

**Relational Forgiveness**

Wednesday, December 13, 2023

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**TEACHING NOTES**

**INTRO:**

As I mentioned in last weeks teaching on Divine 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 which is why it was so important to start there last week.

Only about 12 passages deal with the forgiveness that we are commanded to practice as a spiritual discipline. Don’t think that because it is not mentioned as much that it is somehow of less concern. No, our right understanding and practice of forgiveness is a central part of our daily witness and gospel life.

The world has much to say about forgiveness and likely many of your own views of forgiveness are shaped more by cultural, generational and or therapeutic ideas regarding forgiveness than by God’s word. I will confess that I too have had to reform and refine my biblical understanding of forgiveness as I too had believed and was even taught for years elements of therapeutic forgiveness that stand against what God’s good word teaches us about it.

My prayer is that you would take a deep dive into this vital spiritual discipline with me tonight and let’s look to God’s word together and ask Him to lead us to a better understanding and practice of Forgiveness.

One of my objectives tonight is to help us to see forgiveness in the different applications it exist so we can rightly mine down to what God’s word teaches us about our practice of forgiveness.

To get started let me share with you a simple definition.

**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?

To dive right in let’s consider a definition for Relational Forgiveness.

***Relational Forgiveness*** is a commitment by the wronged to graciously pardon the offender from their liability so that we honor God and our relationships thrive. In some cases, repentance is needed for the sake of true reconciliation. Relational Forgiveness does not mean all consequences are necessarily eliminated.

Now before we get into the layers of relational forgiveness I want to spend some time looking at what God’s word calls for in many instances, whereby, forgiveness is not even needed when maybe we have wrongly thought it was.

**1. Overlooking an Offense**

What I want us to see tonight is that, ***Not every offense calls for forgiveness***.

The bible talks about a way that many will speak or act that we do NOT need to take personal or take to heart. In this case, because we don’t take possession of it into our heart, we can simply overlook it.

**Proverbs 19:11** Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.

Example: Let’s say, You invite some friends to a dinner party you have been planning and putting together for a long time. And one of those friends comes dressed “too casual” in your opinion for the event you went out of your way to put together.

Now, you are hurt because that person didn’t live up to the expectation you had for them to have dressed up more for your dinner party. Now, **Did that person do anything wrong or sinful?** **NO**.

We need to be mindful of our expectations of others, not taking offense to things that don’t need to come between us and others. There are many ways we can be far too selfish and self-minded and create issues between us and others that simply are not there and or do not need to be taken to heart.

Another example: If I am talking to a random guy on the street corner while waiting to cross the street and we engage in a little dialogue and he says something offensive about something I love.

**Is our relationship in great peril?**

**No**, **WHY?** Because we have no relationship.

Because my expectations of the guy on street that I don’t know personally are about as low as they get… and even though I might be put out by his words, I am over it by the time we get to the other side of the street. **Right?**

What about when you do have a relationship with that person and they say something off putting or in a way that you didn’t like. **Is forgiveness needed?**

The answer is no, when the offense was not inherently sinful—it was not against God’s law.   
When violations of our personal preferences happen, we need to be so very mindful to **not** take them to heart. Do **not** let them come between us and them, but instead “overlook” the thing because it’s not a sin and surely should **not** affect the relationship.

God is calling us to be “easy” to be friends with, in this way.

**You know people like that, right?...**they are very gracious towards others in all the right ways.

We are to be people who show a lot of grace to others and slow to demand our preference differences or get hung up on others shortcomings.

When and if we struggle with this we need to go to prayer and do intentional work in your mind and heart to not hold grudges or hurts against others for personal uncommunicated or unreasonable expectations. As we practice this over time, hopefully it becomes more automatic gracious response.

We must never forget that God has designed this creation whereby we have different personalities and where there are many permissible personal liberties. In light of this, we must see sooner than later that people will often not perfectly live up to your personal preferences. This is a part of life and this is why God’s word says we must be good at overlooking an offense.

