

FORGIVENESS #2

Forgiveness— nothing is more foreign to sinful human nature and nothing is more characteristic of divine grace.

In **Titus 3:3** Paul describes his and the Cretans condition by nature with these words, **Titus 3:3** “*For we also once were foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.*”

Our souls were like a magnet drawing hate towards us and we were like a fountain, pouring hate out from us. While it is true that nothing is more foreign to sinful human nature, it is equally true that nothing is more characteristic of divine grace than is forgiveness.

REVIEW

In the introductory message, we considered: the central place of forgiveness in the biblical revelation of God, and of His salvation. **THE CENTRAL PLACE OF FORGIVENESS IN THE BIBLICAL REVELATION OF GOD** was considered under three headings:

- (i) The central place of forgiveness *in the very character and disposition of God. ⁽¹⁾
- (ii) The central place of forgiveness in the substance and proclamation of the gospel.
- (iii) The central place of forgiveness in both the initial, and continuing experience of the children of God.

In conclusion of that initial message it was shown how these three things are organically related. The God, in Whose very disposition is this desire to forgive has sent forth through Christ a message of how forgiveness may be obtained. And in the believing response to that message, God constitutes a community of forgiven sinners who are always then forgiving sinners. So what is inherent in the very heart and disposition of God is now mirrored in a people, who by nature, had the exact opposite disposition. They were hateful and hating one another, but what was in the heart of God (essentially and fundamentally as a part of His very Being to forgive, then embodied in the provision and proclamation of a gospel of forgiveness) calls out of the hateful and hating rank and file of Adam’s lost race a community of forgiven sinners who not only revel and glory in God’s forgiveness towards them, but are now marked as a forgiven community whose joy it is to be forgiving one to another.

It is absolutely crucial to grasp this organic relationship.

What organic [living, united] relationship?

The God in Whose very disposition is this desire to forgive, this God, constitutes a community of forgiven sinners who are always then forgiving sinners. So what is

inherent in the very heart and disposition of God is now mirrored in a people who, by nature, had the exact opposite disposition.

As we shall see in our subsequent studies, in the opening up of several critical passages of the Word of God, the Scripture makes it clear: if you are not a forgiving man or woman, you are not a forgiven man or woman, and if you are not a forgiven man or woman, you have never given a believing response to the gospel. You are a stranger to God’s grace in Jesus Christ.

END REVIEW

Having established the central place of forgiveness in the biblical revelation of God and His salvation and **THE IMPORTANCE** of forgiveness in Biblical revelation, in this study we will take up the most crucial and foundational issue, which is to construct **A DEFINITION AND DESCRIPTION OF THE MEANING OF THE WORD** forgiveness. Forgiveness has no meaning for you unless you are attaching to it what the Bible means by the word forgive. How do we define what forgiveness is? We must get a firm grasp upon a Biblical definition of the meaning of the word forgiveness in order to know what forgiveness is. Let’s begin by:

(A) CONSTRUCTING A BIBLICALLY BASED DEFINITION AND DESCRIPTION OF FORGIVENESS. We will construct this along 6 lines of thought:

- (i) Introduction – why start with a definition?
- (ii) A brief overview of the linguistic family of the words rendered in our English Bibles for forgiveness.
- (iii) Some vivid, verbal, pictures of forgiveness.
- (iv) A working definition and description of Biblical forgiveness.
 - a) Divine forgiveness – the forgiveness God extends to us, and
 - b) Human forgiveness – the forgiveness we extend to one another.

(i) INTRODUCTION – WHY START WITH A DEFINITION?

God’s thoughts are revealed in God’s Words. In First Corinthians 2 the Apostle Paul makes this explicit. **1 Corinthians 2:11** “*For who among men knows the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him?* [after some 30 seconds of silence, if I said, ‘Do you know what I’m thinking?’ You would say, ‘No,’ because who knows the things of a man save the spirit of a man. I would know what I’m thinking because my spirit is in touch with me, but you won’t know unless I articulate my

thoughts into words which communicate them] **11** “For who among men knows the things of a man, save the spirit of the man, which is in him? even so the things of God none knows, save the Spirit of God. **12** But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God; that we might know the things that were freely given to us of God. [Paul is speaking of his unique place as an Apostle] **13** Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches, but [words] which the Spirit teaches; combining spiritual things with spiritual words.”
(2)

