

FORGIVENESS

The Beautiful Empty Space of Freedom

Good morning Church!

Today, I want to take us into a topic that is much discussed, but unfortunately has fallen into the disrepair of familiarity, namely that of *forgiveness*. We talk about it, we write about it, we post about it and we sing about it but how often do we simply take a pause and just wonder at it? How often do we, in our familiarity, forget the magnitude of what Jesus has done for us in forgiving us? In God's terms, what does it mean to be forgiven?

In human terms, we look at a debt and say that somebody doesn't have to make payments anymore because their loan is *forgiven*. But the fact is the ramifications of the loan still exist.

In human terms, we mention forgiving people who have wounded us, which is still a supernatural trait, but we still have to push back against the constant barrage of memories, of emotional scars and for some of us even the physical scars in order to move into forgiveness.

We can forgive the debt someone owes us, but the deficit still seems to linger. The loss is still felt. The injustice still seems to silently inhabit the background like a specter.

So what is forgiveness in God's terms?

Far deeper than any of us will ever know. But what He *has* revealed about his forgiveness is nothing short of stunning.

Forgiveness Is For You

Let me say that the cross is not needed and included because of God's unwillingness to pardon. Nowhere in the New Testament is the cross conceived as turning an unwilling god into a willing one, as a compulsion on a reluctant God. It is not the cause of love, it is its consequence; it is the spring of love, it is its outflow, and that is what is so often forgotten. We read in the New Testament of Christ being offered as a propitiation for our sins, and our thoughts go back to pagan faiths, where men tried to appease their angry gods but the tremendous difference is that in all these faiths man had to provide the propitiation in the christian faith God provides it. He does not ask men for an atoning sacrifice He gives the atoning sacrifice, and He gives it because He loves the world and willeth not that any man should perish ... It is because He is so passionately eager to forgive that God sent His Son to die.

-George Herbert Morrison

Acts 13:38-39 NASB

38 Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through Him forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, 39 and through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law of Moses.

Ephesians 1:7-8a NASB

7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, 8 which He lavished on us.

The astounding truth is that you and I stand here today thoroughly and completely clean. Perfect. Spotless. Not because of anything, *not one thing* that any of us have done. But purely and solely because of the saving work of Jesus Christ!

You have ZERO debt to pay God back for.

You have ZERO sins to beg and plead for forgiveness for.

You have ZERO accusations left against you, because, like the woman caught in her own sin, in her own unfaithfulness Jesus now asks you, “**Where are your accusers?**” and you and I have only one response left that has any truth in it:

“None, Lord.”

You are free.

I am free.

“But Chris, don’t Christians sin?”

Of course they do! Pick up *any* book on church history and you’ll see how fantastically we can fail! But those sins have no record anymore on God’s side.

All of your sins have been cut away from you, you have been fully divorced from your old, sinful self. The self you now live as, the life you now live in is pure and clean because it’s *His* life you’re living in.

How is this possible?

Colossians 1:13-23 NASB

13 For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on the earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 18 He is also the head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. 19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. 21 And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, 22 yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach—23 if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

You have been totally and completely freed from sin. That is no longer part of your identity. It's been thoroughly wiped away.

Paul adds to this narrative in the next chapter of Colossians:

Colossians 2:11-14 NASB

11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; 12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. 13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

Not only the sin that sought to pervert and destroy us, but the very penalty of the law which stood against all lawbreakers, these things that were hostile to you and I: our sin, and the law that demands sin be killed, were *both* dealt with in the Blood of Jesus, **“The Lamb who takes away the sins of the world!”**
(John 1:29 NASB)

Forgiveness Is For Others

But what does this mean for our offenders? What does this mean for the people who harm us? What does this mean for every abusive father? Every manipulative mother? Every absent parent? Every unfaithful spouse? Every rebellious child? Every traitorous friend? Every selfish stranger?

Colossians 3:11b-14 NASB

11b...there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all. 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 also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love which is the perfect bond of unity.

What is Paul saying?

First, in the previous section, speaking of *how* we have been separated from sinfulness and our old nature, putting on this new nature, Paul asserts that there is no such thing as, “you people” or “those people.”

Why?

Because all those listed distinctions, which humans love to use:

- Background (Jew/Gentile),
- Physical Appearance (Circumcised/Uncircumcised)
- Race (Barbarian/Scythian)
- Status (Slave/Freeman)

Are summed up in Christ, who “is all and in all.” In every believer, the mark that sets us apart is not anything from Paul’s list. Not the piety of the Jew, nor the knowledge of the Greek; not the crassness of the barbarian, nor the fearsomeness of the Scythian; not the captivity of the slave nor the freedom of the freeman. The only discerning mark is that of Christ.

Second, Paul tells us the *how* of this discerning mark of Christ in us:

He says that since you and I are:

- Chosen
- Holy
- Beloved

We should match the nature we *already* possess as believers by “putting on,”:

- Compassion
- Kindness
- Humility
- Gentleness
- Patience

And the last two are extremely interesting: “bearing with one another,” meaning to be patient with each other’s weaknesses, and, “**...forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone, just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.**”

Here’s the kicker: You and I are simultaneously *expected* and *empowered* to forgive. It’s not a negotiated item. The forgiveness that we received, we are to extend to everyone who harms us. This is not a natural feat, because we are inclined to seek justice for wrongdoing. But in this we choose to trust God as both our Judge and our Justifier. We no longer view *any* human as merely the sum total of their sins. Rather we view all men, all people through a single lens: The Forgiveness of Christ Jesus.

2 Corinthians 5:14-21 NASB

14 For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; 15 and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. 16 Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer. 17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. 18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

There are actual studies that indicate there's a direct link between our physical health and offenses we carry the scars and anger from. And just as there is a distinct, physical correlation between sickness and unforgiveness, there is also a distinct physical correlation between healing and forgiveness.

Scientists, psychologists and other experts who don't know Jesus have begun to tap into something that the simple child of God has known since the first century: that forgiveness is something that benefits your entire person.

Stop punishing yourself for something God has already forgiven you for.

You are not permitted to sentence the one God has declared you innocent.

Who do you have to forgive their sins of yesterday to experience freedom today?