**Ecclesiastes 7:21-22** Do not take to heart all the things that people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. Your heart knows that many times you yourself have cursed others.

Beloved family, hear me clearly, there are many things through out every day that we simply need to recognize is the reality of living in a complex world and we need to **not** take many, ***many things to heart.***

We also need to be very mindful of our expectations on others so that we are not offended in unnecessary ways. For example, If I had an overwhelming expectation that you all wore big purple cowboy hats to church tonight and you didn’t that would create conflict and friction in our relationship that is simply unnecessary.

Instead we need to be better at really asking:

**Is this thing that I am feeling offended by, *sin* or not**?

It is also important that we slow to consider **by what standard do we gauge if it is sin or not?**

**The answer must be, God’s word. God’s law must be our standard.**

So we must ask ourselves, **Am I truly harmed/wronged according to God’s law?**

Church, this is often how we need to navigate our daily interactions with others.

So that we don’t have a big list of formal offenses that need to be talked about and forgiven and worked through. Instead, we need to glorify God by the good and helpful practice of “overlooking an offense”.

Let me add, If you find yourself really offended and hurt by the comments of the guy on the corner then the problem might just be with you—applying unfitting levels of self-serving judgement to the situation and/or lacking a firm hold on your identity in Christ.

If by nature you are **not** known for or are increasingly known for overlooking things that don’t need to become offenses, then you really need to do business here.

We want to be KNOWN FOR not holding people hostage to your uncommunicated expectations and or personal preferences.

Church, here me, you don’t need to *forgive* peoples’ lack of performing to your personal standards, rather *you* need to do work in your heart and mind *to see it rightly* and not feel it’s a matter of forgiveness that is needed!

Remember, **Proverbs 19:11 tells us that** “It is to one’s glory to overlook an offense”!

We are to **Overlook** things that are not sinful!

We must have righteous judgement and look to Christ and not to our flesh!

May we all grow in this important way!

**2. Forgiving a Debt**

Now, there are a real distinctions between overlooking an offense and the need to forgive a debt.

**Scripture is also clear to speak of offenses that are truly sin.** In this case, the person acted or spoke against God’s law and sinned against you. This could be very small and it could be huge.

The point is that there is still a sinful offense that has the potential to hinder the relationship and needs to be biblically addressed.

Now, a quick clarity is needed here. Because we are all suspectable to fleshly selfish unrighteous judgement. And that clarity is..

**-You can’t forgive a debt that is not real.**

If someone thinks that another has done them wrong when they have not, that person does not need to be forgiven because there is no debt. Jesus commands us to "judge with right judgment" in John 7:24.

We must be very careful to think “this person wronged me or they sinned against me”, when they actually didn’t.

When internally debating about this, we must go to prayer. Trust that God will help you.

The Holy Spirit will bring to light His word of truth. Take time to…Look to God’s word.

Test all things against it and consider if this is really sin or just another layer of a personal offence that should be overlooked.

Most of these should be resolved between you and the Holy Spirit. If you realize it is not a sin then overlook it and move on. Don’t bring it up and or sell that person out. Put it out of sight and walk forward in unity.

Occasionally, what is helpful is to pursue Godly counsel to help us navigate and evaluate what happened and how you are processing it. We can all be guilty of contriving sinful offense when there is none. This check and balance is a wonderful gift of God but it should not be used as a way to gossip or talk about what people did any more than it is absolutely necessary.

Hear me say, ***we all need this.***  **Any of us can be susceptible be “playing the victim”.**

**And we are all susceptible to seeing things through a selfish lens or being slow to give the benefit of the doubt.**

We need to NOT be guilty of demanding that we know what another person’s intentions were and or what was meant by what they said.

**Church, we must have righteous judgment.** God’s word is so helpful here and so are other godly mature brothers and sisters and pastors to help us navigate if this is an offense to be overlooked or covered, or if it is a grievous sinful offence that must be confronted and repented of … or if it is not an offense at all.

