

FORGIVENESS #5

In Ephesians 4:31 and 32, as Paul is setting out the alternate lifestyle of the new humanity in Christ and contrasting what the people of God are to be with the Gentiles who yet walk in spiritual darkness and ignorance and hardness of heart, he directs the people of God with these words, **Ephesians 4:31-32. 31** *"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and railing, be **PUT AWAY** from you, with all malice: 32 and be kind one to another, tenderhearted, **forgiving** each other, even as God also in Christ **forgave** you."*

Colossians 3:12-14. 12 *"**PUT ON** therefore, as God's elect, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering; 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: 14 and above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness."*

We are considering the biblical doctrine of forgiveness, especially the forgiveness that we, the people of God, are to be constantly extending and conferring upon one another. Thus far we've considered the central place of forgiveness in biblical revelation. The biblical definition and description of forgiveness has been set forth. Then, in the last study, we demonstrated from the Scriptures that God's forgiveness of us is both the basis, the motive, and the pattern of our forgiveness of each other. The crucial question, 'What are the conditions, without which, forgiveness is neither conferred by God nor received by the sinner?' was considered. If God's forgiveness is the pattern of our forgiveness, then it is crucial to ask the question, 'Is God's forgiveness of us unconditional or is it conditioned by something in the sinner?' As we looked at the Scriptures and sought to answer this question, we saw that both in entering into life, that is, in conversion, and in the ongoing experience of the Christian life, that is in sanctification, God's initial forgiveness of us, as a Judge, and His continual forgiveness of us as a Father, are conditioned, by the repentance and faith of the sinner. No sinner has any right to say that God has conferred upon them the wonderful gift of forgiveness and that they have savingly received the gift of forgiveness, if they are strangers to repentance and faith. We have the clear word of Jesus, "Unless you **repent** you will perish, and he that believes not, shall be damned." Likewise, with the child of God, "He who **covers** his sin, shall not

prosper, but whoso confesses and forsakes them, shall obtain mercy." As we **confess** our sins as the children of God, He is both faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. God's forgiveness is **CONDITIONAL FORGIVENESS**. Those conditions are not meritorious. Those conditions are not self-wrought. Nonetheless, they are conditions which God in His moral government has established as absolutely essential before He will confer forgiveness and before the sinner can truly receive forgiveness.

In the act of forgiveness itself (particularly thinking of horizontal or human forgiveness), the one who forgives makes a solemn four-pronged promise. When you say to someone who has asked your forgiveness of a specific sin, 'I forgive you,' you are making this promise:

- 1) I will not knowingly remember this thing against you.
- 2) I will not speak of this thing to any others.
- 3) I will not raise it with you again. See #5
- 4) I will not allow it to be a barrier in the restoration of our relationship.

END REVIEW

This study will be a continuation and an addendum to our last study. In this study we will lay out the bad council and the misconceptions with respect to the subject of human forgiveness. We could entitle it as:

COMMON MISTAKES CONCERNING THE DUTY AND PRIVILEGE OF MUTUAL FORGIVENESS.

Four mistakes will be identified. As you read the current literature and listen to the Christian programs on the subject of forgiveness, it seems that these are common mistakes. ***A failure to recognize these biblical distinctions [doctrine] can only result in confusion of thought, which in turn, will give birth to confusion in experience. *Life is determined by thought. *Doctrine shapes practice.** Let's begin to address these common mistakes concerning the duty and privilege of forgiveness.

Mistake #1: A failure to distinguish between the relinquishment of vengeance and the granting of forgiveness.

When we are sinned against, especially if it is a serious offense, or we perceive that we have been sinned against, our instinctive sinful response is, 'I'll get even.

