

Forgiving One Another By Gospel Grace (Ephesians 4:31-5:2)

Preached February 11, 2024, by Pastor Phil Layton (www.gcb.church)

“When he cries out to me, I will hear him, for I am gracious” (NASB).

- That’s the word of God in Ex 22:27 where we ended last time: God is compassionate.
- God says that after a section on restitution, restoration and responsibility to right wrongs.
- God calls me to repent, to repair as far as I can if I do damage to property or people.
- But what does He call me to do if others offend me?
- I’m not talking about crimes now, I’m talking about a Christlike response when hurt

Later in Ex 34:6, Moses asks God to show His glory, and God reveals His name: ‘*Yahweh God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness to thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin...*’ (LSB).

- God is compassionate and gracious in His lovingkindness forgiving all kinds of offenses.
- And His law of love calls us to reflect His lovingkindness, graciousness, and forgiveness.
- He calls us to be slow to anger and compassionate and merciful as He’s been with us.
- I want to expand that theme from Exodus to Ephesians today.
- I can’t think of a better way to round out this study than turning to the book of Ephesians.
- We need law and gospel and more biblical help to live out gracious forgiveness like God.
- We need to make right our wrongs with others, but when others wrong us, what’s right?

I need to pay if I broke a neighbor’s fence, but not make others pay for a personal offense

Eph 4:32 isn’t about restitution in property damage, it’s for relationships in people who hurt.

- Words and deeds can do damage, too, but the gospel makes forgiving possible

Look at Eph 4:31: *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.* 5:1 *Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

- We’ll continue in Exodus future weeks about offerings and sacrifices to God in the OT.
- Today I sense it’s good to be in the NT in this text for gospel applications of these laws.
- There’s a story some of you heard before from years ago I want to retell as we begin.
- It’s personally impacted my life deeply
 - o and I hope it impacts us all personally with the transforming truths of this text.
- It’s a story of 2 families in 2 countries, 2 continents (North America and South America)
- One family knew Jesus, the other didn’t (only knew bitterness, wrath, anger, malice, etc.)
- One family was missionaries, the other murderers,
 - o spearing their own people to death and any outsiders who came near.
 - o This unreached people was considered un-reachable
- Dayuma’s family was savage warriors; Rachel Saint’s family had the Savior’s Word
 - o they believed it was for every tribe and tongue and people
- It’s a story of savages and saints, literal savages in Ecuador
 - o and Rachel’s were literally Saints, that was their last name
- Many of you already know this story, but consider it afresh in light of today’s text

SLIDES

- How is that sort of thing possible? Only through the power of the gospel!

There is no human or natural explanation for that-only supernatural soul-transforming grace!

1. Why should we have forgiveness in our heart?
2. What is it to grant forgiveness in our words?
3. How should we ask forgiveness in our relationships?

v. 32 starts in the heart, kind tender-hearted as we forgive others.

- Why should we have this tender-hearted forgiveness? Because of the gospel.
- End of v. 32: God in Christ has forgiven us.

Col 3:13 *'if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.'* It says right before that to put on a compassionate heart.

- It starts in the heart, anytime you have a complaint, forgive in a heart of compassion. That doesn't mean never giving loving admonishments later, it means be forgiving first. Mk 11:25 *'whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive'* (present tense, keep on forgiving).

Other person isn't there to ask forgiveness, just you and God as you pray, He commands forgive

It starts in a heart that forgives anything against us. Tender heart=a tenderized heart to be kind.

- Steve Saint wrote how the gospel was what helped him to forgive,
- then to give much of his life to these people.
- Elisabeth Elliot later wrote how the gospel moved her to love her enemies,
 - o even laying down herself for them.

She believed Christ died for the Waodani, but knowing her husband died for them, too,

- o that made her love them more (see her book *The Savage My Kinsman*)

The gospel turns killers to kinsmen. Remember Paul himself as he writes Ephesians 4:32,

- Paul was once a killer of Christians, but he was later welcomed as their kinsman in Christ
- The gospel is the power of God to transform mass-murderers to missionaries
 - o (which the Waodoni became to other tribes, seeking to reach others).