The thoughts of God, locked up in the mind of God, are revealed to the servants of God in words chosen by God Himself. Therefore, in order to define the word “forgiveness” we must begin with the Words which the Holy Spirit has chosen to convey the concept of forgiveness. Spiritual laziness will make us vulnerable to all kinds of nonsense that is floating out there in the Christian world concerning forgiveness if we don’t exert ourselves and concentrate and think through the meaning of the word forgiveness. There is so much nonsense out there because people don’t start with their Bibles, and biblical words by which God has encapsulated and revealed biblical thoughts. Having considered the definition of forgiveness, we move to:

(ii) A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE LINGUISTIC FAMILY OF THE WORDS RENDERED FORGIVENESS IN OUR ENGLISH BIBLES.

God has conveyed the concept of forgiveness in seven major words. Three of them are Hebrew words in the Old Testament and four of them are Greek words in the New Testament.

^[15:34] **a)** Of the three Hebrew words, one is used only several times and the word is used in other settings to describe covering, hiding, purging, or doing away with something. In Deuteronomy 21:8 it is used 2 times. In Jeremiah 18:23, it is translated in our English Bibles as “forgive,” and yet in other contexts it is used to describe covering something, hiding something, purging something, or doing away with something. So when God wants to express forgiveness, He uses words that in other contexts clearly mean to cover, to hide, to purge, or to do away.

b) Then there is a second word used about a dozen times that means to lift up, with a view to taking away. That’s the word used in Genesis 50:17, translated “forgive” in Joseph’s interaction with his brothers who sinned against him.

In Psalm 32:1 “Blessed is the man, whose iniquity is forgiven whose sin is covered.” God is conveying, in using

this word “covered,” a word that is used in other contexts as “lift up” –lift up with a view of taking away.

c) The major word is a primary root and it is not used for other purposes. It is found approximately 3 dozen times and it means to pardon, to spare. It’s used many times in Solomon’s prayer in 1 Kings 8.

That’s a brief overview of the Hebrew words. Words that mean to cover, to hide, to purge, to do away, to lift up with a view to taking away, carrying away, to pardon, to spare.

Now when we come to the four New Testament words:

THE FIRST WORD we will consider, one word, used only one time for forgiveness, is a word that in many other usages, is used for divorce in Matthew 1:19. Joseph was thinking about “putting away” his wife –divorcing her. It’s used in Matthew 5:31 of divorce. It’s used again of Jesus sending away the crowds in Matthew 14:15, 22, 23. It’s the word used when Pilate says, whom do you want me to “release” unto you, in Matthew 27:17.

The only place this word is used for forgiveness is in Luke 6:37. God uses this word in all these other settings, but now he employs it to capture the concept of forgiveness. Luke 6:37 “*And judge not, and you shall not be judged: and condemn not, and you shall not be condemned: release [or forgive], and you shall be released [or forgiven].*”

THE SECOND WORD in the New Testament which is used only once is in Romans 3:25, translated for the “passing over” of the sins that were done in the past. It’s speaks of how God appeared to be lenient with the sins of men prior to the coming of Christ. He did not meet them with full, just judgment. He’s passed over them.

Divorce, putting away, sending away, release, passing over.

^[19:06] **THE THIRD WORD** is one of the two major words used for forgiveness in the New Testament. It means to graciously, or freely, forgive. The first part of the word has that word for grace. It means to graciously send away or to graciously put away in an act of forgiveness. It is used 11 times. It’s used in Luke 7:42 and 43 in a very obvious context dealing with forgiveness. Luke 7:40 “*And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto you. And he said, Teacher, say on. 41 A certain lender had two debtors: the one owed five hundred shillings, and the other fifty. 42 When they had not wherewith to pay, he forgave them both. Which of them therefore will love him most? 43 Simon answered and said, he, I suppose, to whom he forgave the most.*” That’s the word that is used. That’s the word Paul uses in Ephesians 4:32. “*Be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving, [graciously,*

freely forgiving] *one another*. It's used in Colossians 3:13 *"forbearing one another, and forgiving each other, if any man have a complaint against any; even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye."*

To graciously, or freely forgive, to graciously send away or to **graciously put away** in an act of forgiveness. **Forgave, forgiving, [graciously, freely forgiving]**

In **THE FOURTH PLACE**, the primary word used 40 times in the verb form expressing forgiveness as an act, 15 times as a noun. This, surprisingly, is the word that is used for **sending away** in Matthew 13:36. It's used for **divorce** in 1 Corinthians 7:11, *"Let him not put her away."* It's used for leave, *"Then the devil leaves Him for a time"* in Matthew 4:11. They **left** their nets Matthew 4:20. The disciples all **forsook** him Matthew 26:56.