I will pay you back for what you have done to me.' According to the Scriptures, no Christian at any time, under any circumstances is to retain this disposition of vengeance. The 'I'll pay you back disposition', has no place in the heart of a child of God. 'I'll pay you back' or 'I wish I could pay you back,' these are dispositions utterly forbidden by the Word of God. In **Romans 12:19** we have this very clear directive given to God's people who are to be transformed by the renewing of their minds in verse **19**, "*Avenge not yourselves beloved, but give place to the wrath of God, for it is written, vengeance belongs unto Me, I will recompense [or literally, I will pay back] says the Lord.*" Here the child of God has been wronged. He has been offended and he has been sinned against and the instinctive temptation and desire is to be the payer backer himself; to take into his hands the responsibility of paying back another for the wrong that has been done to him. This text says, 'No, you child of God, are not to avenge yourself, but you are to give place to the wrath of God. You are to place vengeance in the proper hands. God alone, Who is the Divine Paymaster, will repay anyone who has sinned against you.' If that person's sin is not repented of and forgiven in the way of God's appointment, God will pay him back. but payback is God's prerogative, not yours. Even the desire to pay back and to take that position is a usurpation of one of the rights and prerogatives of God alone. So when there is something that would create in my spirit a disposition of vengeance, I am immediately to recognize it and say, 'No Lord, vengeance has no place in my heart, in my spirit, in my mouth, in my hands, in my actions. Vengeance is Your business Lord. You will pay back. None is to take vengeance but those appointed by You.' In chapter 13 the Apostle makes it plain that God has deposited the right of vengeance in certain circumstances in the hands of human government. **Romans 13:3** "*For rulers are not a terror to the good work, but to the evil. And would you have no fear of the power? Do that which is good and you shall have praise from the same: 4 for he is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do that which is evil, be afraid; for he bears not the sword in vain: for he is a minister of God, an avenger [same family of words] for wrath, to him that does evil.*"

God says, 'Vengeance is mine. I deposit in the hands of human government a certain dimension of that vengeance. I don't put it in your hands to take

personal vengeance upon anyone else, under any circumstances.'

This is what often happens: Someone is deeply, grievously wronged and the spirit of acrimony and bitterness and vengeance takes root in the heart. The spiritual life comes to a horrible, crippled state while vengeance has any place in the soul.

The infection of vengeance in the soul creates a very unhealthy and sick soul. So there is the child of God who feels something of this vengeful spirit that they recognize before God. They come across a passage like this where they're very conscious that their prayer life has become very dull and lifeless. They come to the understanding that they had a vengeful spirit towards this person who has wronged them. They have a disposition that says, 'I want to get even. If I could, and get away with it, I'd kill that person, or at least physically retaliate and do something to harm that individual.' Vengeance has that disposition running through it. When that individual believer sees their sin and comes before God and says, 'God forgive me, for my vengeful spirit. Forgive me that I've had this spirit of vengeance that I ought not to have allowed to percolate into the substructure of my soul. God forgive me for my vengeful spirit' **-and they relinquish vengeance into God's hands.** There is a tremendous relief in their souls and the heavens are opened when they pray. Once again there is a sense of communion with God and freedom and health in the inner soul, but what often happens is that they think what they have done is that they have forgiven the one who provoked them to be vengeful when, in reality, they have not forgiven them, because that person has not owned his or her sin. The cause of the offense is still there. What they have done is **relinquish any thought that they have a right to personally carry out vengeance.** The bi-lateral conference of forgiveness has not taken place.

Unthinking or uncritical writers have constantly made the mistake of confusing the relinquishment of vengeance for the extension and conferral of forgiveness. The two are not the same. ***It is perfectly right** for someone who has relinquished his own sense of right to personal vengeance **to still desire that God will bring vengeance in His own way and in His own time** for the glory of His Name. [imprecatory prayer – to invoke evil or a curse upon] In Revelation 6 we have an account of people who

have so attached themselves to Christ and been willing to confess Him against all opposition that they've been martyred for the sake of the Lord Jesus. **Revelation 6:9** *"And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of them that had been slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held:"* Here are the glorified spirits of these martyred saints under the altar who are part of the company of which it says in Hebrews, *"the spirits of just men made perfect."* Their spirits are wholly sanctified and fully purged of all the remnants of remaining sin with which they struggled, even as they went to their death for Christ sake. And what are they praying? **Revelation 6:9** *"and they cried with a great voice, saying, How long O Master, the Holy and True, do You not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?"*