The gospel literally can turn savages into saints.

- And the gospel changes those who are forgiven to forgive others, by the same grace
- If *they can forgive...you can forgive*, if you know the same forgiveness and same gospel
- You can't honestly say "I can never forgive so-and-so"

If you honestly know the God who has done the impossible in forgiving your far greater sin,

- trust Him to do what seems impossible in you.

Heart forgiveness, or forgiveness from the heart means you don't make pay those who hurt you.

- In Eph 4:31, pay back from a bitter heart can be angry words of malice, clamor, slander.
- In v. 32 tenderhearted forgiving doesn't make others pay in those ways, it's being kind.
- To forgive in the heart is defined as releasing a debt or refusing to make an offender pay.

Jesus taught us to pray *'forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors...'*

- o Sin is a debt, but forgiveness releases it.
- o Forgiving trespasses is pardoning sin's debt. It's assumed in the Lord's prayer,
- o as much as we need our daily bread we equally need daily forgiveness,
 - as we daily forgive sin-debts of others.

Jesus taught that for your private prayer closet (Mt 6), where forgiving starts in the heart

Mt 18:25 illustrates it: *'since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. "So the slave fell to the ground and*

prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.' "And the lord of that slave **felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt.** "But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' "So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' "But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed... his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' "And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over...until he should repay all that was owed him. "My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."'¹

If you don't have a heart of compassion in action, the Lord warns of serious consequences

That slave pardoned a massive unpayable sum had no patience for far lesser debts.

- It's wicked to mercilessly make others pay even relationally for what they did.
- To feel no compassion like you received moves the Lord's anger to threaten judgment.
- How dare you not forgive and not have mercy on a fellow slave in light of the gospel?
- Why do you choke over compassion? Lord have mercy
- 100 denarii is no small sum (thousands of dollars today), but we owed mega millions.

Our debt was infinite for our infinite sins against God, and we're unwilling to have mercy?

The Master in this story said 'should you not have mercy...in the same way I had mercy on you?'

I've said before authorities are to bring consequences for physical loss or criminal offenses

- but I'm talking here about most interpersonal or relational offenses.
- Forgiveness doesn't mean no discipline, but loving discipline's goal is restoration.
- It's not in a kid's power, position or place to spank siblings, it's the father's role.
- God the Father brings punishment in His family, that's not our job.

Don't punish by sinful words to them or about them, silent treatment or 'de-friending' them.

- A brother or sister in Christ had that sin paid for on the cross, must they repay you too?
- Jesus paid it all, but you're saying His payment isn't enough, they need to pay me, too?!
- Those who don't repent aren't redeemed, they'll pay for their own sin in hell eternally.
- I don't need to make them pay me in this life on top of their payment in the next life.

To not forgive is saying basically 'God, hell may be payment enough for You, but not for me.

- They need to pay relationally now, cuz you making them pay forever isn't enough?!
- Let's let God do His job, it's His to make pay.

- o He's not hiring debt collectors or a spiritual collections department

Can you pray as the Lord taught, '*forgive us **our debts, as we forgive our debtors***'?

- Can you say 'be merciful to me a sinner as I'm being merciful with sinners against me'?
- Do you want to be forgiven just like you forgive others?

Next line He taught to pray: '*lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.*'

- We need to pray for deliverance from evil un-forgiveness that is a temptation.
- If you can't pray 'as I forgive my debtors,' pray 'forgive me my sin of bitterness.'
- Pray 'help me forgive in my heart, release it to you, and deliver me from evil thoughts.'

Just as we pray 'give us this day our daily bread,' we need to daily pray to give up sin eating us.