Quickly, I will add that Matthew 18 gives us a way to settle the dispute if two people cannot agree on what happened and whether or not it is a sinful offence or not. Don’t stay stuck in your own head or between to people.

Make every effort for the unity Christ bought to give us. Get Godly help and counsel. God has clearly provided a road map to resolving these things. There is no need for ongoing disunity between to believers. There is just too much at stake to not be diligent to do this. When we struggle to arrive at unity between us an another party God has blessed us with elders to help us settle our dispute and put it to rest for the sake of unity and healing.

Now, before we get to what scripture says we should do with an “actual sinful offense”, let’s take a moment and look at what scripture says we shouldn’t do.

**These softballs represent the true sins of others, the relational debt that has been created by them and against you. When they sinned against you a debt was created.**

The First thing you must understand is, **Who possess (owns) the debt?** You do!

**Now the ? is: What are you doing to do with it?**

**The answer is typically one of three things:**

**A. Sinfully, You Revenge It**

This is when our flesh aims to get back at that person directly, indirectly or subtly and slowly. We want them to pay for what they did. We want them to feel it.

The problem with this is that God’s word is clear that we are not to take revenge for vengeance belongs to the Lord.

**Romans 12:17-19** Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”

**Why should we leave vengeance to God?**

Because **He said so** and because in our sin and flesh we make vengeance a self-serving thing and we don’t do it in a righteous way.

But God, who is perfect, enacts perfect vengeance and He does it in total righteousness.

**We must trust in faith that the vengeance God brings is be just and full and complete.**

It is not lacking in any way. If the act was illegal or the like, you may perceive that the horizontal, earthly judgment that person may receive is not fully just—like they got away with their crime somehow—but we must trust that they will not escape God’s perfect justice and vengeance.

The other reason why we don’t pull the pin and force collect our debt with revenge is that it doesn’t solve our relationship problem. We don’t hit them back and or do something to get back and them and then they say, ***ok now we are even***. No, what revenge does is just create more drama and more hurt and more conflict in your relationship and according to God’s standard, now you are in their debt for your sin.

As we get older, thankfully, many people learn to stop looking to revenge the offense but to often we turn to another perceived solution which is not a solution at all…

**B. Sinfully, We Bury It**

In this, we try to pretend the debt/ the hurt, the sinful offense is just not there.

We just try to bury it out of sight and move one.

We rational that it will just be easier to stash it away and not confront it.

We think it is just easier to put it out of sight and pretend it is not there and go about your life.

But we all know in the end this really doesn’t work—that’s because God calls us to true forgiveness.

Burying the real relational debt of others is not how we put the gospel to work and it does not honor God’s command to forgive others. See with me that it is lazy or selfish to simply not want to deal with it and or to avoid the stress that comes from confronting or interacting with the offender.

Now, I have been doing this a long time and one thing I know is that we don’t like to confront others with conflict but I want to encourage you that even though it can be very hard, even on the brink of paralyzing at times, the Lord has made it clear that there be “no divisions among us” **1 Corinthians 1:10** andthat we “Make every effort to live in peace with everyone “ **Hebrews 12:14**

The bible is very clear that when someone sins against you that we are **not** to bury it.

Rather, we must forgive it, and in some cases go and talk about it with them. Jesus is clear in **Matthew 18:15** when he says, “If your brother sins against you, *go and tell him his fault*, between you and him alone.

What we don’t get to do is just ignore it or stay busy with life.

As Christians, God calls us to “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” **Ephesians 4:3.**

This means we don’t get to do nothing. Holding on to it and trying to ignore it and move on is not making every effort. That does not glorify God with your life.

Another reality when we decide to sinfully bury the debt of others instead of righteously forgive it and, when needed, confront them about it, is that it begins to really negatively impact our own life. It acts as a curse on you!

**What happens over time when we are guilty of holding onto or burying others sins against us?** **Your arms get full of these hurts and burdens..** I want you to visually see how this affects you and your ability to have quality relationships with others. See how miserable you are.

