

SERIES: DO YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE
PART 12A: I AM FORGIVEN

Learning to receive God's forgiveness and then learning how to live a lifestyle of forgiveness is one of the most important truths that you can ever embrace and prioritize. One of the most important truths each one of us must learn and take to heart is the actual cost that Jesus took on so that He could provide forgiveness for us. Why is this so important? Because, to follow what Jesus has told us how He wants us to live a life of forgiveness, it is incumbent upon us to understand and count the cost that we will have to pay every time we're called to forgive those who offend us, sin against us, lie about us, misrepresent us, betray us, and take behaviors towards us that diminish and tarnish who we are. Forgiveness is such a crucial issue for each one of us, I will speak on I AM FORGIVEN PART 12B after Father's Day. I read a remarkable story that sets up what I want to teach on today from our passage in Ephesians 4:25-32. I highly recommend the book **Forgiving The Unforgivable**, by **Dr. David Stoop**. He is one of my favorite authors when it comes to the integration of biblical truth and how to apply the truths that are found from counseling and psychology. Dr. Stoop tells an amazing story that demonstrates some of the ins and outs of what true forgiveness looks like. It also dismantles some of the myths I want to discuss today.

One day during a break at the seminar he was doing, Dr. Stoop had a young man from Lebanon share a story about

himself when he was 20 years old. A man in his village falsely charged John with a crime. The accuser gathered several other accusers to press false charges against him. Because there were 3 accusers, John was sentenced to 20 years in prison. As John was leaving the court he caught the eyes of his liar and said to him, "I might be going to prison, but I have three brothers who aren't." The man heard him but quickly left the court room knowing he had been successful in punishing John for something he didn't do. In prison with not having much to do, John decided to go to a service that was held weekly by a group of college students. It wasn't long after he started attending that John surrendered his life to Jesus. Then he joined some of the other inmates in a small discipleship group led by the same students. It was long after he started that the concept of forgiveness came up as a part of his discipleship and obedience. John stubbornly said one day after hearing Jesus' teaching on forgiveness, "I'll never forgive that man! How can I after what he's done to me?" The students lovingly took him to Matthew chapter 18, the Ephesians passage we're looking at today, at the prayer Jesus taught His disciples to pray, and other significant passages from the Bible on forgiveness. It took John awhile, like it does most of us, to understand his need to forgive his accuser in the context of Jesus' forgiveness of him. Though John resisted the truth, he began the process, and if you have attended CVCHURCH for any length of time, you have heard me teach yearly on forgiveness as a process. He realized that he would some day need to forgive his accuser. Dr. Stoop notices that John was in his early 30's and realized that John did not fulfill his full 20-year sentence. John said, "In our

country, we don't get out of prison early for any reason. But at the five-year mark of my prison term, I was suddenly released. To this day, I don't know why. I checked to make sure it wasn't some mistake and didn't pursue my search because I didn't want to make any waves." Once John got out of prison he started attending the Bible college that the students who reached him had attended. He worked the process of forgiveness and felt like Jesus was leading him to go back to his village and find this man who falsely accused him and tell him he forgave him. When he consulted his friends and faculty they immediately said, "Do not go back; he is way too dangerous." So, they prayed for him and he got on a bus and went back to the village where it all happened. No one in the village had known that he was out of prison because his family moved in great disgrace and shame when he went to jail. Those who thought he had broken out of jail were quite excited to see that he was back and expected there would be some fireworks. The man's wife answered the knock on the door and said that her husband wasn't home. John said he would return around dinner time. When he did his accuser cracked the door oh so slightly and asked him, "What do you want?" John said, "I came to tell you that while I was in prison, I met Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I became a Christian. As part of my surrender to Jesus, He forgave me for every wrong thing I have ever done, and because I have been forgiven I was able to forgive you. After a moment of silence, the man threw open the door and said, "That's wonderful John, come in and eat with us. "No, thank you," John responded. "I really have no desire to eat with you, I just came to tell you that I've forgiven you." And

with that, John returned and walked back to the bus station, got on the bus and headed back to school in Beirut. On hearing his story Dr. Stoop writes, “I was so excited that John and his fellow students had gotten it right. Forgiveness must take place, but reconciliation is an option. John would have been foolish to have dinner with that man, who was dangerous and had already stolen five years from John’s life. Who knows what lies he might have created if John had sat with him at dinner. We must forgive, but reconciliation is not always wise!” Please follow along with me as I read our passage today, Ephesians 4:25-32. **“So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body. ²⁶And ‘don’t sin by letting anger control you.’ Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry, ²⁷for anger gives a foothold to the devil. ²⁸If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need. ²⁹Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. ³⁰And do not bring sorrow to God’s Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, He has identified you as His own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption. ³¹Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. ³²Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.”**

