

Forgiven and Forgiving Identity: A Biblical and Holistic Healing

Text: Colossians 3:12-14

¹² So, as those who have been **chosen of God**, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience; ¹³ bearing with one another, **and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so must you do also.** ¹⁴ In addition to all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

Introduction:

With all the hatred and unforgiveness around the world today, oppression of the military government in Myanmar, Asian American hate in Western countries, corruption, killings, and injustices in various countries, it seems difficult to forgive these oppressors.

This challenge is also true inside our churches, it is hard to forgive others, to forgive like Christ; like how God has forgiven us. Think of the person who offended you much and try to imagine if you can forgive that person right now. It is hard, right? Well, the mere idea that you still thought of someone means that you have not forgiven that person yet.

Brace yourselves, I will be citing a lot of biblical verses to make a strong point in our sermon.

Main Idea:

What is forgiveness? When the Bible uses the word “Forgiveness” it always carries the decision to release a person from the debt (obligation) that resulted when they injured you. Contextually, it also means, “to lavishly grace one another” or “to freely give to one another.”

If we are going to follow this in a literal sense, can you cancel the debts of those who borrowed money from you? Some will say, yes, pastor. It is easy if its just a small amount. But what if, its greater, something that your hard-earned money will just go and vanish like a bubble?

God’s Character

Dr. Bryan Maier, a biblical counselor, and Christian clinical psychologist published work about *Forgiveness and Justice*. In one part he just simply noted that “God forgives because that is just the way He is. He is always ready to forgive, and nothing slows Him down, because He is always love.”

Truly, this is true. Forgiveness, first and foremost, is grounded in the character of God:

- Ultimate example of Jesus on the calvary (Luke 23:34)
- *“They refused to listen and failed to remember the miracles you performed among them. They became stiff-necked and in their rebellion appointed a leader in order to return to their slavery. **But you are a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love. Therefore you did not desert them.**”* (Neh. 9:17)
- **“You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you.”** (Psa. 86:5)

But we should not forget that God is also a God of justice. A just God needs to exemplify justice in his creation. That is why, the death of Christ economically satisfies the wrath of God against our sins. Christ died on behalf of us because God is both a forgiving and a just God.

Christian Character

Yet, for Christians, it is hard for us to discern or balance justice and forgiveness. That is why, most of the time, we would like to put justice in our own hands, trying to revenge or even fight injustices in an unorderly manner.

Yet, we need to remember, first, that as Christian we have a **forgiven identity**. Christians are forgiven since we have confessed our sins and believe in our heart. 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.”* Providentially, God’s word states, in Hebrews 10:17, *“I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.”*

Why do we need to know this again? Pastor, we already know that we are forgiven. It is proper to overcommunicate this matter since this is essential in our spiritual growth. We need to remind us that we have been forgiven. But we usually forget the next part of the story.

Focusing on verse 13, in our passage, *“just as the Lord forgave you, so must you do also.”* Out of God’s forgiveness, receiving this forgiven identity of ours. Our identity in Christ becomes a fount of forgiveness, we need to channel this overflowing gracious forgiveness of Christ to others as well.

Christ reminded his disciples in the *Lord’s Prayer*, in Luke 11:4, *“forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.”* Being able to forgive is a manifestation of a forgiven identity. Only those who experienced forgiveness, can truly forgive.

1. Unforgiveness is Not an Option

Paul reiterated this reminder in Ephesians 4:32, *“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”* We have sinned against Him, yet when we sought His forgiveness, He canceled all our obligations. He wants us to do the same to those who have sinned against us.

Remember that Jesus modeled forgiveness to us. How great is this forgiveness? In Psalm 103:12, *“As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”* In the first chapter of Colossians verses 13-14, *“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.”* This is the gospel narrative of forgiveness.

Take note, this is in an imperative mode of speech. Meaning, it is a command. Now, if God said “do not steal” but you stole, then we are sinning, right? “Do not lie” but we lied, we are sinning. But God said, “You must forgive” but we are not forgiving, hence we are also disobeying God’s command. This is called sin of omission.

Okay, pastor, okay. I will learn to forgive and forgive the person who offended me. But what if that person repeated to oppress and offend me. What will I do? Should I still forgive that person, pastor? “Isn’t that too much already?”

Well, first and foremost, I am not the one saying these things. This is from God's word; this is God speaking to us through His revealed Word. That is why, I keep quoting verses, in its proper context because I am careful not to impose any bias coming from me.

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?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times."* These numbers are symbolical meaning, never-ending forgiveness.

Another, 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.*" Christ reminded us that we ought to forgive so we will not hinder our prayers to Him; this is parallel to what we have learned last week in Ephesians, during our Bible study, about grieving the Spirit. Remember that it is the Spirit who intercedes our prayers to God in Christ.

So, why do we expect spiritual blessings, spiritual growth, and church liberation, if we are not forgiving? We are hindering these blessings of God by grieving or quenching the Spirit in our own disobedience. Ohhhhhhhh! I pray, may we repent corporately, individually, and spiritually.

2. Other Centered

God does not forgive to make himself feel better. God forgives for the sake of the recipient of his forgiveness. A good example, the parable of the prodigal Son in Luke 15:1-32. The father forgives for the sake of his dying, pitiful, and sorrowful son.

In Psalm 32:1, "*How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven.*" The one who was blessed was the recipient of forgiveness. Also, in Romans 5:8, "*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*"

Other biblical characters: Joseph forgiving his brothers (Genesis), Stephen forgiving those who were throwing stones at him until he dies (Acts 7:57-60), and Paul who had been abandoned and left behind (2 Timothy 4:16).

3. Ask for Forgiveness and Repentance

Grounding again in our main passage in Colossians 3:13, "just as the Lord" or in another version, "just as in Christ," we need to understand that Christ has forgiven us because we have confessed our sins and repented (1 John 1:9).

In Luke 17:3-4, "*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 the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him.*"

Indeed, in Christ's finished work, we can forgive any time as long as we are always prepared to forgive. But remember, just like what I said a while ago, that we need to balance and discern justice and forgiveness. In God's way, **repentance of the oppressor is needed in order to have the fullness of forgiveness.**

By admitting their sin and repenting from it, it shows humility and submission to restoration.

How do we discern an **Authentic Repentance**? First, *No demands*. Second, *Willingness*. Third, and the last, *Change of character*.

What about those unrepentant people?

Remember that God is a God of justice. He has the ultimate say at the end.

While the offender is unrepentant, we must always be ready to forgive. And if time will not come that the offender apologizes to you even if you are seeking for this person's repentance, then put your whole trust in God that **one day justice will be complete and final**.

Deuteronomy 32:4, 41-42, God reserves vengeance for Himself, He takes the burden of justice off the victim's shoulders. *Healing comes from here*.

Conclusion:

Truly, this is a biblical survey of forgiveness. But why holistic? Holistic means wholly, the totality of one's personhood. Holistic healing is total biblical forgiveness. Total forgiveness is grounded in God's character channeled to His children.

Only those who can forgive truly and wholly can experience holistic healing. Remember, unforgiveness is not an option, also that it is other-centered as a contrast to secular healing, and lastly, repentance of the oppressor is needed for total forgiveness balancing God's justice and mercy.

May we all learn to forgive like this. Remember, in Colossians 3:13, "*bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so must you do also.*"

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