

Ephesians 4:32

Forgiven and Forgiving

Read Eph. 4:32. I'm going to spend the entire sermon explaining this verse because it's so important.

Battle of Antietam Illustration: From the History channel's "This day in history". It's September 1862 and two union soldier from the 27th Indiana infantry, Sergeant John Bloss and Corporal Barton W. Mitchell, were walking in a meadow and stumbled upon three cigars wrapped with a piece of paper. On this paper was General Robert E. Lee's plans to attack the Union near Frederick Maryland in a battle that would become known as the battle of Antietam. So they pass the orders up the chain of command to Union General George McClellan. McClellan had spend the previous week mystified by Lee's operations, but now the confederate plan was clear. He even said, "Here is a piece of paper with which if I cannot whip Bobbie Lee, I will be willing to go home." But McClellan was slow to act. He thought the confederates had more troops than they actually did and took too long to mobilize his men. As a result, the advantage of the intelligence provided was lost. Antietam one of the bloodiest battles in civil war history. He could have won—he knew their plans—but he failed to take advantage of it. What an incredible advantage to have something like that...and when it comes to the Christian life, we have something like that—a peek into the plan of the enemy. **2 Co 2:10-11.** "Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, 11 so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs."

- One of Satan's strategies in opposing God and His kingdom is to keep believers from forgiving one another. (2 Cor. 2:10-11)

Satan strategy is not just to make you sin it's to make sure that when you do, the wound stays open and is doesn't heal. It's one of his most potent strategies in destroying your marriage, your family, and this church. And because of that it's really important that we forgive and forgive well...

Even the average American recognizes this. A 2010 study by the Fetzner Institute discovered 62% of Americans agree with the statement, "I need more forgiveness in my personal life and 90% of Americans agree with the statement, "We need more forgiveness in America." Most everyone agrees that forgiveness is important and needed. But what it is? What does it mean to forgive someone...when you say, "I forgive you" what does that mean? Does it mean I'm not mad anymore? Does it mean there aren't consequences? Does it mean that you forget it ever happened? I've found that few are able to put their finger on what it is. But if we don't know what it is, how are we going to practice it? This isn't something we can afford to be vague on. It's extremely important! And before we talk about exactly what it is...we need to talk about where get the power to forgive, we need to understand the basis on which we forgive others.

Read. Mt. 18:21-35. So here's the picture...you and I have been forgiven an infinite debt against a holy God and because of that we have both the power and the obligation to extend forgiveness to others.

- Because god has **forgiven** us of our sin, we must forgive others of theirs. Forgiven people forgive people.

The foundation of the forgiveness we extend to others is the forgiveness we have received from God.

And it's only when we realize and feel the weight of our sin before God that we're empowered to extend forgiveness to others. The people who are the best forgivers are the people who realize how much they've been forgiven.

You see one of the reasons we struggle with forgiveness is because we don't see how gross our sin is. You say Chase I'm not that sinful. I mean, I'm definitely not perfect. I've done somethings that I'm not proud of, but that's because we tend to think of sin as really bad things we do. And it's not less than that, it's so much more. Not just the things you do the things you think. The things you feel.

Every prideful thought you have is spitting on God and his glory. Every moment you are ungrateful in life is a slap in God's face. Every attempt to define yourself based on money or success or looks is idol worship. Every moment you try to find your sense of self worth people's praise an approval is divine treason. Every lustful thought is cheating on God. Every moment we doubt God makes a mockery of his character. Even the seemingly small things like taking the fruit God told you not to is worthy of eternal condemnation. Listeners of George Whitefield were "urged to consider the torment of burning like a livid coal, not for an instant or for a day, but for millions and millions of ages, at the end of which they would realize that they are no closer to the end than when they first begun, and they will never, ever be delivered from that place" This is what your sin deserves. Sin is a personal offense to God. Every second we live for our glory and not His is worthy of eternal torment. You say is it really that bad, no it's worse! Romans 3:11-18. That is you. And that's me. Just stay...

Tit. 3: 4-7." But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.." God has come, with full knowledge of all of what you've done to him, what you did to him today, and what you'll do to him tomorrow and loved you so much that he killed his own Son to forgive you his enemy.

I'm spending a lot of time on this because it's the foundation for everything we're about to talk about. Your ability to forgive hinges on your feeling the weight of what you've been forgiven. I can talk all day about the how to's of forgiveness—and we're about to—but if you don't sense your own sinfulness you will not have the power to put any of it into practice. I want to stop before we've move on and thank God for the grace we've been given.