I. Learn to walk in the power of God’s forgiveness

A. I am forgiven in Jesus

To truly understand the lengths that Jesus went through to offer His forgiveness to us it is important we understand the justification of God's anger and wrath. Ephesians 2:2-3, **“You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God.³ All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God's anger and wrath, just like everyone else.”** God's anger and wrath is completely different than humans' anger and wrath. Expressions of God's anger exhibit no loss of control. It is an act of God's will. His anger results in deliberate judgments against sin. His anger results in actions appropriate to the situation and in keeping with His own character as holy and just. Romans 3:23-25 says, **“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,²⁵ whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood to be received by faith.”** The Bible says it is our sinful nature that makes us subject and vulnerable to God's wrath. Every one of us have violated God's holiness, perfection and His very character. This is why Jesus is so important to us in the Good News of the Gospel. To redeem us means that He purchased our salvation by His sacrificial death on the cross. The word propitiation means He not only wiped away our sin, rebellion, guilt, and shame, but He brought satisfaction to Father God by once and

for all paying the penalty for humanity's crimes against the Godhead, and through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, on the final day of human history, Jesus Christ will stand in judgment over the devil himself, all of his demons and every one who has rejected Jesus Christ as God's Son and what He did on the cross. Hebrews 2:16-17 says, **"It is surely not the angels that Jesus helps, but He helps the descendants of Abraham. ¹⁷Therefore He had to be made like His brothers in every respect, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people."** Again, propitiation means Jesus atoned for our sins, which means He took our sins and He fulfilled the payment for God's wrath. Based on what Jesus did on the cross there is nothing you have ever done that would thwart or stop Father God from forgiving you because of what Jesus did. I am forgiven. Completely. You are forgiven completely.

B. I can forgive others through Jesus

In this passage Paul writes in vv. 31-32, **"Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. ³²Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you."** Because of what Jesus did on the cross, there is no reason that I can give for not forgiving what others have done to me, no matter what it is. Again, I recommend the book by Dr. David Stoop, "Forgiving the Unforgiveable." He deals masterfully with the worst kinds of crimes and behavior and how what Jesus did

for us can give us the power and the humility to forgive others. Loved ones, I believe as every one of us forgives those we carry grudges, revenge, bitterness and possible hatred for, we will see God do extraordinary things in our midst. He is waiting on us to do what He has asked us to do in our relationship with Him and with others.

II. Identify what forgiveness is

We know that forgiveness is both a decision and it is a process. The decision to forgive is usually accompanied with powerful emotions like anger, loss, grief, and sadness. Because forgiveness is so taxing on us spiritually and emotionally, it is usually best to demonstrate it in word and deed which might include a face to face meeting with your offender. Or you can write a letter to your offender expressing their sin against you and your feelings about their sin and your forgiveness towards their sin. Sometimes people write the letter and then burn it or shred it. The key is to make sure that you make it through the forgiveness process so that you no longer have this toxic cancer of unforgiveness, resentment, bitterness, anger, and rage sitting in your heart and soul. I want to identify for you the following elements and truth concerning what forgiveness is and what it isn't. There is a good chance if you feel stuck in the process of forgiveness you could be holding on to some beliefs that just aren't true.

A. Forgiveness is cancelling the debt owed to me

When someone sins against you, a wrong has been committed and a debt that must be paid has occurred. It is the debt that makes forgiveness so difficult. Something has been lost or taken from you. Forgiveness cancels, it does away with the debt. In forgiveness, you cancel it. See Matthew 18:27.