**How can you love others when this is your state?**

**How is our church healthy is we are walking around like this?**

**How is the gospel at work in and through you if this is the burdened and sinful state you are in?**

Christian, **if this is you, you must repent of this and go to work to being to address these things according to what God has called you to. Not later but now.**

The Lord has given you today and so do what is righteous today.

Now, if revenging the sinful offense is not an option and burying it is not an option,

then we are left with only one thing and it is what God commands us to do! That is to…

**C. We Forgive it**

Look with me at a few of God’s commands regarding forgiving others.

In every case where forgiveness is needed, you must do business *in your heart* first and foremost!

Jesus said in **Matthew 18:35** “…forgive your brother from your heart.”

Forgiveness needs to always occur in the heart of the believer and most often offenses doesn’t need additional layers of conversation, confrontation unto reconciliation. The sinful offense can be truly forgiven in the selfless gracious love of the offended and the relationship can go forward without consequence.

The reality is, In this fallen world we will experience many things that people do or say that are sinful but not grievous and or necessarily divisive to the relationship.

This is where the other centered love of God at work in us goes to work in forgiveness from the heart.

Listen to Peter’s words in **1 Peter 4:8** Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

While we do hold high the practice of Christian accountability, what we *also* need to hold high is the need to be lovingly gracious to others in this hard life. This is not new to you as you do it all the time. None of us are running around calling out and demanding repentance so that forgiveness can happen and the relationship be restored for every single thing others in our lives do wrong or sinful.

In every couples wedding I officiate, one of the vows they commit to each other is **“slow to anger and quick to forgive”**

Listen to Jesus instruction on this in **Mark 11:25** And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”

**We must be quick to forgiveness in this life, church.**

Our love needs to “cover” a multitude of sins.

“Cover” here means to show gracious patience, in love, to others as they navigate life in this broken world, ***not*** *needing to elevate every sinful action to a confrontation, requiring confession and formal relationship restoration*.

Understand, this is different than “burying” the wrongs and keeping a list of offenses to dump truck later. No, it is to be gracious to others for many of their wrongdoings by being quick to forgive them and move on. No longer holding it against them.

See with me that this is a beautiful way we live out the gospel & the grace that has been shown to us.

See this again in..

**Ephesians 4:32** Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. A Christian’s disposition must be kind and tenderhearted. It is from a tender heart that one is loving, gracious, and quick to forgive.

**Colossians 3:12-13** Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, **13** bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

I want you to see that God’s word is adamant that we MUST forgive others because we have been forgiven by God. This is not a choice but is something we must do. We do not get to be the keepers of others sins. This Spiritual Discipline is one of the primary daily ways God wants us to put the gospel on display in this life.

**By What Power Do We Forgive Others?**

The first thing I want us to see is that the truest power to forgive others is only found in the fact that we have been forgiven by the Holy God!

**Where does one find the power to Forgive?**

**How do you and I forgive someone who does not deserve to be forgiven?**

**Colossians 3:13b …**forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

**Ephesians 4:32b** …forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

The Gospel is the Christian’s power and the motivation in to practice forgiveness.

**Can and should unbelievers practice forgiveness?** Yes!! But the motivation and power of the gospel at work in the life of the saved is truly a power and motivation that is unmatched!! Think about it with me..

When you rightly see that the perfect, eternal, holy God who was not obligated to love us or show us mercy, put His grace on you and willed His only sin to take all the wrath that you deserved on himself.

So, that you could be FORGIVEN… when you rightly see this.. then you are gospel empowered to show that gracious forgiveness to others.

God purposes the saved unto a life that honors him by practicing **the FORGIVENESS**

See the Gospel is not just about my salvation. **It is also a movement.** A Movement of people who forgive! It is GOOD NEWS that must be shared and lived from. It is a power that moves on hearts and transforms lives. Christians, practice the spiritual discipline of forgiveness. We don’t withhold it, we don’t wait for others to perform, we extend what has been extended to us.