So I want to help us move toward practicing forgiveness, and I want to make a clarification up front—everyone listens to a sermon like through the lens of a particular circumstances. My context and the context of Ephesians 4 is relationships, specifically relationships in the body which I include marriages and friendships. And so my goal is to talk about what forgiveness in relationships looks in general, not to describe exactly what forgiveness looks like in your particular context. Obviously, the way you express forgiveness to your spouse is going to be different from the way you express forgiveness to someone who's in jail. Ok so that being said, the Bible talks about forgiving others in two ways and it's the same to ways that we tend to talk about forgiveness.

- **Vertical** Forgiveness: A commitment to ask God to forgive them, fight personal bitterness/hate, and forgo revenge. (this is what people mean by "forgiving them in my heart")

When you get hit, nothing fees better than to hit back! "Forgiveness...is a form of suffering. You not only suffer the original loss of happiness, reputation, and opportunity, but now you forgo the consolation of inflicting the same on them. You are absorbing the debt, taking the cost of it completely on yourself instead of taking it out of the other person." (Keller)

- Vertical Forgiveness is unconditional based on God's love for us. (Lk. 23:33-34; Acts 7:60) Look at it here (Lk. 23:33-34; Acts 7:60) I am asking God to forgive them and I am asking God to help rid me of bitterness. If someone sins against you, it's not ok to just walk around with hatred in your heart and tearing them apart in your head, which is what we want to do bc anger keeps us warm.

Now this is key, we offer vertical forgiveness simply because God has paid for our sin—not because they asked for forgiveness! The cross is what makes forgiveness possible even when people don't repent. Don't forget the cross represents—grace but also the wrath of God due sin.

And here's what you can know—especially for those of you for perhaps have had something horrific happen to you no repentance...no sin goes unpunished. No sin gets a free pass, that person who sinned against you there are only two options...either Jesus stood up and paid for that sin on the cross or that person will pay for that sin forever. Vengeance is the Lord's frees us from needing to take it our selves. And giving them over to the Lord's will and wisdom. Vertical forgiveness is unconditional. This is one way the Bible talks about forgiveness. Another way the Bible talks about forgiveness is a forgiveness that we grant someone...

- Horizontal Forgiveness: A commitment to cancel the relational debt, and move toward reconciliation—without necessarily removing all consequences. (forgiving with my words and actions)

Horizontal forgiveness is communicating to that person that they are freed from laboring under shame and guilt and re-affirming your love for them. 2 Cor. 2:5-8.

- Horizontal Forgiveness is conditional based on repentance. (Eph. 4:32; 1 Jn. 4:19; Lk. 17:3-4; Mt. 18)

No where in the Bible is there the idea that you have to go to someone who hasn't repented and tell them that you forgive them. (Lk. 17:3-4)

So when people ask, "Do you have to forgive everyone?" the answer is "Yes, you have to forgive everyone vertically before God in your heart." Do you have to tell someone you forgive them? No, not unless they repent. It's only when they express sorrow and repentance that we offer them our forgiveness.

○ Horizontal Forgiveness is NOT...

- ✦ (1) Forgetting it's not attaching someone's identity to their failure.
- ✦ (2) A feeling Some of you don't want to forgive. But it's not a feeling. I'm not asking you to feel. He's asking you to do! Which means then...
- ✦ (3) Optional It's not a suggestion. Some of you have heard that the reason we need to forgive is because it makes us feel better. Johns Hopkins psychiatrist says that forgiveness reduces stress and lowers blood pressure. It's therapeutic. Forgiveness isn't a technique to help you live happily. But the reason we forgive is not because it will make us feel better, but because it shows the Gospel of Christ. The forgiveness we extend is a picture of the forgiveness we've received. Forgiveness communicates I'm forgiving you for being such a sinful person. It communicates I'm forgiving you because I know that a sinful person I am and I know the forgiveness I've received. And it's not optional. You say, I can see that with little things, but with big things that's not possible. Surely you can just say "No".