Putting away, release, sending away, divorce, total separation, away, leaves, permanently walking away, left, forsook, to graciously, or freely forgive, to graciously send away or to **graciously put away in an act of forgiveness. Forgave, forgiving, [graciously, freely forgiving], passing over.**

The Hebrew words mean **to cover, to hide, to purge, to do away, to lift up with a view to taking away, carrying away, to pardon, to spare.**

It's like God is saying, 'I want you to get the idea what forgiveness is, so I'll take a word I can use for **divorce**, which means a **total separation** of formally married partners.' It means people who are called into discipleship, forever, resolutely, **permanently, walking away** from their nets. It means the devil turning and **leaving** the presence of Jesus.

As we've considered this brief overview of the family of words used for forgiveness, do you get an overall sense of the meaning of the words?

THE HEBREW WORDS that mean **to cover, to hide, to purge, to do away with something, to lift up with a view to taking away, covered, carrying away, to pardon, to spare.**

THE GREEK WORDS: putting away, release, sending away, divorce, total separation, leaves, permanently walking away, left, forsook, to graciously, or freely forgive, to graciously send away or **to graciously put away in an act of forgiveness. Forgave, forgiving, [graciously, freely forgiving], passing over.**

Do you have an idea of what forgiveness is from the use of these words? * **THE IDEA OF SEPARATING THE SIN FROM THE ONE WHO COMMITTED IT**, is absolutely foundational and central in the family of words the Holy Spirit has used by which to convey to us what

forgiveness is. You must not think of forgiveness apart from **THE CONCEPT OF SEPARATION**. Separation that has to do with the sin that has been identified with the sinner. In forgiveness, some kind of separation, for some reason or another, is made between the sinner and that sin.

That's the brief overview of the family of words, but now we often say that one picture is worth 1,000 words. Consider secondly,

(ii) SOME VIVID, VERBAL PICTURES OF FORGIVENESS.

God has used all these words, and when you put them all together we get the idea that forgiveness involves taking the thing away, separating the sinner from the thing that is called sin, releasing it, divorcing it. Now, in order to make sure that we get it, besides words, God uses pictures. By way of pictures God is going to allow us to see what forgiveness is.

THE FIRST VIVID, VERBAL PICTURE is found in 2 Samuel 12. Do you remember the horrific sins David has fallen into? He's fallen into willful, deliberate adultery, calculated murder, cover up, months of a backslidden state, and living the life of a hypocrite. But he's God's child and God is determined to bring him back, and so he sends the prophet to him and through the prophet Nathan his heart is pierced and he's brought to a place of penitence. Now look at the language in **2 Samuel 12:13** *"And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against Jehovah. And Nathan said unto David, Jehovah also has put away your sin;"*

God could have said, the Lord has **forgiven** you, but He didn't use one of the standard words for forgiveness. God said, 'David, that sin clings to you. It clings to you in the memory of the doing of it. It clings yet closer to you in the accusations of your conscience.' Read Psalm 51, Psalm 32, Psalm 6 *"day and night Your hand was heavy upon me. My moisture is turned into the drought of summer."* David was like a madman under the tortures of his accusing conscience. His body was distressed as was his psyche, and he says, 'I have sinned against Jehovah. This sin is mine. This sin clings to me. My sin is my great burden.' What does the prophet say to him? The prophet says, 'Do you know what God's done with that sin, right here and right now, immediately, unqualifiedly, David? He has put the sin away. It's gone. David, if you open your mouth to me about that thing, I'll say it's gone. I've separated this sin, from you.' That's what forgiveness was to David. I have put away your sin. He didn't say, 'I've begun to put it away, and I'll do it by putting it away by bits and pieces.' No. 'I have put away your sin.' That's forgiveness. It's put away never to be brought back. Now yes, there were temporal consequences in terms of God's Fatherly

discipline and chastening. ‘Yes your son’s going to die, your household will be in a shambles for the rest of your days, but as far as the legal liabilities and the filial disruption of your sin that cuts off communion with Me, your sin is put away.’ That’s forgiveness. Do you have the picture? One moment David is buried beneath the mountain of his sin and the next moment the sin is gone. Out of sight. Vanished. Put away.