If a wretched wicked enemy of God (who was defined by my practice of sin against him) has received a gift I am not deserving in the slightest.. if that man can be Forgiven.. then surely I (and all other Christians) can forgive our neighbor, our sister, our mother, our son, our spouse, our friend of the sinful offenses he/she has committed.

The Gospel at work in our lives means the truest power to forgive, which means the truest restoration of relationships.

Now, many will say,

**What if they do not deserve it?** Well, Yes, they sinned against you, and by some accounts it may be regarded that they don’t deserve forgiveness.

But, you and I didn’t deserve what God gave us (in the slightest!) but he mercifully and graciously forgave us. We must see God’s purpose for us in this. He saves us and sends us to live in this broken world amidst many broken people, producing many broken relationships, but now we live redeemed, with the truest power and the motivation to honor Him by practicing forgiveness.

Church, see with me that your faithful righteous practice of forgiveness is one of the biggest ways we put the gospel of our Lord and the testimony of what He has done on display for all to see!

Forgiveness is how we have a righteous relationship with others in a world full of sin.

Forgiveness is how we reconcile a broken relationship according to God’s gracious work in us.

**Christ in YOU = the power and the motivation to Forgive.**

As the Gospel becomes more and more real and you grow deeper and deeper into Christ, you have the power to FORGIVE! And as we forgive, relationships can heal and be reconciled. And trust begins to be rebuilt and the body of Christ grows and matures together.

Now, the reason why I spent so much time teaching on ***Divine Forgiveness*** (on Sunday) is because we should start with the vertical reality and we should emulate God’s grace towards us.

We are to forgive others as God in Christ has forgiven us.

**Listen to Paul’s words again.**

**Ephesians 4:32** Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

(Hold the Softball)

When we forgive another we commit to forgive the debt, which means we possess it no longer.

(put it down)

It means we don’t bring it up and hold it over their head.

(Put it down again)

Which means healing has begun and trust gets to be rebuilt and the relationship is not hindered.

**How do you know that you truly forgave them?**

When reminded of the situation or by the scar you have or when you have some interaction with the person. There is **no** more hostility, bitterness, resentment, hurt, anger! Maybe just a measure of sadness that sin happened but no resentment or angst against them anymore.

We must commit to this just as God is faithful to His commitment to not hold our sin against us any longer. We must do that for another or we haven’t forgiven them.

**What if they keep sinning against us?**

Peter asked this question to Jesus in..

**Matthew 18:21-22** Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” 22Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.

Again, we must see that the practice of the spiritual discipline of forgiveness is one of the primary ways Christians put the gospel on display in this life. We don’t stop this work because we get tired and should not get to a place where we say “enough grace, enough forgiveness”.

No, the depth of the grace of God and the forgiveness of God for all our sins is put on display in the fact that we faithfully continue to put forgiveness to work as long as it is honoring the way God called us to do it. Be GENEROUS with forgiveness! That is what Christ is getting at—“ seventy-seven times” means be GENEROUS with forgiveness

Back to our definition:

***Relational Forgiveness*** is a commitment by the wronged to graciously pardon the offender from their liability so that we honor God and our relationships thrive. In some cases, repentance is needed for the sake of true reconciliation. Relational Forgiveness does not mean all consequences are necessarily eliminated.

There are situations where grievous sin has happened and or sin that has hindered the unity of the relationship. When this happens the offended should still be quick to forgive in their heart but for the sake of the unity of the relationships and true reconciliation, interaction and repentance are needed. In these weightier cases, there is extra action needed *for the sake of Christian accountability and/or the relationship*.

When this is the case both parties need to be involved so that true reconciliation/unity and proper testimony happen. The offender needs to be shown their sin so that they can confess and repent of it and the person offended needs to share that they have forgiven them and together they need to take real steps forward in trust rebuilding, accountability, and living out the reconciliation.