If giving up vengeance as a personal right means forgiveness, there'd be nothing that these people would need to have as the occasion of crying to God for vengeance. If they had "unconditionally forgiven" those who killed them, why would they now be praying "how long before you will avenge our blood?" Do you see the absolute contradiction with the notion of unconditional forgiveness and that putting vengeance in God's hands means that I forgive the person towards whom I had the vengeance. No, unconditional forgiveness and that putting vengeance in God's hands are distinct and separate issues. I am never to have vengeance in my soul, but to commit into God's hands the taking of vengeance – when appropriate, in His own time, and in His own way – is a noble, a righteous, and a holy issue. A lot of confusion has come into the matter of mutual forgiveness by not making this distinction between the relinquishment of vengeance and the conferral of forgiveness. ***I can relinquish vengeance toward people whom I do not forgive**, for they have not owned their sin, nor sought my forgiveness, and my forgiveness of them is not to be unconditional. If it is, then how do you make sense of this passage? God doesn't say to Christians, vengeance is a naughty word in the Christian vocabulary, forget it. 'No,' God says, 'Vengeance is Mine. Just put it in My hands, not in yours.' So much confusion comes by a failure to make that first distinction.

Mistake #2: A failure to distinguish between the disposition of a forgiving spirit and the act of conferring forgiveness itself.

God Himself takes the position of One Who is described in **Psalm 86:5** as *"ready to forgive."* In **Exodus 34** when God revealed His glory to Moses, it was part of His essential glory that He is a forgiving God and He takes the posture towards men of readiness to forgive, *"for You Lord are good and ready to forgive."* God stands in readiness to forgive.

In the incident of David, God's forgiveness to His sinning, wayward, backslidden child was beating in His heart. God's forgiveness was dammed up behind the door of God's heart wanting to burst forth and inundate David. As soon as David said "I have sinned," the dam broke and David is swallowed up, inundated, and overwhelmed with God's gracious forgiveness . . . but, the disposition to forgive, is different from the act and the conferral of forgiveness.

Luke 23 is one of the most misunderstood passages of the Word of God. Our Lord Jesus has just been impaled upon the cross and we read in **Luke 23:33** *"And when they came unto the place which is called The Skull, there they [the Roman soldiers] crucified Him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand and the other on the left. 34 And Jesus said, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."*

This text is often brought forward to show that we are to have an attitude of unconditional forgiveness to anyone, no matter what they have done to us. It is argued that's what Jesus did when He said, *"Father forgive them."* Let's consider what this text is NOT saying and then what this text IS saying:

(A) WHAT THESE WORDS ARE NOT SAYING.

(i) THESE WORDS ARE NOT A DECLARATION OF WHAT JESUS IS DOING.

They do not say that Jesus said, 'Father, **I** forgive them for they know not what they do.' This is not a declaration of what is going on in Jesus own activity of mind and soul. He does not say, 'Father, **I** forgive them.' It is not what the text says. Secondly:

(ii) IT IS NOT A STATEMENT OF ABSOLUTION.

It is not a statement that says, 'Father they are forgiven, for they know not what they do.' Nor is it a statement of absolution directed to them, 'You are forgiven, for you know not what you do.' That is not what the text says.

(iii) Nor is he praying that the Father would grant them forgiveness in the courtroom of heaven without repentance and faith.

Now is Jesus praying that irrespective of repentance and faith, those foul mouthed, cursing, brutal heartless **soldiers** should there and then be absolved from their sins? Is that what the words mean? So they could go home that night and say, "Hey honey do you know what happened, I got saved standing by the cross today. I heard Jesus pray to His Father that I'd be forgiven and I'm forgiven." No repentance. That's nonsense and contradictory to the Gospel.

What about the **leaders** in the Jewish hierarchy, who would've heard Him say, "*Father forgive them.*" Would they go home that night comforting themselves saying, 'We are forgiven. We heard Jesus pray, He prayed to His Father that we would be forgiven. We are forgiven.' Nonsense. Jesus had pronounced one of His most terrible words to these religious leaders when He said "*You will die in your sins.*" Seeing Judgment Day from afar and bringing it to the present and knowing that they would not be granted faith and repentance He says, "*You will die in your sins.*"

We cannot make nonsense out of the words of Jesus. **THEY ARE NOT WORDS STATING WHAT HE WAS DOING, 'I forgive them.'** **THEY ARE NOT WORDS DIRECTED TO THE PEOPLE OF ABSOLUTION, 'You are forgiven.'** **NOR IS HE PRAYING THAT THE FATHER WOULD GRANT THEM FORGIVENESS IN THE COURT OF HEAVEN, WITHOUT REPENTANCE AND FAITH.** That would overturn everything that we saw in the Scriptures in our last study. So what is it? What does the text say?

(B) WHAT THESE WORDS ARE SAYING.