What is forgiveness? God putting away our sin.

THE SECOND VIVID, VERBAL PICTURE is found in **Psalm 103:11** “*For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His loving-kindness [His covenant love and faithfulness] toward them that fear him. 12 As far as the EAST is from the WEST, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.*” He doesn’t say, ‘as far as East is from West, so He has forgiven us.’ No. He wants us to get the message. This is forgiveness. This is God removing our transgressions from us, separating our sins from us, not an inch away, a foot away, not a north or south pole away, but East and West. How far away are they from one another? As far as you want to chase them around the equator, you never get East closer to West. As far as East is from West. There is no East Pole and West Pole. If you’re going east, you keep going east, and you’ll keep going east and you’ll never overcome going east until you turn around and go the other direction and then you’re going West. As far as East is from West, so far He has removed our transgressions from us.

Remember the overall thrust of those words that we covered? Removal, divorce, picking up and carrying away—all come to concrete expression in these vivid word pictures.

THE THIRD VIVID, VERBAL PICTURE is found in Isaiah 38:17. Hezekiah has prayed that God would spare him and not take him home. Though the prophet has said you shall die and not live, he turns to the wall and he prays. Now he breaks out in this Psalm of praise after the recovery of his sickness, and then he says this in **Isaiah 38:17** “*Behold, it was for my peace that I had great bitterness: but You have in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption; for You have cast all my sins behind Your back.*” Do you see the imagery? Hezekiah says up until this point of God’s activity of forgiveness, ‘My sins clung to me. When I sought to have dealings with God or God with me, my sins were an impediment. The sins were there as a barrier to that relationship, but God this is what You’ve done, You’ve taken my sins, and You’ve put them behind Your back so that You can look upon me with favor, and I can look upon You with peace. The sin, is no longer there as barrier. You’ve cast it behind Your back.’ God is showing us what forgiveness is. He’s saying, ‘It’s taking your sins and putting them behind My

back never to drag them out before you or before Me again.’

THE FOURTH VIVID, VERBAL PICTURE is found in **Isaiah 43:25**. God says, ‘My people are awful dense.’ Because we are so unforgiving, it’s hard for us to grasp a God Who is so prodigal in His forgiveness, so God says, ‘I’ll lay it on thick because I want to get the message through to them.’ **Isaiah 43:25** “*I, even I AM He that blots out your transgressions for Mine own sake; and I will not remember Your sins.*” Here the prophet is most likely using the imagery of what someone would do in removing the ink from a parchment, so blotting it out that the parchment would once again be clean. You look upon the parchment and there is no sign, no trace of the former ink and writing upon it. It’s been blotted out. Not partially, not by incremental portions. It has been blotted out to such an extent, that God says, ‘I will not to remember. I will not call it to mind, in My dealings with you. You must not call it to mind in your dealings with Me. It has been blotted out.’

THE FIFTH VIVID, VERBAL PICTURE is found in Isaiah 44:22. There is a little different nuance 44:22 “*I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and, as a cloud, your sins: return unto Me; for I have redeemed you.*”

I have blotted out as a thick cloud. What is God talking about? EJ Young, the great Hebrew student and commentator, in his commentary on the book of Isaiah suggests that this was taking imagery from a situation in the weather conditions in that part of the world—how there could be thick cloud cover in the morning and in a very short time, because of the shifting of the winds, those clouds would be utterly blotted out, removed, and there would be nothing but clear Palestinian skies. That’s the imagery. God says, ‘Your sins are like a massive cloud, that when you would look up and see My face, there the cloud is. When I would look upon you and express My love and My favor, there’s the cloud, but in grace and in mercy, I will blot it out as a thick cloud.’ You look up one instant... all clouds. You blink and look up again... no cloud. Clear skies.