What Rachel, Marj and Steve Saint and Elisabeth Elliot and those missionary families had to forgive is not as massive as what God forgave us, but when we can see how big *our sin* problem is, and remember how big our Savior is, and how big and massive His grace is in the gospel, then the first part of v. 32 is empowered by the last: "*just as God in Christ has forgiven you.*"

God only forgives us when we repent, so some ask if we only do v. 32 with those who repent?

Some teach we may not or must not forgive unless someone asks forgiveness?

Be careful: bitterness in v. 31 won't be put off if you don't forgive in your heart in v. 32.

- Don't let the sun go down on anger as v. 26 says, at least release it in your heart.
- Unforgiving unkind hard hearts need v. 32: be kind to others, tender-hearted, forgiving.
- Is God *kind* (v. 32a) only to the repentant?
- I already read from Luke 6 earlier where it says God is kind to evil men.
- He is kind all the time in His common grace to the evil and ungrateful and unrepentant
 - o His kindness lets them live and move and have their being and keep breathing.

Rom 2:4 says God's *kindness* is to lead to repentance, it's not only shown after repentance

- In Eph 4:32 that word for tender-hearted compassion is the root word used of Jesus
 - o in His heart towards all people in multitudes of unbelievers.
 - o These words in Eph 4:32 are not only for repentant believers in God's Word.

In Luke 7, this same Greek word translated "forgive" is used for grace Jesus gave freely to all

- and for a debt a man couldn't repay, and it's translated there "graciously forgave."²
- This Greek word can mean unconditional or unilateral forgiveness.
- The root idea of this word is the gracious giving or bestowing or granting of something
 - o unmerited and undeserved, not because the other party did something,
 - but because of a gracious decision.
- So it might be helpful to translate Eph 4:32 the way this word often is used:
- "*choose to be gracious as God chose to be gracious to you.*"
- This type of forgiving doesn't depend on the sinner, it depends on the Savior.

There's different words translated 'forgive' in NT. This one has the Greek root *charis* from 2:5

- God's grace to us undeserving unresponsive unrepentant spiritually dead.

God calls us to take the initiative for those who may not respond, by grace, *like God did for us*.

- The point is not how strict I can be in conditions the sinner must meet before Eph 4:32,
- the point is how free and gracious I'm to be, "*Freely you received, freely give*" (Mt 10:8)

If you can't show grace, you don't know grace

#2. What is to grant forgiveness in words? Saying 'I forgive you' to those who apologize

- There does need to be loving confrontation at times, conversation, restoration in person.

But Eph 4:31 tells us we need to put off bitterness and anger and sinful speech before v. 32.

- We need to put on kind actions, in hope there can be a verbal transaction of forgiveness.
- Sometimes we need to tender-heartedly tell someone how they hurt us, in private, 1-on-1.
- Gal 6 says restore in a spirit of gentleness, that may move them to repentance.
 - o If so, be quick to grant 'I forgive you brother'

We forgive from the heart first but reconciliation needs a conversation, it's a 2-way street

- Think of the OT story of Joseph, and how his brothers sold him as a slave.
- They ask forgiveness at the end, Gen 50, after Joseph had been kind for years.
- In 50:20 it's clear Joseph had already forgiven from the heart, trusting God meant good.
- He didn't forget, he said 'you meant evil,' but he believed God's sovereign goodness.
- He didn't make them pay, he paid for their living expenses and provided all their needs.
- Year earlier he learned to put off bitterness but the brothers needed to recognize their evil
- There had to be a conversation for a full reconciliation. Joseph embraced and gave grace

Heart forgiveness isn't the same as reconciliation, it's the first step toward reconciliation

- but it takes both parties to be reconciled (ideally 1-on-1 but sometimes a friend can help)
- You can forgive in your heart before it's ever expressed verbally, usually should.

One of the tests of forgiveness to ask yourself is do you want to reconcile?

Forgiving is NOT forgetting. How many of you have heard a phrase 'forgive and forget'?

- That's not part of forgiveness in the heart or forgiveness in your words you grant or say.
- Grace doesn't erase memories of hurts. It doesn't just say 'nah, forget about it!'

