

Nov 23: Forgiveness (part 4)

Last week was a pretty heavy duty week. We wrestled with a difficult biblical reality: what to do when forgiveness has not or cannot be completed. We examined how to adopt the Christlike attitude of forgiveness even when you do not have the opportunity to exchange the action of forgiveness. We talked about what it means to lament the pain of this lack of reconciliation, and really all pain since on the cross Jesus took upon Himself the penalty of sin, and all pain comes from sin.

We outlined tangible steps we can take to practice the attitude of forgiveness. Pray for the one who wronged you. Guard your narrative. Find redemptive community. Practice lament regularly. When emotions don't follow obedience, remember that forgiveness is a choice before it's a feeling. Feelings of pain are not proof of unforgiveness; they are invitations to return to the Cross. The goal is not amnesia but redemption of painful memories into a story of His faithfulness. Folks, that incomplete space when an attitude of forgiveness hasn't had a chance to become the action of forgiveness, that space, by God's divine grace, is the most fertile soil upon which personal sanctification, Christ-likeness, will ever grow because God the Father looks upon the weight you carry by His grace and sees His Son.

Using Psalm 13, we also briefly covered the topic of biblical lament.

Lament is the honest cry of a hurting heart wrestling with the paradox of pain and the promise of God's goodness. It's an honest expression of sorrow, confusion, or injustice before God while maintain trust in His character. A lament is addressed to God. It's a prayer addressed to the Lord God. This prayer is expressed through a cry, and not just any cry, but a righteous cry. What makes it righteous? The right attitude. The cry reveals the pain; the request reveals the need; the confession reveals the hope. Folk, all of this comes together to form the word faith. And faith is the heart of worldview. This is the necessary foundation from which your beliefs be rightly ordered, your values rightly prioritized, your behavior rightly edifying.

Remember that forgiveness is supernatural. As such, any wisdom that attempts to apply forgiveness without a context rooted in God's character and His Word will invariable miss the mark. If we are going to make any attempt to apply biblical forgiveness in our lives, in our faith, in our relationships, then we need to begin with the right lens. You ask, receive, and extend forgiveness only because of God's divine grace. The clearest and truest determination proving you belong to God is love demonstrated through forgiveness. Not through kind gestures. Not through service. Not through preaching. It's forgiving others. Forgiving others PROVES you have embraced and received the forgiveness offered to you through the blood of Jesus Christ. Forgiving proves your heart is under renovation to look more like Christ.

Last week I told you we would today discuss what it looks like to struggle with embracing God's forgiveness, confronting the secular and unbiblical notion of forgiving yourself. I

promise you, we will get to this rather important aspect of forgiveness, but once again, after much conversation with y'all after last Sunday's equipping hour, we are going to slow down and take our time exploring biblical forgiveness. So today we need to discuss part two of the attitude of forgiveness.

So what do I mean by that? The principles we are biblically called to adopt as the right attitude of forgiveness, like we covered last week, are universally applied in all circumstances, but the dynamic does change depending on the relationship. When it comes to forgiveness between Christians, we do, in fact, have extra responsibilities beyond the attitude of forgiveness. From a secular point of view, the conversation on forgiveness, when we began this topic, included the idea of retributive justice, restorative justice, and conflict management. But within the family of God, the Body of Christ, the conversation on forgiveness includes the ideas of peacemaking, accountability, and unity. What we are going to cover today is somewhat antithetical to the culture we live in, but if we are going to be a Christlike, gospel-centered fellowship of siblings, we must take an honest look at what Scripture says about what relationships within the Body should be like and respond with an honest look at how we've been doing it and what might need to change.

Last week we used a tennis ball to visually describe forgiveness. If I toss the ball to someone who is not part of the family of God and they don't toss it back, or if the person has already left this life and can't catch, then I have no more *actions* to take but am biblically called to adopt an *attitude* of forgiveness toward that person for the rest of my time on this earth.

Romans 12:18

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

But when the ball is tossed to a living fellow heir, a fellow child of God, and he or she does not respond biblically, our part is not necessarily over once we've brought the issue to the other person's attention. So this morning we are going to follow up last week by examining a biblical outline for responding to conflict and pursuing peace within the family of God, even when it's really, really hard. Within this we will look at what Jesus meant in Matthew 10:34 when He said, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." Why would the Prince of Peace say such a thing? Another facet of this will be the idea of love's power to actively extend grace, to move us forward towards reconciliation.

All of this sets the stage for looking at biblical accountability centered around the unity we make with our lives, not just our mouths, because this unity is our most powerful gospel witness. Forgiveness is a relational concept, and Scripture does make clear how we are to exercise and apply the attitude of forgiveness universally, but within the family of God, we have a next level of responsibility. This begins with identity.

