

Forgive One Another – Col 3:13

Introduction – Last week we considered what true confession of sin is and how the ability to confess our sins is a gift from God. The Scriptures also teach us that we are to forgive one another as Christ forgave us. And this requires that we carefully consider what it means to forgive one another from the heart.

The Poetry of God's Forgiveness – Let the words of Scripture get ahold of you –

"In those days and in that time," says the Lord, "the iniquity of Israel shall be sought, but there shall be none; And the sins of Judah, but they shall not be found; For I will pardon those whom I preserve" (Jer 50:20).

"As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12). Also – Isaiah 44:21-23, Mic 7:19
"To give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins..." (Luke 1:77).

This is what God did in Jesus Christ. He redeemed a people for Himself. Through nothing more than His mercy, He blots out our transgressions, restores us to Himself, and then rejoices over us with singing like the father over his prodigal son. And then He teaches us to daily seek forgiveness for our sins as we walk in the light (Psalm 86:5, 1 John 1:8-9).

Question: When you hear the words, "your sins are forgiven through Jesus Christ," what do you really believe? What are you thinking? How are you responding?

Question: What is the Lord instructing us as we pray, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us?"

The Promise of Forgiveness – Forgiveness is not a feeling, although forgiveness is to come from the heart (Matt 18:35). But that is not an appeal to emotion; it is an appeal to an honest vow. And that is because forgiveness is a promise. When God forgives, He is making a promise; He is going on record. *"I will not remember your sins"* (Isaiah 43:25). This is not a promise to forget (you know the ol' saying, "forgive and forget"? – it's not biblical). The omniscient God does not forget anything. His promise is not to bring to remembrance and use them against you in an accusatory way. And relationally it means that there is nothing standing between Him and you with regard to your fellowship; He is delighted in the reconciliation even though He paid for it all.

Confession and Forgiveness – Understanding what confession (homologeo) and forgiveness (a vow) really are helps to develop the right kind of forgiving in relationships. This is not "I'm sorry," and "oh, just forget it" kind of stuff.

What Kind of Forgiveness (Col 3:13) - *"...bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do."* Our tendency is to receive forgiveness standing under the Niagara Falls of grace, and extend forgiveness, with tight-fisted hands, scrupulously checking to see if "he really meant it," and reluctantly giving a tea spoon of the stuff. Jesus built this problem into the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:12, 14-15) which therefore doubles as a great tool for personal discipleship. We want to be eager to extend forgiveness and/or eager to learn how to extend forgiveness more and more.

Even As Christ Forgave You - It means that, when forgiveness is sought, Christ grants it immediately, and so we should do the same. Jesus came to seek the sick, not the healthy. He came to forgive sinners, not the righteous. He was looking to extend forgiveness, not looking to see if He could find it in His heart to forgive. *"even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do."*

Christ forgives our sins fully and completely, no matter how wicked the sin was. Trespasses against us are always much smaller in ratio than our trespasses against the infinite, perfect, holy God of heaven. *"even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do."*

Christ does not put us in a state of probation or purgatory. Christ does not put us in a period of testing to see if we really mean it. He restores us each time we confess our sins to full fellowship with Him. *"even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do."*

Christ does not stop forgiving us, even when we sin again and again. How many times have you been forgiven for the same sin? *"even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do."*

The World Cannot Forgive – If there is no Jesus, no atonement, no way to take care of the sin-problem, then there is no forgiveness. A man rapes a woman, or murders someone, or abuses a child – now what? How does a society determine when you can say, "I forgive you" and based on what? Doesn't something have to be done? But what can one do to earn forgiveness? That is an oxymoron, like working for mercy. There is this deep conflict between our sense of the high value of human life and the damage we can bring upon that life through sin. But we cannot provide that infinite relief, atonement, redemption, or reconciliation.

God Can Forgive – This of course is the gospel. God forgives our sins through Jesus Christ. And all those in Christ are those who know they have a great need for mercy – and a great need for us to overflow with that mercy towards others. *"Mercy triumphs over judgment"* (James 2:13). This mercy has triumphed over you, has it not? Then this mercy will manifest itself in the fruit of forgiveness, tenderheartedness, longsuffering, grace, peace as much as it depends on you, and love from a pure heart. We become a forgiving people only when we are found in a forgiving God.