In these more serious, grievous instances, see that repentance with others is essential not for us to forgive in our hearts, but for there to be relational reconciliation.

**Now, what if a person who has sinned against us in a grievous or damaging to the relationship way, doesn’t repent?**

First, we are to still show them the love of Christ, to pray for them and do good to them.

**Matthew 5:44** But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

**Luke 6:27-28** Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, **28**bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

It is so important we do not let our flesh become bitter, or hold a grudge or aim to mistreat them.

**We love because Christ loved us.** Not because our brother/sister performed well.

Flying as a banner over all interaction with those have offended us is “love one another” and “Love your enemies.***”* Look just a few verses later as Jesus continues…**

**Luke 6:35** 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.

Again, our priority in these days God gives us is to glorify God and to act in the ways he commands us. So, if a person doesn’t repent we don’t stop doing the things that God says we are to do.

Now, the reality is the relationship is still in a state of conflict and is still in need of reconciliation so we don’t turn to business as usual as that would be the practice of burying the offense which we have already seen we are not to do.

No, instead we are to pursue that person for reconciliation. Look with me again at Romans 12 and let’s add vs 20-21 this time because this is Paul helps us see what we are to do and why!

**Romans 12:17-21** Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Healing coals on one’s head is seen in history in places like the cultural ritual of Egypt in that day whereby a person showed repentance by carrying a pan of hot burning charcoal on the head.

So the point Paul is making here is that when we respond with Love and not hate, when we do not take vengeance but pursue them for proper reconciliation in love this can encourage the other person to be repentant for their actions.

I have seen this so many times in counseling, in watching you the congregation interact and just in my own life. When we treat our offender with love and gentleness we set the table for their repentance. This is opposite of when you come at them guns blazing and white hot mad which typically creates a defensive posture in others thereby conflating the issue at hand instead of breeding a longing for repentance.

**Now, WHY is this important?** Because in the case of grievous sin, their repentance is key for true relational reconciliation!!

Jesus gave us the model for how we are to pursue each other when grievous sin that requires repentance is needed. Look with me for a moment at Matthew 18.

**Matthew 18:15** “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. We are to pursue the person who sinned against us. We should not wait for them to pursue us.

If or when a person refuses to meet for the sake of communication and reconciliation or when that meeting doesn’t reach good God honoring resolve. Christ says what we are to do next.

**Matthew 18:15-16** “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

It is a great victory when we slow down to be humble and to hear each other out and to pursue Christ together unto confession and repentance, allowing for genuine reconciliation and God glorifying unity among the beloved. But when the these attempts at unity and healing fail and a person is being prideful and stubborn to not head the counsel and help of others then Jesus says…

**Matthew 18:17** If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

And if a brother/sister refuses in their pride to repent of their sin, even after involving the wider fellowship of believers, often including shepherds and other church leaders, there can be no reconciliation. He/she is to be treated as an unbeliever and not a true part of Christ church.

I want to highlight something here again, if the person who sinned against you has not confessed their wrong, the reality is they may not know what they did and so often we need to love them and our gospel testimony enough to pursue them and tell them what the offense was and our hope for their repentance so that they can receive our forgiveness and the relationship can experience true reconciliation.

**Christian,** don’t wait for the offender to come to you, go to them in love.

Gently, rebuke them if needed.

This is how we pursue what is righteous and help our brother to repentance.

One of the critical things we see in the totality of God’s word for us who belong to him is that forgiveness is what we do, it’s what we want, it’s what we pursue.

Because we love Jesus and His church we are not ok with being in disunity.

Therefore, we pursue each other, we are proactive in forgiveness.

**Let me say it again:**

**The disposition of the true Christ follower is always wanting and proactive to forgive.**

We don’t need the other person to prove themselves, we don’t need them to earn it, we don’t want them to suffer for a time while we withhold forgiveness. No, we are quick to forgive!