THE SIXTH VIVID, VERBAL PICTURE is found in **Jeremiah 31: 34** and we have a concept that’s picked up and amplified in the new covenant and in the work of Christ. As God reiterates through the prophet what He will do under the new covenant, **Jeremiah 31:34** “*And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, know Jehovah; for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, says Jehovah: for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more.*”

You say, ‘Wait a minute, God’s omniscient and knows all things. He doesn’t forget anything. You mean God cannot bring the sins to remembrance if He chose to?’ Yes, He could bring the sins to remembrance, but He’s saying, ‘I am making a commitment of My will to put away that sin in forgiving. I make a commitment of will that the sin that is forgiven will never enter the picture in the way that I deal with you and it must not enter the picture in the way you deal with Me.’ “*For I will forgive their iniquity and their sin will I remember no more.*” God says, ‘I have self-imposed amnesia with respect to your sin. I will remember it no more.’

THE SEVENTH VIVID, VERBAL PICTURE is found in **Micah 7:18**. “*Who is a God like unto You, that pardons [He forgives] iniquity, [what’s that involve?] and passes over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage. He retains not His anger forever, because He delights in loving-kindness. 19 He will again have compassion upon us; He will tread our iniquities under foot; and You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.”*

When something is cast into the depths of the sea, it’s gone, it’s buried out of sight, out of mind, forever. And as one author said, “. . . and on that part of the sea in which He cast our sins, God has a big sign that says, No Fishing Here.”

Do you see the similar contours and hues in all the verbal pictures? As surely as the linguistic family of words for forgiveness points to a separation of the sin from the sinner, a letting go, a lifting off, a divorcing, so the verbal pictures point in the same direction. God says, ‘I’ve put them away, as far as East is from West, I’ve blotted them out, I’ve blotted them out as a thick cloud, I will remember them no more, I will bury them in the depths of the sea.’ That’s what forgiveness involves. Now having looked at – why start with a definition; an overview of the linguistic family; considering the vivid verbal pictures; now we come fourthly to:

(iv) A WORKING DEFINITION AND DESCRIPTION OF BIBLICAL FORGIVENESS.

a) Divine Forgiveness

b) Human Forgiveness

When we take the biblical words, consider the pictures, take the biblical data and say, what is forgiveness Lord? What do we come up with?

By way of introduction in what we just considered, it’s clear that there is a similarity in divine and human forgiveness. We are to pray, ‘forgive us our sins or debts or trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.’ There is similarity in divine forgiveness (God’s forgiveness of us) and human, or relational forgiveness

(our forgiveness of others). **Ephesians 4:32** “*and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you.*”

“*. . . and be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God for Christ sake has forgiven you.”* We are to forgive as God forgives. There is similarity between God’s forgiveness and our forgiveness, but listen carefully, ***SIMILARITY, IS NOT IDENTITY**, and all kinds of theological nonsense are floated, because people do not make that distinction. Similarity is not identity and, therefore, there is no one definition of forgiveness that fits divine forgiveness of us and our forgiveness of one another. So we will deal first with a description and **definition of DIVINE forgiveness**. When God says, “I will forgive their iniquities,” what is God ready to do with my sins?

DIVINE FORGIVENESS is the gracious act of a Holy and Just God, by which He removes from the sinner the guilt and legal, or filial [family liabilities in the case of a child of God], liabilities of their sin, thereby clearing the way to a restored relationship between Himself and the sinner.

That is our definition of forgiveness. We are not now considering the grounds of this forgiveness –that’s the work of Christ. That comes in the next message. We are not talking about the condition of it in the sinner, that’s repentance and faith. But, we want to grasp the heart of forgiveness. What is it when God forgives me?

Again, **DIVINE FORGIVENESS** is the gracious act of a Holy and Just God, by which He removes from the sinner the guilt and legal, or filial, liabilities of their sin, thereby clearing the way to a restored relationship between Himself and the sinner.

What is human forgiveness? What are we doing when we forgive? When someone comes to us and says, ‘Will you forgive me?’ And we say, ‘I forgive you,’ what are we doing? What steps, what commitments, what promises, what perspectives are in the words ‘I forgive you?’

HUMAN FORGIVENESS is a gracious God-like act, not of a Holy and Just God, but of one forgiven sinner to another forgiven sinner, by which the offended party makes a commitment of their will not to remember the sin of the offending party, thereby clearing the way for a restored relationship between both parties.