(i) It is a prayer that Jesus prays to his Father.

He prays this prayer in His Sanctified, Holy **Humanity**, which has just born all the indignities of the blows of the hand –the crown of thorns, the mock coronation, all of the jeering, the buffeting, all of that horrific treatment– and now He's been impaled upon the cross. He says, "*Father forgive them,*" that is, 'if they come to the place where they own their sin, Father, take into account, that they don't fully understand what they are doing.' The Roman soldiers do understand to some extent that they've been the lackeys of the pressure of the Jewish hierarchy, but they don't fully understand what they are doing or the One to Whom they are doing it. 'Father, show mercy in

the light of their partial ignorance.' Even the Jewish leaders do not fully understand, for Paul said later, had they known what they were doing, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory. Paul could say, 'Mercy was shown to me because I did what I did in murdering Christians in ignorance, in unbelief.' In His Holy, Sanctified **Humanity**, what is the disposition of His Holy Soul? It is one expressed in these words, "*Father, forgive them.*"

(ii) It is the expression of the deep, Holy, disposition of the soul of our Lord Jesus that was a disposition of forgiveness towards those who put him on the cross, both directly (the soldiers) and indirectly (the Jewish hierarchy).

Jesus is reflecting the disposition of His heart that can find extenuating circumstances even in the hands of those who put Him upon the cross and He's saying, '**My disposition is one of forgiveness extended TOWARDS them, but nothing of forgiveness conferred UPON them.**'

Now blessed be God that some of these very ones, some days later on the day of Pentecost when they are charged with being murderers of God's Messiah, are pricked in their hearts and they cry out, "*What shall we do?*" Peter says in Acts 2:38, "**Repent** and be baptized unto the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." This prayer of Jesus is a beautiful, overwhelming, humbling manifestation of this disposition of a forgiving spirit that we must maintain to those who treat us with the greatest disdain and heap the greatest amount of evil upon us. There is never an act done to us that warrants the killing in us of a forgiving spirit. If you ever think there is go to this prayer. [And also to the parable of the unforgiving servant] Is the disposition of an unforgiving spirit found anywhere else in Scripture?

This very attitude is mirrored, in the first martyr Stephen, in **Acts 7**, where Stephen has preached to the Sanhedrin, calls them who are **externally circumcised** uncircumcised and indicted them for showing the same pattern as their forefathers. He described them in **Acts 7:51** "*You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, you do always resist the Holy Spirit (1) as your fathers did, so do you. 52 Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? and they killed them that showed before of the coming of the Righteous One; of Whom you have now become betrayers and murderers; 53 you who received the law*

as it was ordained by angels, and kept it not. 54 Now when they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.

59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon the Lord, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. 60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."

What was Steven's prayer to the Lord Jesus? Was it, 'Lord Jesus, here and now, blot out their sin, **irrespective of** whether **they continue** to have a **stiff neck** and an **uncircumcised heart** and **resist** the Holy Spirit?' Would Stephen be so foolish as to ask God to confer forgiveness upon stiff-necked and uncircumcised people then and there, with their condition being unchanged? No repentance, no faith? Of course not. He is manifesting the same spirit as his blessed Lord. While the rocks are pummeling down upon him and men are doing their worst to him, he is saying, 'God, the disposition that was in my blessed Lord when He was impaled upon the cross is the disposition which, by the Spirit, has been implanted in me.' *Stephen has a prevailing **disposition of forgiveness** towards these sinners and he has a longing that they will know the blessing of God's forgiveness, **IF and WHEN** they **meet the conditions** for the reception of that forgiveness, but not irrespective of it.

Would Stephen himself forgive them? Yes. Stephen is saying that, 'If they would repent before You God and own their sins before You, and were they here and now, to suddenly fall upon their knees and say, "Stephen, we have sinned grievously, with what we have done to you. Can you forgive us?" ' Stephen would say, 'Yes. **The prevailing disposition of my heart is one of forgiveness.** Even in the direction of those who would take my life.'

I believe that most likely, I'm not being dogmatic, but I believe that most likely this is the meaning of **Mark 11:25** "*And when so ever you stand praying, forgive, if you have aught against any one; that your Father also Who is in heaven, may forgive you, your trespasses.*"

There is no indication of interpersonal interaction at this point. I think, what the passage is saying is, 'If you stand praying –and certainly part of your prayers, if they are biblical, will be asking God for the forgiveness of **your** sins– make sure, that when you ask God for the forgiveness of your sins, you pray with a heart that

has as its **prevailing disposition** an attitude of forgiveness with respect to others.