Now, many will say, **What do I do with my temptation to be bitter at those who wronged me?**

To answer this we have to understand what happens when we forgive someone. We give the debt to God who either put it on Christ if that person is saved or puts it on them for eternity in his righteous judgment and justice. We trust that God will carry out justice. We rest in God as we forgive others.

**This can happen with a parent who neglected you or an old friend of the family who abused you and they have died or moved or will not speak to you. Are you just left to be bitter because there is not path to reconciliation? The answer is NO, because**

Earthly circumstances is NOT our remedy for moving away from hatred and bitterness….

Christ is!!!

You can still forgive them for their sin and in this experience the peace of Christ in your life. You can do this because you know that God is just and his justice will be perfectly carried out. You do not need to be bitter you need to be full of faith.

Some of you really need this, because you are stuck for far too long thinking that the remedy to your bitterness and hurt is only in the other person’s performance and reconciliation with that person….but it is not. Christ is your answer. Christ is your help. Christ is your peace.

Scripture says that we are to be free from hatred, bitterness, and vengeance at all times.

“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice” **Ephesians 4:31**

**Hebrews 12:15** See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;

Bitterness is simply not a place a Christian is allowed to live and still honor Christ.

It is sinful and something that must be confronted and rooted out asap!!

In Psalm 73 see Asaph share his brewing bitterness in the opening verses of the chapter.

The temptation of our flesh is to give into bitterness by stewing on what happened. This was Asaph’s struggle. But then he makes a critical turn as he stopped thinking about himself and the injustice of the perpetrator going on with their life with no viewable consequence and start putting your focus on and trust in God. Listen to his reorientation towards the Lord and away from his bitterness…

**Psalm 73:23-28**

23 Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand.

24 You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory.

25 Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.

26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

27 For behold, those who are far from you shall perish; you put an end to everyone who is unfaithful to you. 28 But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may tell of all your works.

We need to rest not only in the fact that God’s perfect and complete wrath and justice will always come to be but also in the providence of God to ordain and govern all things for his purposes.

This is a major weapon against bitterness!! We see this so clearly in places like…

**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.

**Genesis 50:20** As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good…

Church: The Lord is our solution to putting off bitterness. Not our circumstances and not the performance of another.

Jesus modeled for us how we truly make our way through our life where unresolved hurt tries to haunt and or define us… **1 Peter 2:23** When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

**Christian, we are to make every effort for peace as much as it depends on you.**

If tempted to be bitter or enraged, rest in Jesus. He is our answer and our help.

Listen, to his invitation and receive it.

Matthew 11:28-30 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” May it be so!!!

Now this leads us to ask: **What if you choose to not forgive?**

**First,** you are commanded to as one who belongs to Christ to forgive in your heart, so you are disobeying God to not do this.

**Second,** your withholding forgiveness and not making every effort to have/pursue unity with the brethren will reap conflict and sinful separation in the body of Christ, whereas God calls to be united and at peace.

People will leave churches and break up our ONE ANOTHER because they won’t forgive.

People will leave churches and break up our ONE ANOTHER because they assume they won’t be forgiven.

Beloved: Here me clearly today. **We are commanded by God to forgive each other.**

So, if you don’t you are sin and you are showing concerning evidence that Christ may not be in you.

If you are wrestling (knowing you need to take steps), don’t give up, pursue counseling, help, prayer, whatever it takes. Don’t give up.

If you have messed up, KNOW THAT THIS DISCIPLES FAMILY WILL FORGIVE YOU.

And in grievous situations, when you have biblical repentance, KNOW THAT THIS DISCIPLES FAMILY WILL REMAIN WITH YOU. Yes, there still may be needed accountability for your sin but our definition is clear to say that this can and does happen. But Forgiveness will occur as God’s word calls for us to forgive, so the elders, will make sure of it. You need to count on that.

Those who refuse to obey God’s commands to forgive and or to practice repentance will be disciplined in the good ways God prescribes in His word.