Human forgiveness is a gracious God-like act of a forgiven sinner to another forgiven sinner, by which the offended party [that’s me when you’ve come confessing your sin, asking forgiveness] makes a commitment of my will [it has nothing to do with my feelings. I may feel like slapping the other person for what they did and my

feelings haven't calmed down yet, but when I forgive that person I'm making a commitment of my will] not to remember the sin of the offending party, thereby clearing the way to a restored relationship between both parties.

We have not addressed the conditions or the grounds of this forgiveness, that will be covered in coming messages, but we must get a hold of what forgiveness is first.

No text captures what forgiveness is more beautifully, in short compass, than **Matthew 18:15**. "*And if your brother sin against you, go [and tell your friends about their sin? No!] show him his fault between you and him alone: if he hear you, you have gained your brother.*"

What has happened? Here one forgiven sinner has sinned against another forgiven sinner. What are they to do? The one who has been sinned against? It's sin. It's not some notion where they put construction upon stuff that is not sin. It's the kind of thing that could stand up in a court of law. The offended believer goes to the believer who sinned against them with what attitude? To beat up on that person? No. He's grieved that the sin has put a barrier between them and he's lost his brother or sister. He's lost face-to-face communion. He's lost open-hearted fellowship.

He wants to gain that person and he wants the barrier to be removed. So what does he do? He tells him his fault and seeks to get him to see his sin, so he shows "him his fault between you and him alone."

Next Matthew 18:15 says, ". . . if he hears you . . ." What's this hearing? He sees his sin and owns it as sin, and he turns to you as his brother or sister and says, 'my brother, my sister I see, I've sinned, will you forgive me?' And when the offended brother or sister says, 'I forgive you,' what are they doing? They are engaging in a gracious, God-like act, making a commitment of will not to remember the sin of the offending party anymore. Thereby, clearing the way for restored communion. The last part of Matthew 18:15 says, "*you have gained your brother.*"

When people come to me and say, I did this wrong can you forgive me? You know what my standard answer is? Almost invariably I say, 'I never feel more like God in the legitimate sense, than when I can forgive people.' It's one of my greatest joys to say, 'I freely, cheerfully, forgive you.' It's God-like to say the issue is put away. When I look upon you, when I speak to you, this thing is no longer there. It is put away. As God says, 'I will not to remember it,' though He could if He chose to. Likewise, I say, 'I will not to remember it,' though I could if I chose to. I am engaging in that God-like gracious act of making a commitment of the will to no longer remember, so that when I say, 'Oh God my Father, forgive my trespasses as I

forgive those who trespass against me.' What I'm saying is, that when I'm the offended party, and someone asks my forgiveness, I am doing what we've just described. I'm making a commitment of the will. Most often embodied in a sincere promise followed up with honest effort that this issue is put away. It no longer influences. It's buried, and so the next time I'm offended (and we'll see this when we come to that critical passage about forgiving 70x7) it's like the first time. If you put the sin away, then it's not there. It's no longer there to write in the book. Love takes no account of evil. Love keeps no ledger book of previous wrongs. Does God keep a ledger book? No. It says He **blots them out**. 'I cast them behind My back, I bury them in the depths of the sea, I put them away,' and if Almighty God, in His infinite burning Holiness, can put away my sin for the sake of Christ, what kind of a creature am I, who ought to be roasting in hell, if I can't put away your sin as one who has received God's forgiveness.

Then we will study that parable in Matthew 18. The language that should never be in the mind, let alone on the lips, of a Christian is the language "I can't forgive, I won't forgive." That's dangerous language. Remember the parable of the unjust servant, the man is forgiven his millions, and his buddy has a pocketful of change he owes him, so he grabs him by the throat and says, 'Pay up!' The man he grabbed pleads for mercy, but he sees no mercy. Jesus said that man will be cast to the tormentors. If you don't know what forgiveness is in your own soul, it is morally and spiritually impossible to have **a heart suffused with the wonder of divine forgiveness** and not have a fundamental principle of human forgiveness.

As we, as a group of God's people, grow in our appreciation and are basking in the wonder of God's forgiving grace, one of the most tangible manifestations of that will be that we are an aggressively forgiving bunch of people in our dealings one with another. Talk about being the light of the world and the salt of the earth when people come out of a society full of hate and hatefulness. Think of the lack of forgiveness and hate that's out there. Road rage, people giving other people the finger, parents bitter to children, children to parents. To step into a context where people fall over one another to forgive each other, outsiders are going to say, 'What in the world makes you people tick?' That's what the Gospel does to us when we lay hold of forgiveness in Jesus Christ. That's what God puts in our heart, in our relationships, one to another.

