

**Divine Forgiveness**

Wednesday, December 6, 2023

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**TEACHING NOTES**

Please grab your bibles and turn with me to the NT letter of Colossians.

I am thankful to take this week and next to focus on a 2-Part teaching on ***Forgiveness.***

In our English Bibles, there are approximately 130 references to some form of the word “forgive.”

The vast majority of occurrences reference God forgiving his people or an individual.

Only about 12 passages deal with the forgiveness that we are commanded to practice as a spiritual discipline. That means the God’s word focuses far more on His forgiveness of guilty sinners then our forgiveness of each other. For this reason, I want to take some time tonight to study and celebrate God’s **Divine forgiveness** of His elect people as a first step to then teaching thoroughly on his command for us to forgive one another.

To get started let me share with you a simple definition of…

**Forgiveness**: the act of erasing or pardoning debt that is owed. It is to release the debtor from their obligation to pay the debt that they once owed**.**

In many financial, formal, or business like endeavors the party who holds the debt has the right and freedom to forgive the one indebted to them. But that’s not our focus as we want to dig into what does forgiveness look like when it is relational, when it is between two people and specifically this morning what it looks like between God and individual people.

To do this turn with me to Col 2, where Paul is writing to the believers in the church of Colossae. Look at

**Colossians 2:13-14** 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.

To dive into our study on Divine Forgiveness let’s consider a definition to help us along.

***Divine Forgiveness*** is a commitment by God to graciously pardon those individuals He has chosen for redemption, who repent of their sin and trust in Jesus so that they are reconciled to God, although this commitment does not eliminate all consequences that may arise from our sin.

To begin to dig into this definition of divine forgiveness, let’s consider our sinful debt and God’s grace by looking at..

**Ephesians 2:1-3** And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

The reality of our sin meant we followed the devil and the passions of the flesh instead of honoring God. The righteous result of this was that we deserved God’s wrath due our sin and separation from the holy God.

**Ephesians 2:4-5** But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.

**BUT GOD.** Praise God for these words!

Church, we were hopeless, lost, enslaved and deserving of God’s wrath BUT GOD intervened in grace and love and He made us alive together with Christ and saved us.

See with me that, **Forgiveness from God is a necessary and essential part of our redemption.**

For the Holy God cannot have unity or community with those who are in sin and deserving of His wrath.

First understand that God was not obligated in any way to save us or forgive us and we were not deserving of Christ’s atonement on our behalf or God’s forgiveness and that is why it is ***amazing grace!***

Never forget, if God were obliged to be gracious, grace would no longer be grace & salvation would be based on human merit rather than grace alone. **To add anything we do to grace alone, is to deny grace alone!**

Praise God for His amazing grace to forgive many undeserving sinners like you and me.

**Now turn with me back to Colossians and let’s see how Paul speaks of God’s forgiveness to us.**

**Colossians 1:13** He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

In Christ alone we have redemption.

When talking about the work of Christ on behalf of the elect, redemption, is always to be understood in the strict sense of **deliverance by ransom.**

**A ransom** is a payment demanded or paid for the release of a prisoner.

Christ paid our debt. So those whom God gives saving faith, those who confess their sin and trust in Christ are forgiven of their sin! **This is the power and promise of the gospel of Jesus Christ.**

Now turn back to…

**Colossians 2:13-14** 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.

He forgave us, “All our Sins”. That means the worst, most grotesque, despicable, wretched, selfish, wicked thing you ever did **is forgiven**, as is everything else sinful you did or will do over your lifetime.

God the Son, Jesus Christ, is eternally perfect and holy, and the fact that He willingly took on flesh, and lived a perfect and holy life meant His blood sacrifice in the place of the elect is big enough, holy enough, worthy enough not just to cover your past sins but your present sins and all of your future sins.

If you think that the sin you committed is too big to be forgiven you need to realize that is not a proclamation of the grossness of your sin but it is an inditement on the power of Christ to be able to cover all your sins!!! **Don’t do that.**

It is flat out wrong to believe that you are in Christ, but not all your sin is truly forgiven.

That cannot be. It is false to believe or say such a thing because it flat out denies God’s clear written word. Repent of such a view and, in trusting in Christ alone and know that ***you are forgiven***.