Voddie Baucham: 'I keep remembering it...that means I haven't forgiven, because if I forgive, that means I forget, right? [he says he'll ask where they got that from in the Bible? Book of] 2 Hesitations? That's not in my Bible anywhere! God...remembers [sins] no more, which literally means He chooses not to bring them into evidence anymore. The Bible never told you that you had to forget...human beings weren't created to forget. When human beings forget things, they are malfunctioning...When you start forgetting things, that's a sign that something's wrong...how ridiculous it is that there are people who beat themselves up because they can't do what God created them not to be able to do [forget]. That's ridiculous...to forgive someone is to cancel a debt...you remove your right to make the other person pay for what they did.'³

Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker*: 'You may need to bear certain effects of the other person's sin over a long period of time. This may involve fighting against painful memories, speaking gracious words when you really want to say something hurtful, working to tear down walls and be vulnerable when you still feel little trust, or even enduring the consequences ... that the other person is unable or unwilling to repair. Forgiveness can be extremely costly, but if you believe in Jesus, you have more than enough to make these payments. By going to the cross, he has already paid off the ultimate debt for sin and established an account of abundant grace in your name. As you draw on that grace through faith day by day, you will find that you have all that you need to make the payments of forgiveness for those who have wronged you.'⁴

When Granting Forgiveness (saying "I forgive you"), You Are Promising:

1. I won't bring up to myself/dwell on [Micah 7:18-19]

'a God like you, pardoning iniquity... You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.'

To forgive like the Lord means we don't keep bringing the incident back up from the ocean floor, like dragging up some old garbage. No fishing allowed! Don't go down or dwell there

2. I won't bring up this incident again to you [Isa. 38:17]

"... I had great bitterness; but in love you have delivered... cast all my sins behind your back" (ESV). It's in the past now, behind us, can't reach. Don't go back in bitterness, look to His love

3. I won't bring up this incident to others [Isa. 43:25]

I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, and I will not remember your sins. [for His sake, not me. If you have a trouble forgiving someone, don't do it for their sake, or for your sake, but for Christ's sake, refuse to remember that sin]

Jay Adams says not remembering is like burying it, you know where it is, but won't dig it up:

*'I will not bring up these matters to you or others in the future. I will bury them and not exhume the bones to beat you over the head with them. I will never use these sins against you.'*⁵

4. I won't keep up a wall between us or let this incident hinder our personal relationship [Isa 59:2, Eph 2:14-17 says Jesus '*himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility... to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace*']

Corrie ten Boom wrote of meeting a Christian after church who was one of the Nazi soldiers who had been her prison guard at the concentration camp where her sister died at their hands]

“How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein,” he said. “To think that, as you say, he has washed my sins away!”

His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached ... about the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side.

Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? “Lord Jesus,” I prayed, “forgive me and help me to forgive him.”

I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer, “Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness.”

As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me ... When he tells us to love our enemies, he gives, along with the command, the love'⁶

The ideal of forgiveness is reconciliation. How do we reconcile?

When Asking Forgiveness (below also from Ken Sande's *The Peacemaker*:

1. Address everyone involved [Luke 19:8]
2. Avoid “If,” “But,” and “Maybe” [Ps 32:5, Ps 51]
3. Admit specifically [Luke 15:21]
4. Acknowledge the hurt [James 5:16]
5. Ask “will you forgive me for...” [Gen 50:17]

Eph 5:2 *walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us ...*

¹ NASB95.

² Luke 7:21, 42.

³ Genesis 45 sermon on forgiveness at www.sermonaudio.com

⁴ Ken Sande, *The PeaceMaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict* (Baker, 2004), p. 208.

⁵ Jay Edward Adams, *From Forgiven to Forgiving* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1989), 12.

⁶ Corrie ten Boom, *The Hiding Place* (New York: Bantam, 1974), p. 238.