedience and fear, seeking to glorify God in worship in all things. Consequences are NEVER as bad as what we truly deserve, so we take the consequences in light of what we gain in Christ.

Grace is our (NEW) Default Position in the gospel – Did you flinch a bit when it was said that forgiveness was conditional? You probably should have. But this is where we come full circle in this concept from the passage. The way that we deal with our anger, with the bitterness and resentment revealed in relationship, is to put it away, and put on kindness, compassion, and **GRACE.** Instead of a default setting of anger, we are re-programmed to have a setting of graciousness toward others, including those who sin against us. *Are we going to be reconciled with everyone who sins against us?* Probably not. Are we called to respond in grace with everyone who sins against us? Absolutely!!! When we are gracious toward others, especially those who have done horrible things to us, we embody the same grace that God gives us in Christ. In responding with grace, we can begin to **“love our enemies and pray for those**

who persecute us” (Matt. 5:43), ‘so that we may be sons of our Father who is in heaven, since He makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.’ Matt. 5:45
Grace frees us up to pray for those that hurt us, to not be weighed down by anger, and to hope that they would be reconciled to God, with the result that we could actually be reconciled in true relationship with them.

Forgiving others is no small thing. If we are going to be a thriving, healthy church, it means we must practice this often, since sin WILL happen among us. Have you asked to be forgiven of your sin, repenting and turning from sin to Christ? That is the first step in this process. *Do you have anyone you need to ask forgiveness of? Have you been carrying around anger, bitterness, or restatement toward another? Is there anyone you need to have a hard conversation with? Have you been un-gracious to someone in your life that’s caused a continued break of relationship.*

The hopeful part of all of these questions is that fact that the gospel frees us to forgive, to be reconciled, and to do it now, regardless of the timeframe or severity of the wrong done. Forgiven people forgive. That is something the world cannot figure out, but they surely long for it. Let’s be a people who believe this and practice this immense and beautiful truth, all to the glory of God, since it is both right and best.