TO THOSE WHO MAY NOT BE PARTAKERS OF THAT FORGIVENESS.

Your greatest need is to know God's gracious act by which He will remove the guilt and liabilities of your sin and clear the way for a restored relationship with Himself. The liabilities are nothing less than eternal hell; conscious,

eternal, torment; and those are frightening liabilities; and the only way that they can be removed is by Divine forgiveness; and that forgiveness has been procured in the bloodletting of the Son of God; and God has promised, if you will go in your guiltiness and cast yourself upon His dear Son, God will righteously and justly pardon all of your sins. All of them. All of them! You say, 'But wait a minute, you don't...' I don't have to recall all of them. God is Omniscient and He knows them all and He says, "Their sins and iniquities [that I know in full] I will remember, no more." Wouldn't you love the joy and the exquisite peace of pillowing your head tonight, and know that the God of heaven has no controversy with you at all. Every barrier, that calls for His judgment, that keeps you at a distance from Him, is removed and you can begin to live in communion with the God Who made you for Himself. That's what God offers you freely in the Gospel, and I plead with you, to lay hold of it and embrace His offer.

TO THOSE WHO MAY BE PARTAKERS OF THAT FORGIVENESS.

What a difference in our homes, our gathering together with God's people, when the gracious forgiving heart of God is mirrored in our relationships one to another. We ought to be like God. You Lord are good and ready to forgive. The inside of the door of our heart ought to be worn thin from the knuckles of our soul pounding, saying, 'I want to get this forgiveness out.' And you welcome someone coming to the other side of the door knocking, and saying, 'My brother, my sister, will you forgive me?' You say, 'Oh, I just could not wait for you to come. I couldn't wait. My heart's been yearning to say the words to my fellow sinner, 'I forgive you. My brother, my sister, you are forgiven.' Forgotten. Put away. Done with. Do you know that reality? It's a blessed thing. Pray that God the Holy Spirit will come and grant us such an increased measure. That, no matter how much we may struggle with our own sin, that we will never have to struggle with forgiving the sin of others. How can anyone living daily under the canopy of God's ongoing, Fatherly forgiveness, even think of withholding forgiveness from another believer?

(1) FORGIVENESS IS WOVEN INTO THE VERY CHARACTER AND TEXTURE OF THE BEING OF GOD

Psalm 86:5 "For You, Lord, are GOOD, and READY to forgive, and abundant in lovingkindness unto all them that call upon You."

Nehemiah 9:16 & 17. Here we have a setting of corporate confession of the sin of the nation. Nehemiah is the mouthpiece for the nation. Confessing the sin of covenant breaking and all of the various manifestations of that covenant breaking, and yet in the midst of it we find these words in **Nehemiah 9:16** "But they and our fathers dealt proudly and hardened their neck, and hearkened not to Your commandments, **17** and refused to obey, neither were mindful of Your wonders that You did among them, but hardened their neck, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage. [What would your hope be if you had to say that's what their sins were? That God had mercifully come, singled out this nation in free sovereign love and delivered them out of Egyptian bondage, yet they refuse to obey. They didn't remember His wonders, they harden their neck, they were rebellious and wanted a captain to lead them back into their bondage in Egypt. What hope would you have for a people like this? Look at Nehemiah's hope.] But, You are a God **READY TO PARDON**, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness, and forsook them not."

Micah 7: 18 in a context in which the moral corruption of the nation has been acknowledged to the people through the prophet, and yet in the midst of all of this, notice what the prophet declares in **7:18** "Who is a God like unto You, that pardons iniquity, and passes over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retains not His anger forever, because He delights in lovingkindness. **19** He will again have compassion upon us; He will tread our iniquities under foot; and You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. **20** You will perform the truth to Jacob, and the lovingkindness to Abraham, which You have sworn unto our fathers from the days of old."

(2) 1 Corinthians 2:12 But we received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God; that we might know the things that were freely given to us of God. [Paul is speaking of his unique place as an Apostle]

Matthew 6:

9 After this manner therefore pray ye. Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. **10** Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth. **11** Give us this day our daily bread. **12** And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. **13** And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one .

14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. **15** But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.