Another layer scripture gives us to see God’s forgiveness for us is that he will “remember our sins no more”

**Jeremiah 31:34b** “For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

**Isaiah 43:25** “I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.”

Now, God is omniscient. Meaning, He doesn’t have any limitations to His knowledge. That means this language and ***Him not remembering*** is not literal, but it teaches us something very important about His forgiveness for His people and that is that God doesn’t forget our sins literally but what is conveyed is a judicial and covenantal promise of God to not punish us on the basis of those sins…to not hold them against us, in any way.

This is what is meant in **Psalm 103:12** as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

God’s forgiveness for those He has chosen to save by his grace doesn’t mean He erases our sin from His memory, it means that He doesn’t have wrath against us for our sin.

This is amazing and cause for high praise!!!!

Really think about the ramifications of this for our life now and forever!!!

**2 Corinthians 5:17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

**Romans 8:1** There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

**Christian, you absolutely, fundamentally must understand that in Christ you ARE FORGIVEN by God!** This means nothing stands between you any longer and you are able to be reconciled to Him now and forever. This cannot be undone for it is Christ who finished His glorious work of redemption on the cross on our behalf. This is truly Good News! Amen.

Look at the definition again..

***Divine Forgiveness*** is a commitment by God to graciously pardon those individuals He has chosen for redemption, who repent of their sin and trust in Jesus so that they are reconciled to God, although this commitment does not eliminate all consequences that may arise from our sin.

Know that DF is a commitment by God. A promise that He will not break!!

Know that DF is absolutely gracious that He pardons any of us who are guilty in our sin for what we deserve is His righteous wrath. He does this because of Christ work on our behalf and not because of our repentance or performance on any level.

In God’s sovereignty to save us, He gives us a new heart, a spiritual awakening, eyes to see and ears to hear and **what then does He cause in us?** **-Repentance and Belief.**

In this, we see the wickedness of our sin and we confess it as sin and we turn from it and we turn to trust in Jesus instead.

For our relationship with God to be reconciled we must confess our sin and turn from our sin to honor Jesus!

***The reality is: God doesn’t just forgive anyone and he surely doesn’t forgive everyone.***

No, He forgives those who whom He gives new birth and saving faith…**those who repent and believe in Jesus.**  See that our confession and repentance is a critical part of His gracious work to save us and make us His.

Peter spoke to this well in multiple places!

In his sermon at Pentecost..

**Acts 2:38** “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In his preaching in Solomon's Portico in..

**Acts 3:19** Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out,

And also in his second letter to the elect exiles in…

**2 Peter 3:9** The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

John also made this clear in...

**1 John 1:9** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

**If you are here today and you are not saved. Understand that you stand guilty for your sin and you therefore stand against God and cannot be reconciled to God but instead you deserve His righteous wrath and judgment due all your sin earning you eternity in Hell.**

**When you look at the Life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ you NEED to realize that**

**either JESUS died for you and suffered and rose “for you” or “you will” die and suffer for eternity and never rise.** **I promise, this is the truth of God’s word.**

God gave Jesus perfect life to be tortured and murdered in your place so you could be forgiven.

Then he rose him from the grave so that he could raise you too the newness of life.

So you could know what real joy is. So you could finally build your life on the ROCK and not the sand.

Friends, there is no hope apart from the cross of Jesus. 🡪Your sins are real. 🡪God’s wrath is real.

🡪Hell is real. 🡪 And so is the forgiveness of sin through the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

If God is showing you the beauty of his grace to send His only Son who died in the place of undeserving sinners like you and you want to be forgiven of your sin and to submit your life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ for the rest of your days, **then confess your sins to God & trust your life to Jesus & be saved**

**If you have repented and trusted your life to Jesus then know and never forget that …**

*“he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

One last needed clarity to understand that we see in our definition of Divine Forgiveness and that is..

“**although this commitment does not eliminate all consequences that may arise from our sin.”**

This side of heaven we will still face and have to work through many of the consequences that our sin causes. If you got drunk and drove your car and physically injured someone, that person may have the physical consequences of that accident the rest of their lives. That person might be you.

You likely will have a jail sentence to serve for the law you broke and the harm you caused.

A powerful example of this that we find in Holy Scripture is when God use the prophet Nathan to confront David in 2 Samuel 12:7-12. Here we see that King David realized the magnitude of his sin and that he was truly repentant.

**Nathan told David that God would forgive him for his sin** (2 Samuel 12:13).

However, there were still consequences David would face in his future life and family because of what he did. Nathan told David that there would be the consequence of violence in His family for his sin.