But, let’s all be sure to understand that **Separation is not the will of GOD for his people unless biblical discipline/accountability are happening.**

God’s command on us is to purse Obedience/Restoration/Reconciliation!

**Third, those who choose to not forgive will not be forgiven.**

Slow down with me and consider the real seriousness of this.

Because some of you need to do business with this because you have not. You have made excuses and not done what God calls you to which is to forgive each other. Listen to Jesus teach on the seriousness of this in..

**Matthew 18:23-35** “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

**If we choose to withhold forgiveness of others in light of the Holy King of Kings forgiveness us then we prove to NOT KNOW God’s forgiveness for who are we to receive it from him in exponential portion and then deny it for another for what is comparably nothing.**

**Jesus says in Matthew 6 following the Lord’s prayer that those who forgive others have the father’s forgiveness and those who do not forgive others do not have the father’s forgiveness.**

**Matthew 6:14-15** For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Hear me, **Forgiveness is not a work by which we earn God’s forgiveness.**

***By no work of Man do we Earn God’s saving Grace!***

***The Spiritual Discipline of Forgiveness is an evidence of a person who received the ultimate forgiveness!***

Forgiveness flows from a heart satisfied with the mercy of God and rejoicing in the cancellation of our own deadly debt. It is the fruit of the spirit that lives within the redeemed.

So let me ask you tonight and you need to be honest about this.

**Who do you need to forgive?**

**Who do you need to pursue for reconciliation?**

You need to do this now and not later. Do not wait. There is way too much as stake.

Know that I am praying for you and your group leaders are here to help you walk through this if needed.

Finally, look with me at the last part of the definition,

***Relational Forgiveness*** is a commitment by the wronged to graciously pardon the offender from their liability so that we honor God and our relationships thrive. In some cases, repentance is needed for the sake of true reconciliation. Relational Forgiveness does not mean all consequences are necessarily eliminated.

Just like with God’s forgiveness, there can still be horizontal consequences that come about as a result of the sin that was committed even after true and full forgiveness has been applied.

**For example,** You can forgive someone and call the police and have them arrested.

You can forgive someone and still testify the truth of what happened in court.

They might say, “I thought you forgave me.”

You can say back to them, **I do forgive you. But you’ve committed a crime. You broke the law.**

**and so you will face the consequences of that action, but I forgive you”**

Forgiveness and reconciliation doesn’t always mean trust is instantaneously, fully restored.

So someone will ask, **“My family member sexually abused my son. He truly repented and I truly forgave him.” Can he babysit my kids?” Answering “No” to that does not mean you haven’t forgiven him, but it does mean full trust isn’t there at this point.**

Or someone will say, “My boyfriend beat me up, but he was remorseful and I forgave him”

**Should we just pick up where we left off and keep going?”** **Answering “No” to that does not mean you haven’t forgiven him, but it does mean full trust isn’t there at this point. There is some reevaluation needed for this relationship. At a minimum some proper accountability had and trust is going to need to be rebuilt.**

Forgiveness and reconciliation doesn’t always mean trust is immediately or fully restored.

Sometimes, many times it is right to trust them again fully and immediately.

But in some situations trust will need to be rebuilt.

So set boundaries on your relationship with them to build trust again.

Your teenage child negligently wrecks your car… Trust being rebuilt might look like… (directions, money for the bus, give them a ride, loan them your scooter, loan them your bike, loan them your moped and then loan them your car again as trust is rebuilt in how they steward other things)

The consequences of hurtful sin in a marriage can mean consequences that will need steps to rebuild trust. But forgiveness must happen so Christ is honored, the gospel is on display and opportunity for true reconciliation is at work.

Church, in my many years of pastoral ministry I have come to see that our practice of the spiritual discipline of forgiveness is one of the brightest ways the gospel is at work in and through the church.

We must understand it rightly as I have attempted to teach you tonight and we must practice it faithfully for God’s glory and others good!

I can’t wait to see what God has in store for us all as we aim to faithfully put the spiritual discipline of forgiveness to work.