Children of God are called to be peacemakers, not peacekeepers. The difference between those words is far more than semantics. Let's break down the differences. A peacemaker will actively disrupt the status quo in order to engage Christ-centered growth in self and others. That means recognizing and addressing sinful tendencies and patterns. A peacekeeper will passively avoid change in order to protect the status quo. Why? Because change is hard and often produces conflict. Why? Because we like things our way.

James 4:1 spells it out clearly:

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?

Nothing reveals your passions faster or stronger than change. Changes to your worldview can be scary and disruptive. Changes to the culture of the church can be scary and disruptive. Changes to your roles, work life, kids moving out, all the above. And perhaps most of all, growing in Christlikeness can be scary and disruptive.

A peacemaker will poke at what needs God's transforming touch, whereas a peacekeeper will avoid poking because of the likelihood of conflict. A peacemaker enters a potential conflict with faith. A peacekeeper avoids a potential conflict out of fear. A peacemaker, for the good of others, will sacrifice his or her wellbeing in favor of truth, reconciliation, and love. A peacekeeper will self-protect to avoid discomfort, confrontation, and the truth. A peacemaker is God-focused. A peacekeeper is self-focused. A peacemaker is filled with the fear of the Lord. A peacekeeper is filled with the fear of man. A peacemaker is blessed and called the sons of God. A peacekeeper is not.

A peacemaker sees conflict as a normal, and necessary, part of living in a fallen world. He sees conflict as redemptive, useful to God for revealing hearts, for sanctifying and refining hearts, for displaying the truth and power of the gospel in hearts.

A peacekeeper sees conflict as abnormal and unnecessary. He sees no redemptive value in it because he carries the wounds of the past and falsely believes that avoidance of conflict actually makes him holy, embracing a counterfeit peace of this world rather than the peace from loving God.

Peacemaking is antithetical to the American cultural value of rugged individualism. It stands in the way of "you be you," "live your own truth," "you have the power within you," and "don't rock the boat." If we, collectively, want to see this Body grow up, together, more and more into the Body of Christ, as siblings rather than fellow church attendees, then rugged individualism needs to die because peacemakers exist in community. Peacekeepers are alone.

Colossians 1:20 says the blood of Jesus reconciled everything to himself, on earth and in heaven, by **making peace** through the cross. Not keeping peace because before Jesus

there wasn't any. Jesus came in order to make peace between God and man. We, as sons and daughters of the Father, are called to do likewise as His ambassadors.

2 Corinthians 5:17-20

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself (that's peacemaking) and gave us the ministry of reconciliation (also peacemaking); ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them (that's forgiveness), and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (we are called to be peacemakers).

The ultimate difference between a peacemaker and a peacekeeper is the contents of their heart. So what makes a peacemaker? What are the essential attributes? Well, peacemaking begins with modeling the humility of Christ. Paul writes in Philippians 2:

Philippians 2:5-8

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

For us, peacemaking means humbly recognizing the magnitude of our sins before ever approach someone else with theirs. If I am not fully saturated and fully moved, in my spirit, by the seriousness of my sin and the magnitude of grace extended to me by God, then pride will get in the way of my motivations. Jesus says so.

Matthew 7:3-5

Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? ⁵ You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

Notice two things with me. First, Jesus uses the word "brother." That's a relational word describing citizens in God's kingdom. We are called to do this within the family of God. Second, Jesus doesn't say anything about the person with a log in his eye being permanently disqualified. I have sinned. In big ways! By worldly standards, I am radically disqualified from standing up here and should be cancelled immediately. But Jesus says the opposite, actually. Just because I am blinded by my sin does not mean I have no responsibility to care for the spiritual welfare of my fellow siblings. But being blinded by my sin means I can't see your situation clearly, nor will I have the right biblical attitude and my motivations will prove me to be a hypocrite. If I am going to pursue peace, the first step is addressing my own sin. This is impossible without humility.

1 Peter 5:5-6

Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” ⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you...

A peacemaker will regularly examine his or her motives and ask the question, “Am I seeking God’s glory and the other person’s good, or am I seeking my own vindication?” A peacemaker is going to regularly shepherd a clean conscience and uses Scripture and godly counsel to confirm his or her motivations are righteous. What else?

A peacemaker fears God more than man. This is kind of a big one. Pursuing peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation doesn’t require bravery; it requires a heart filled with awe and reverence for Almighty God. When God is rightly worshiped upon the throne of our hearts and the throne of heaven, we will experience a confidence that cannot occur apart from His presence.

Matthew 10:28

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

The context of that verse is persecution. How much more so shall we **not** fear when the worst case scenario for keeping a Christian accountable is his anger, a loss of that relationship, or he leaves the church? Compared to what so many of our brothers and sisters today face regarding physical persecution, this fear is spectacularly unwarranted.

Proverbs 28:1

The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion.