**2 Samuel 12:10** “Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.”

We see these consequences play out in some of the following ways:

* The baby that was conceived by David in Bathsheba would die (2 Samuel 12:14)
* His son, Amnon, would violently rape David’s daughter, Tamar ( 2 Samuel 13:1-22)
* Another son, Absalom, would kill Amnon (2 Samuel 13:23-33)

This is a powerful example from an old covenantal situation that was different back then, but the fact still remains; that is, our sin has earthly consequences.

So, yes we are fully forgiven of all of our sin but in God’s perfect righteousness He still carries out his will for our lives on earth until he takes us home and His providential decree is that there will many times be real and lasting consequences for our sin in this life.

When God carries out his providential will (and loving discipline) in this way we need to be so careful to never count it as His wrath for our sin, for Christ has paid the wrath due us for that.

Instead we see it as His purposes at work in His creation and often as His discipline for those he loves!!

The fact is, our sin often has earthly consequences. And also under this portion of our definition, God’s “**commitment does not eliminate all consequences that may arise from our sin**” we should also realize that it is God’s design for our personal experience of eternity to be conditioned on how we navigate this life.

**While ALL Christians are truly and fully forgiven of their sin guilt AND all Christians will fully enjoy eternal life in the new creation…. God’s forgiveness for us does not mean we all experience that eternal life the exact same way.**

For example:

**2 Corinthians 5:10** For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

The bible is clear to teach here and in many other places that God rewards those who are good stewards of the faith and life God entrusted to us in the here and now. Therefore, those who commit sin after being saved, forgiven and reconciled can affect the reality of their eternity as a result.

Church, don’t take this too far. Understand clearly, that every saved child of God will experience eternal life with God and have the fullness of joy. There will be no coveting, sinful comparison, etc.

ALL believers will be in complete joy with Christ. But, in a mysterious and glorious way, we will have different lots. Perhaps this analogy is helpful to understand that, Not everyone’s cup will be the same size, but everyone’s cup will be FULL. Eternal life with Jesus will mean the fullness of Joy, every spiritual blessing and no envy or coveting what others have in comparison.

The point to clarify all of this is to see that Divine Forgiveness does not mean God is indifferent to how we live in the here and now. Divine Forgiveness does not mean God gives everyone the exact some lot for forever. We are still responsible to honor God in all things and be good stewards of all that He puts before us.

God’s ways are high and above us, let us praise Him in humility for He is gracious, forgiving, and just.

One last time, ***Divine Forgiveness*** is a commitment by God to graciously pardon those individuals He has chosen for redemption, who repent of their sin and trust in Jesus so that they are reconciled to God, although this commitment does not eliminate all consequences that may arise from our sin.

**If you belong to Christ, You must see rightly and fully that you are forgiven and you will enjoy eternal life with King Jesus forever! Glory be to God!**

**With this mighty truth in hand, let us consider some further application.**

Two more needed clarities about divine forgiveness that many Christians misunderstand and in doing so pervert the gospel.

The secular therapeutic influence on society when it comes to its unbiblical understanding of forgiveness is too often counsel people that they need to forgive themselves or even to forgive God in order to be healed or to overcome their guilt for something that they have done or hurt for something that was done to them. Let’s take some time to address both of these false practices!

**A) If, you are in Christ you don’t need to forgive yourself. You are forgiven.**

The problem with the idea or claim that you need to “forgive yourself” is that it is not a biblical teaching, but rather a worldly invention. It may feel or sound helpful but it is not.

What is certainly true and biblical is that you need to not hold something against yourself that Christ has paid for as it is something that God doesn’t hold against you.

Christian, you are not living out your gospel identity if you continue to hold against yourself sins that God has forgiven you for. You cannot have a higher standard or greater justice than God has for you.

God’s standard and justice has been perfectly and finally met in the atonement of Jesus on your behalf. You belittle that work of Christ when you think or proclaim that you need to take an additional step to “forgive yourself.”

By adding something to the reality that you ARE forgiven, you declare that what Jesus did to pay for it and God’s forgiveness is not enough so you must continue to hold yourself in contempt and pay penance and experience unhealthy guilt and remorse for it. This is a lie.

This is not the gospel and this is not the gospel at work in you.

RC Sproul once famously said it well, ***“If God says, 'I forgive you,' you are forgiven no matter how you feel, and to refuse that forgiveness is an act of arrogance.” -*** *RC Sproul*

Now, for some of you this is a big change in the way you have been taught to think about the things you have done wrong that you hold against yourself. You may have put on a worldly approach to this (maybe you even have found a level of comfort in the secular practice of forgiving yourself) and now you feel a weight or concern by this biblical clarity.