A failure to distinguish between **the disposition of** a forgiving spirit and **the act of conferring** forgiveness itself, creates tremendous confusion and it can bring dear servants of God into miserable bondage.

Listen to one of the old Baptist writers in a commentary on Matthew:

"But like many terms expressive of Christian duty, the word forgive has come to mean and is often used in a weakened sense, and many anxious minds are misled by its ambiguity. If forgive means merely, "bear no malice, abstain from revenge, leaving that to God," then in some sense we ought to forgive every wrong-doer even though impenitent and still our enemy, but this is not the Scriptures use of the word forgive. And in the full sense of the term, **it is not our duty or even proper to forgive one who has wronged us until he confesses the wrong**, and this with such **unquestioned sincerity and genuine change of feeling and purpose, as to show him worthy of being restored to our confidence and regard.** Thus our Lord says, "If your brother sin, rebuke him, if he repent forgive him." Here again, the example of our Heavenly Father illustrates the command to us. In His goodwill He sends rain and sunshine on the evil and the good, but **He does not forgive** men, restoring them to His **confidence** and **affection, until they sincerely and thoroughly repent.**"

Mistake #3: A failure to distinguish between a love-motivated unilateral covering of the sin of another and the bilateral interaction of conferring forgiveness upon another.

Bilateral – two sided, involving 2 people, both sides

Unilateral – one sided, decided by one part

1 Peter 4:8 "*above all things being **fervent** in your **love** among yourselves; for love covers a multitude of sins:*"

TO COVER (2)

Of all things Peter says, 'Have fervent love among yourselves.' Why? Because of what love among yourselves will do when it is fervent love. It takes a great measure of love, in its active, high expression for this to be true. "*Being fervent in your love among*

yourselves; for love covers a multitude of sins.” Sins—*hamartia* is the standard word for sin. It means the missing of the mark of God’s standard of absolute righteousness. Peter most likely had in mind two verses from Proverbs.

Proverbs 10:12 “Hatred stirs up strifes; but love covers all transgressions.”

Hatred stirs up strife's. If you've got a hate-filled heart there'll be all kinds of sin, little sins, that hate stirs up. Hatred stirs up strife. Why? Because there is always enough raw material for strife if you want to go blowing on the coals, using the bellows of exaggeration and overly sensitive feelings to blow on them. Hatred will find 1,000 ways to stir up strifes, but love covers all transgressions.

Proverbs 17:9 “He that covers a transgression seeks love; but he that harps on a matter separates chief friends.”

People don't make this distinction. Is it right and proper on many occasions for me –when someone else has sinned, sinned against me, or sinned in general– to see this sin and to choose, unilaterally, to cover that sin with a blanket of fervent love? Yes. Peter says, above all things, have fervent love among yourselves because love goes around with a whole sack full of blankets and it just delights to cover sin.

If by covering that sin, I am not doing harm to the brother or sister who has sinned we can leave it unrebuked. In other words, it's not a sin which unrebuked and un-reproved and un-dealt with, would cripple them, ruin them, possibly lead them into hardness of heart and apostasy. No, those kinds of sins the Bible is clear. **Hebrews 3:13** “*Exhort one another daily lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*” If we see a sin that could cripple a brother, it is not love to cover it, it is hatred that does not love him enough to run the risk of him or her getting ticked off at me for coming to him and lovingly exhorting, reproving, admonishing him. But where it would not harm a brother or a sister (talking about believer to believer) or poison the church of Christ if left undealt with we can leave it unrebuked. [38:05] It would not be a little leaven that leavens the whole, I can make a discernment or a judgment to leave it unrebuked. You've got to exercise spiritual discernment and judgment. I am able to unilaterally, impelled by love, cover it, and, in some cases, that is a

virtuous thing to do. Love covers, in that sense, a multitude of transgressions.