Corrie Ten Boom released in 1944 became missionary set up recovery houses for people affected. But it wasn't until 1947 that she would face the true test of whether the forgiveness of Jesus had transformed her. She writes about it in her book *The Hiding Place*:

"It was in a church in Munich that I saw him—a balding, heavyset man in a gray overcoat, a brown felt hat clutched between his hands. People were filing out of the basement room where I had just spoken, moving along the rows of wooden chairs to the door at the rear. It was 1947 and I had come from Holland to defeated Germany with the message that God forgives. "It was the truth they needed most to hear in that bitter, bombed-out land, and I gave them my favorite mental picture. Maybe because the sea is never far from a Hollander's mind, I liked to think that that's where forgiven sins were thrown. "When we confess our sins," I said, "God casts them into the deepest ocean, gone forever. ..." "The solemn faces stared back at me, not quite daring to believe. There were never questions after a talk in Germany in 1947. People stood up in silence, in silence collected their wraps, in silence left the room. "And that's when I saw him, working his way forward against the others. One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat; the next, a blue uniform and a visored cap with its skull and crossbones. It came back with a rush: the huge room with its harsh overhead lights; the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor; the shame of walking naked past this man. I could see my sister's frail form ahead of me, ribs sharp beneath the parchment skin....[Betsie and I had been arrested for concealing Jews in our home during the Nazi occupation of Holland; this man had been a guard at Ravensbruck concentration camp where we were sent.] "Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out: 'A fine message, Fräulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!' "And I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand. He would not remember me, of course—how could he remember one prisoner among those thousands of women? "But I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. I was face-to-face with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze. " 'You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk,' he was saying, 'I was a guard there.' No, he did not remember me. " 'But since that time,' he went on, 'I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fräulein,' again the hand came out—'will you forgive me?' "And I stood there—I whose sins had again and again to be forgiven—and could not forgive. Betsie had died in that place—could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking? "It could not have been many seconds that he stood there—hand held out—but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do. "For I had to do it—I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us. 'If you do not forgive men their trespasses,' Jesus says, 'neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.' "I knew it not only as a commandment of God, but as a daily experience. Since the end of the war I had had a home in Holland for victims of Nazi brutality. Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able also to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars. Those who nursed their bitterness remained invalids. It was as simple and as horrible as that. "And still I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart. But forgiveness is not an emotion—I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart. '... Help!' I prayed silently. 'I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling.' "And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes. " 'I forgive you, brother!' I cried. 'With all my heart!' "For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely, as I did then"

The sin that we've been forgiven empowers and obligates us to forgive others before God and to extend that invitation to them when they repent...Yes it's difficult, but with God it's possible and it's beautiful

and it's yours. I want to end this morning by taking the forgiveness that God empowers you to extend and talk about a few ways that you can practice that in your relationships.

Practicing Forgiveness...

- Often times, forgiveness is both an ____**event**____ and a process.

- o An commitment to start and continue the promises I'm making you in forgiveness.

Granting forgiveness is about making and keeping promises. Forgiveness is making the promise and then the ongoing work keeping the promise. You see when we say "I forgive you" we're really promising 4 things. And at the point where we announce our forgiveness, it's now our job to keep these four promises. These are aimed at asking "How does God forgive us?"

Forgiving Like God: The Four Promises of Forgiveness

- (1) I will ____**think**____ righteously about this incident.

I'm not going to let this consume my thoughts. I'm going to see myself as a sinner alongside you. I'm going to ask God for grace to guard my mind and heart from ungodly thoughts and feelings. Thoughts that I'm better than you. That you're terrible. Feelings of hate or bitterness. I'm committed to taking thoughts captive. I'm not going to cut you to pieces in my head and heart.

- (2) I will not use this ____**against**____ you in the future.

It bothers me when I flirt with other girls, or yea you think it bothered me when you went to Waffle House with that bunch of guys the other day after the game? Whenever you accuse me of doing something wrong, I'm going to make sure you to remind you of all the things you did wrong that I said I forgave you for. Are you guilty?

- (3) I will show discretion in *how* and *with whom* I discuss this.

We love forgiving and then telling everyone else about how we won. It not enough that they're sorry, we need the world to know. We don't pray about it either. Imagine if God did this with the angels.

- (4) I will work towards reconciling our ____**relationship**____.

I forgive you but it's just never going to be the same. Because of what you've done there's always going to be a permanent barrier between us that I can't do anything about. Imagine if God said this.

Good thought hurt you not gossip never friends forever.

These are the promises of forgiveness. This is what I'm committing to this is what I'm promising when I say
"I forgive you"

So if someone said something really nasty about my wife, and then came and asked forgiveness, I said yes. And you asked me "did you forgive them?" my answer would be yes, and I'm continuing to develop and establish that forgiveness in my heart but I'm still fighting some of the feelings.

Also, if someone asked me and I couldn't commit to those things, I'd say "I know what God commands me to do and I'm committed to doing it but I'm still working towards that moment."

Maybe you've withheld forgiveness.