Please hear my pastoral heart and love for you when I say this for your good. **WHY?** Because..

-It is better to know and rest in the gospel truth than it is the ideas of the world.

-It is better to know and rest in the true and full forgiveness of God than it is the ideas of the world

-It is better to run to God when you are feeling guilt and despair than it is to run to schemes of secular society. There is no comparison.

*Let me ask you here today,* ***Are you burdened?...are you feeling guilty?....are you feeling dirty?*** *This is what Jesus came to save you from. See with me that..* ***Jesus took on your burden, your guilt, your filth, so that you can have the forgiveness of God forever and no longer carry it****.*

*I pray you let the gospel go to work in relieving your burden of guilt. To rejoice in Jesus is to rejoice in the fact that He bares your burdens and you need carry them no longer!!*

*Child of God, When you have the gospel in correct view you are simultaneously relieved by the fact that Jesus yoke is light and that however you share in the sufferings of this life you identify with Christ your savoir who suffered for you so that you could be forgiven and freed!*

*Remember, do not hold something against yourself that Christ has paid for and something that God doesn’t hold against you. There is life changing good news in the sufficient forgiveness of God. Don’t downplay it or add a self-help work to it. Know and experience God’s forgiveness and rest in Him.*

The second false practice to clarify is:

**B) You do not ever need to forgive God for God never sins and cannot be in your debt!**

For some, this clarity is needed because they’ve heard or otherwise believed plainly that there are things they need to forgive God for. For others, there isn’t a plain or bold declaration of this idea, but the possibility of felling this way is looming quietly in the flesh, ready to pop up, disguised as something else.

**What do I mean by that second group?**

We know that God is the sovereign One—that He is the first cause in all things—that only that which He ordains comes about and knowing this truth about God may lead fallible men and women, boys and girls, to resent God for things we experience.

For some, maybe that is terrible abuse as a child, maybe a parent or friend that abandoned you, maybe the death of a loved one, maybe recent health or mental health struggles, maybe a lifetime of hardship, maybe not getting the job you’ve worked hard for, maybe losing your job unjustly, maybe a million other things that have come upon you and caused you real pain or sinful bitterness.

It is possible that even a well-studied Christian, a long time Christian, a Christian leader can fall into a mindset of bitterness towards God for such things. In that, we can feel or think that God has wronged us.…And “IF” that were true, then forgiveness would be in order.

BUT, **God makes NO error. He does NOTHING wrong.** You do not EVER need to forgive God for God never sins and God cannot be in your debt!

Christian, while God’s sovereign plan for each of us on this earth isn’t always easy, it is GOOD for us. God is always perfect and good.

**Psalm 145:17** The LORD is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works.

**Psalm 23:6** Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life…

**Psalm 25:10** All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

**Romans 8:28** And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Yet, in our flesh we may fall into a sinful place in our time on this broken earth. This should not be, and we must be quick to repent, but since it may happen, we should acknowledge it in this lesson.

We must always think of God rightly:

**1 John 1:5** God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

**God is Holy,** which means God is distinct, separate, and in a class by Himself (set apart). He is superior to creation in every way and above all. He is morally pure (without any sin), and He is holy in relation to every aspect of His nature and character. Purity and the sum of all moral excellency are found in Him (\*Holiness of God; WOTC)

So say or to think that any created being needs to forgive God is to completely not understand who God is and is to sinfully put yourself in the position of God and to put Him in your debt.

**Romans 9:20-23**

But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use? What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—

The creator does not exist for the glory of the creation, but the creation exist glory or the Creator!

**Romans 11:33-36** Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

“For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”

“Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Church, the Holiness of God is not only the reason why he never needs to be forgiven but it is the very core reason why we who are conceived in sin and spend a lifetime committing sin fall short of the Glory of God and his Holy standard.

It is the very reason why we need to be forgiven.

For only when we are truly and fully forgiven are we able to be reconciled to God now and forever!!!

What good news it is that God forgives. That he made a way for us to be forgiven.

May we not only repent and trust in Jesus alone to be forgiven and reconciled to God but may we live a life of biblical forgiveness of others as a God ordained testimony of the gospel and much of the very purpose of our days here on earth.

I am so excited to teach on the Spiritual Discipline of relational forgiveness next Wednesday night at our Midweek gathering.

Please make it a priority to join us. I am confident you will grow in your understanding and hopefully a result your practice of it. By God’s grace and for God’s glory. Let’s pray!