If husbands and wives don't have a sack full of blankets, they have a rotten relationship. If every time your spouse sins, and you feel you have to rebuke them, I wouldn't want to be your spouse for a thousand worlds. Yes, there is a spectrum of issues and sins. For some things, you throw a blanket of love over. Other things, that are destructive to the relationship, must be addressed. God is patient with His dealings with us and we need to reflect Him in our dealing with one another. Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities us. He doesn't expect us to grow up equally in all areas at the same time. Some of you are far more strict than God in the way that you deal with your spouses.

Love covers a multitude of sins, but **the Bible does not call that forgiving**. It calls it covering. It's a unilateral act. I choose to take out a blanket and throw it over the issue. You don't know about it, nobody else knows about it. It's a transaction between me and God, having to do with you, that you don't know about. I've just thrown a blanket over it. (3)

On the other hand, forgiveness is a bilateral issue. For example, a spouse comes saying to you, “Dear, in this area I really believe you blew it. And I believe you were disrespectful of me in the way you spoke to me. I believe your response to me in this was tinged with a spirit of insubordination and I do not believe it is healthy for your soul, nor for our marriage, to leave it unaddressed. I believe you sinned in this area. Here's why.” You lay it out.

The spouse responds, “Honey, you're right, I was insubordinate, I was disrespectful, will you forgive me?”

“Yes, as a forgiven sinner it is my joy to extend forgiveness.” As the forgiving party, I make my four-pronged promise, and if it flashes up on the screen of my mind, I push the delete button. I'll not raise it with you again, I'll not raise it with another, and I won't let it be a barrier in our communion. That's a bilateral interaction. That's forgiveness.

Unilaterally I can throw blankets over many things. Do you see the difference? Why confuse what the Bible separates?

That's the third area where there is confusion – A failure to distinguish between a love-motivated unilateral covering of the sin of another and the bilateral interaction of conferring forgiveness upon another.

Mistake # 4: A failure to distinguish between loving one's enemies and forgiving one's enemies.

Matthew 5:43 *"You have heard that it was said, You shalt love your neighbor, and hate your enemy: 44 but I say unto you, love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you; 45 that you may be sons of your Father Who is in heaven: for He makes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. 46 For if you love them that love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the publicans the same? 47 And if you salute your brethren only, what do you more than others? Do not even the Gentiles the same? 48 You therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."*

Let's go back over that: **Matthew 5:43** *"You have heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy 44 but I say unto you, love your enemies [imperative] and pray for them that persecute you [imperative] [why?] 45 in order that you may be [that is, that you may make it evident that you belong to the family in which the Heavenly Father, Who makes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, sends His rain on the just and the unjust, has a flock of children who are like Him] in order that you may be sons of your Father Who is in heaven."*

What does God do? There are people who are His enemies. They are unforgiven, uncleansed. He knows they are His enemies and what does He do? He loves them and He shows His love by sending the same rain on their backyard that He sends on His children's backyard, and He makes the same sun that rises in the east to shine on them that shines on His children. This is a manifestation that God loves His enemies.

Matthew 5:48 *"You therefore shall be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect."* Be like your Heavenly Father. Show the family likeness and love your enemies, but **is there one word in there about forgiving them?** If they are forgiven, and forgiveness results in reconciliation of relationship, they are no longer your enemy. So you're no longer loving your enemy, you're loving your friend. So your enemy has become your friend, because you have "unilaterally" forgiven them. Do you see the confusion?

If you take your Bible seriously, and through the course of your life you will have your share of enemies, and you go to your knees and say, "Oh God, how am I to treat my enemies?" Then you read some of the books that say you should forgive your enemies unilaterally, and you say, "Lord, I'm ready to do anything you tell me, but this doesn't seem right," and then you come across a passages like **Mat 5:43-48** and you say, no wonder it doesn't seem right, it's ungodly. It's not Godlike. **God loves His enemies. While they are still His enemies, He does good to them, but He does not forgive them.**

In Luke chapter 6 Jesus goes even further in this parallel passage. He gives more imperatives of what we are to do in relationship to our enemies. **Luke 6:27** *"But I say unto you that hear, Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, 28 bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you."*

Love them, do good to them, bless them, pray for them, but you don't see a word about **forgiving** them.

***'Do you mean you can do all of that without forgiving them?' Yes!** Because God does, and it says be like God. In the strength of God, love them, do good to them and pray for them, even though they are still your enemies. God's forgiveness and your forgiveness await **their repentance** and **their acknowledgment of their sin.**

* If forgiveness becomes the everything of dealing with one another as sinners, it ends up becoming nothing.