A peacemaker is consumed not by what others might think or do, but rather God’s glory and good pleasure, and this is the motivation that overcomes timidity and cowardice.

And lastly, a peacemaker loves others enough to take risks. Consider that for a moment. If I see you blindly walking towards a deep precipice, the most unloving thing I can do is nothing. In my ignorance, I might deceive myself into thinking it’s none of my business. Or worse still, I might deceive myself into thinking I’m actually being loving, gracious, and patient with you by **not** pointing out your sin. In other words, I will “lovingly” escort you to the edge of the cliff in silence. Let’s be honest, that sounds really stupid, but functionally this is no different than when we don’t boldly take the risk of rejection for the sake of the other person’s soul.

It’s impossible to have the right view of taking this risk if we do not have a right understanding of the power and influence of sin. Complacency towards your brother or sister’s sin is no different than complacency for them walking off a cliff’s edge. If you

actually love people, you will do whatever it takes to get them to stop, change direction, or listen to you, even at the risk of them not responding well. This isn't license to be busy-bodies because those people lack the first trait, humility, and the therefore the right motivation, love. But Philippians 2:4 tells us:

Philippians 2:4

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

In other words, don't just look out for your own good, but be on the lookout for the good of others! But this requires taking the risk that your warning about the cliff will be rejected and the relationship might suffer. When our fear eclipses our understanding of the power and influence of sin, then we have abdicated our role as peacemaker. What kind of risks does a peacemaker take? Rejection, misunderstanding, loss of reputation, abandonment. All of this is included when Jesus says His true disciples must count the cost of following Him because:

John 15:18-19

"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."

The world hates the message of the gospel, which means it will hate you. Peacemakers will be aggressively and often violently opposed by the world. That's why Jesus says this in Matthew 10:

Matthew 10:34-39

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. ³⁶ And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. ³⁷ Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

The peace that the Prince of Peace offers is peace with God.

Isaiah 53:5

But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

In the same way Jesus sent the original disciples, He has also sent us. As peacemakers. As ambassadors of reconciliation. Within the family of God, this forgiveness and reconciliation means accountability. That word "accountability" has been significantly abused over the centuries, so let's be sure we are using a biblically accurate standard. Holding someone

accountable for his or her sin against you begins with ensuring it was, in fact, sin rather than a preference. What do I mean by that?

[Memorial Day Story from WA Church]

We diminish the power of real sin when we apologize and ask for forgiveness because someone was offended by something we did or didn't say and it wasn't actual sin. Biblical accountability is holding someone to the standard he or she professes, which is the gospel. The gospel is what offends, not your preference.

Paul twice exhorts the Philippians church to live in a manner worthy of the gospel, to hold true to what they had already attained by faith. To the Galatian church he writes:

Galatians 6:1-2

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. ² Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Hebrews 3:12-14

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

Mind you, none of this gives us license to be sin police. Our motivation is love, and love covers a multitude of sin. Not makes excuses. Not sweeps under the rug. Covers.

1 Peter 4:8

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

James 5:19-20

My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, ²⁰ let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Well what does that mean? The love that covers sins is best understood as a forbearance, meaning love bears all things from 1 Corinthians 13:7, and does not let wrongs done within the Christian community come to their fullest and most disruptive expression. Love covers means peacemaking, taking action to keep the sin from having a greater impact within the community, like removing yeast from the dough because it spreads. This kind of love is longsuffering and persistent, refusing to respond in kind to behavior that destroys community because our unity is the most powerful testimony we have to the world.

Ephesians 4:1-3

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

We have both a selfish view of sin and a selfish view of reconciliation. Again, rugged individualism. The biblical reality repeated over and over again is that sin within the Body of Christ hugely impacts the entire Body, which means forgiveness and reconciliation would similarly have a huge impact, but in the positive. Before His arrest, Jesus prayed not for the gospel to spread, not for our physical protection, but for our unity.

John 17:20-21

I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

So that the world may believe that God the Father sent God the son. How? By our unity. Our unity brings God glory.

Psalms 133

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! ² It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! ³ It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.

Forgiveness and reconciliation between believers must include biblical accountability and unity. It must include choosing to be a peacemaker rather than a peacekeeper. In a very real sense, it means fighting for unity when I toss you the ball and you struggle to toss it back. And Matthew 18:15-17 makes it abundantly clear that this might include taking the risk of following through with the entire biblical process of accountability.

Matthew 18:15-17

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Sometimes forgiveness and reconciliation in the Body needs the help of others. Disunity within the body, folks, simply is not a biblical option. Instead of retreating, I am called to pursue you, for your sake, for my sake, for our sake, for the sake of our witness. That means being a peacemaker by taking risks, fearing God above all things, and modeling Christ's humility. We have so much more to cover, so we will continue this conversation until we break for Christmas.