B. Forgiveness is removing the control the debtor had over you

When you cancel the debt of the offense, you no longer have the pain, frustration or anger over what the person did or said to you. When you think, hear or see the other person and you react negatively you are still under that person's control. Proverbs 29:25 says, **“Fearing people is a dangerous trap, but trusting the Lord means safety.”** When you truly trust Jesus to defend you and protect you, you remove yourself from your offenders' control. Proverbs 15:1, **“A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare.”**

C. Forgiveness is you giving a gift to you and to your offender

This is one of several costs to forgiveness. I get to forgive you whether you admit to your wrongdoing or not. This is a uniqueness of Christianity. Other major religions teach that you cannot forgive someone who hasn't apologized and taken responsibility for it. You see this in Judaism and Islam. Proverbs 17:9 says, **“Love prospers when a fault is forgiven, but dwelling on it separates close friends.”**

D. Forgiveness is rejecting revenge

When you feed revenge, you become like the person who hurt you—self-centered and dangerous. An ancient Chinese proverb says, **“He who seeks revenge should dig two graves.”** Proverbs 20:22 says, **“Don’t say, ‘I will get even for this wrong.’ Wait for the Lord to handle the matter.”**

E. Forgiveness leaves ultimate justice in God’s hands

We can often struggle with forgiveness because it can seem so unfair, and it violates our sense of justice. For the Christian, justice was done on our behalf when Jesus Christ suffered like a criminal on our behalf on the cross. Romans 12:19 says, **“Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, ‘I will take revenge; I will pay them back,’ says the Lord.”**

F. Forgiveness is often times a process

In Matthew 18:21-22, Peter asked Jesus if I’m to forgive someone up to seven times, and Jesus said, “No, up to 70 times.” Leon Morris comments on this passage by saying, **“It is a way of saying that for Jesus’ followers forgiveness is to be unlimited.”**

G. Forgiveness desires good for your offender

In forgiving those whom have done us wrong, you know that you have worked through the process of forgiveness when you pray for God's blessings and goodness in their life. Matthew 18:27 says, **"Then His master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt."**

III. Identify what forgiveness is not

A. Forgiveness does not deny that sin or hurt has happened

For true forgiveness to happen you cannot say "nothing happened" or that what happened was not a big deal.

B. Forgiveness does not empower sinful behavior

In forgiveness, you still point out where you believe the person is wrong. Forgiveness doesn't say it is okay; it means you will not hold it against them, but you're not saying it was okay what they did. You won't allow yourself to punish yourself with unforgiveness.

C. Forgiveness is not a response to an apology

This is what is so powerful about forgiveness. I don't need you to agree that you wronged me. If a person takes responsibility for the wrong they did to me, we might be able to reconcile. If they don't, we won't reconcile, but I won't hold what they did to me against them. I cancel the debt. Romans 5:8 says, **"But God showed His great love for us**

by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.”

D. Forgiveness is not covering up a sin committed against us

This is where boundaries, that I have spoken about for years, are so important. Mark Driscoll writes, **“If a crime is committed, we can simultaneously forgive someone and seek legal action.”**

E. Forgiveness is not forgetting

You cannot cancel the debt of a wrong that has been committed against you until you can remember in detail what they did. To ask someone to forget what was done to them—like being beaten, raped, betrayed or any other kinds of sinful actions, is to demand the impossible and to create a deep sense of condemnation. When God says, “I will forgive their sin and I will remember it no more,” He wasn’t saying that as God He develops amnesia. No. It means that God does not begrudgingly hold it against us as the basis of our identity and relationship with Him.

F. Forgiveness is not trust

Forgiveness, depending on what the sin is, can take a moment. Trust is built over time. Once trust is broken because of wrong and betrayal committed, it can take much time to rebuild, if it gets restored at all.

G. Forgiveness is not reconciliation

It takes one offender to take responsibility for what was said or not said done or not done and one offended to forgive, but it takes two to reconcile. So, unless there is both repentance by the wrongdoer and forgiveness by the offended, reconciliation can't occur, which means that the relationship will remain broken until reconciliation does occur. Your forgiveness is the beginning of potential reconciliation, but it doesn't mean reconciliation has been achieved.

Prayer.