If forgiveness becomes everything, it ends up becoming nothing.

If the relinquishment of vengeance were forgiveness, if the maintenance of a disposition of forgiveness were forgiveness, and if loving one's enemies were forgiveness, then what would forgiveness be? It would lack its definition and its concreteness, so when I read Ephesians 4, I'm to be kind, tenderhearted, **forgiving** one another, does that mean all these things in one, or does it mean, when my brother, when my sister, owns his or her sin, and says to me, "My brother, I have sinned, I am grieved that I've sinned, God has forgiven me, will you forgive me?" Then I turn and respond and say, "Yes, as a forgiven sinner, it is my great joy to be a forgiving sinner." I make the promise of forgiveness. The issue is dealt with. I will not allow it to flash up and remain on the screen of my mind. I will not bring it up in our interactions. I will not speak of it

to others. I will not let it remain a barrier to our relationship. I forgive you.

When these distinctions are not made, tragic misrepresentations of God and the gospel occurs.

Here is a distillation of it. There was a woman who was repeatedly violated by her father as a little girl. For 20 years she allowed the infection of vengeance and resentment to build up in her soul. A Christian was counseling with her and caused her to see that until she dealt with that vengeance, she would never make any progress. It was ruining her marriage, it was ruining her Christian life. So she went to her father, who had violated her and said to him, "Father, I unconditionally forgive you." He was hard as stone, but this writer went on to say the daughter was transformed. She was now able to make progress with her husband and their marriage. The heavens were opened in her prayer time. What happened? This is a tragic misrepresentation of what really happened. Was that an accurate representation of the gospel to go to this hardened, impenitent, incestuous father, and say, 'You are freely forgiven,' and give him the impression that God might be like my daughter, Who will unconditionally forgive me, whether I own the rotten, foul sin that I committed or not?

Would it not have been more God-honoring for her to go, having seen that she had no right to maintain vengeance in her heart, that it was her **duty** to have **the disposition of forgiveness** percolating through her spirit, and to go to do good to her father, to assure him of her prayers for him, and to say, "Dad, for 20 years I allowed what you did to me to create an infection in my soul, but God has shown me I sinned by allowing that spirit of vengeance. I have asked God's forgiveness, and to the extent that it's colored the way that I've related to you, I ask for your forgiveness, for I had no right to have vengeance towards you. That's God's business. Dad, what God has done in forgiving me through Christ, as I have owned my sin, He stands ready to do for you, if you will own your sin. And Dad, I want to tell you, the moment you own your sin, not only before God, but before me as your daughter, I am prepared to freely, fully forgive you, and seek to begin to cultivate, a warm, father-daughter relationship."

Which course of action more accurately reflects the gospel?

Don't tell me these distinctions are irrelevant. They are an issue of rightly reflecting God and the gospel.

As we come to the communion table how do we come? We come forgiven sinners. What a contradiction it would be to come to the God of heaven, Who has infinite charges against us and Who could've sent us all to hell, Who has sent His Son to die in order that we might have a just pardon and a righteous forgiveness. What a contradiction to come to that table and take the emblems of His Self-giving that we might have forgiveness, "*this is the new covenant in My blood, shed for **THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS***"; and to have anything in our hearts but a forgiving spirit to one another. Hearts free from any sense that we have a right to maintain a vengeful spirit –that we have any right not to love our enemies and be committed to do good to them and pray for them. The distinctions that were made don't let us off the hook. They press us all the more forcefully to go to Christ to put in us those dispositions that are so contrary to us by nature.

Footnotes:

(1) This is describing the marks of the religious unregenerate, it is not saying they can resist the effectual call of God.

(2) **1 Peter 4:8** "above all things being **fervent** in your **love** among yourselves; for love covers a multitude of sins:"

Proverbs 10:12 "Hatred **stirs up** strifes; but love **covers** all transgressions."

Proverbs 17:9 "He that **covers** a transgression seeks love; but he that harps on a matter separates chief friends."

Covers? In what sense. Forget the past? Recalling the past? Cover irritations?

He does disciple for moral offenses.

(3) A sensitive child of God will be aware of the times when their spouse (or anyone else) has used a blanket of love. They are tuned into and focused on their **own** sins, ever striving to eliminate that sin and working toward the holiness that our Christian faith demands.