

Lesson 12-Part 1: Forgiveness and the Gospel

Overview:

1. Forgiveness and the Gospel
2. Forgiveness according to Scripture
3. Practical summary
4. Common questions

I. Forgiveness and the Gospel¹

“The Spirit of God worked on me as I lay in that bed. An image formed in my mind. The image of the cross – Christ on the cross. It blotted out everything else in my mind. This Jesus knew what I had suffered. He understood. And He cared. Because He had experienced it all Himself. This Jesus, this One who had brought good news directly from God in heaven, had lived what He preached. Yet He was arrested and falsely accused. Like me, He went through an unjust trial. He also faced a lynch mob and got beaten. But even more than that, He was nailed to rough wooden planks and killed. Killed like a common criminal. At the crucial moment, it seemed to Jesus that even God Himself had deserted Him. The suffering was so great, He cried out in agony. He was dying.

“But when He looked at that mob who had lynched Him, He didn’t hate them. He loved them. He forgave them. And He prayed God to forgive them, ‘Father, forgive these people, for they don’t know what they are doing.’ His enemies hated. But Jesus forgave. I couldn’t get away from that. The Spirit of God kept working on me and in me until I could say with Jesus, I forgive them too.’...

“...It’s a profound, mysterious truth – Jesus’ concept of love overpowering hate. I may not see its victory in my lifetime. But I know it’s true. I know it’s true, because it happened to me. On that bed, full of bruises and stitches – God made it true in me. He washed my hatred away and replaced it with a love for the white man in rural Mississippi. I felt strong again. Stronger than ever. What doesn’t destroy me will make me stronger. I know it’s true. Because it happened to me.” – John Perkins, *Let Justice Roll Down*, 193.

A. **Seven concepts to preach to yourself in order to “get to the place of forgiveness”**

¹ The bulk of this section was taken from a four-part lecture series on forgiveness from Milton Vincent, entitled *Evangelizing Those Who Wrong You*, given at a biblical counseling training conference Grace Fellowship Church in Kentucky, 2014. It can be accessed at <https://www.graceky.org/sermons/series/milton-vincent-evangelizing-those-who-wrong-you/>.

1. "O my soul, remember that Christ has suffered as I am suffering right now, and infinitely more so, which means I am never alone in any pain."
 - a. Isaiah 53:3-4 – At the cross, the Messiah indeed paid for your sins, but He also _____ your very griefs and _____ your sorrows.
 - b. Mark 15:23 – Christ knows _____ of what it's like to suffer as you are suffering.
 - c. Hebrews 4:15 – Your pain _____ with Jesus: "We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize [lit. "suffer with"] with our weaknesses..."

THINK: When you gaze at the cross, you're not just seeing Jesus dying, you're seeing Jesus _____!

2. "O my soul, remember that sometimes God purposes that those whom He loves deeply be painfully sinned against."
 - a. Matt. 3:17 – "...This is My _____ Son, in whom I am well-pleased."
 - b. Acts 2:23 – God didn't spontaneously "make the best" of the wrongdoings against Christ; He _____ that he would suffer.
 - c. Acts 4:27-28 – "...for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place."

THINK: When you gaze at the cross, you're not just seeing men hating, you're seeing _____!

3. "O my soul, remember that God the Father can be trusted completely on the receiving end of any wrongdoing."
 - a. 1 Peter 2:23-24 – Jesus trusted to the very end, despite his _____ circumstances.
 - b. Luke 23:46 – Was the Father worthy of Jesus' trust?
_____.

THINK: When you gaze at the cross, you're not just seeing Jesus dying, but Jesus _____!

4. "O my soul, remember that I have committed greater sins against God than any person has ever committed against me."
- a. Matthew 7:1-5 – The "log" and the "speck" do not refer to the depth or breadth of your sin compared to your brother's; they indicate that your sins are _____.
 - b. You may apply a sermon to your neighbor, but when you sit at the cross and contemplate _____, then you will naturally be more concerned with your own sin than someone else's.
 - c. "Until you see the cross as that which is done _____ you, you will never appreciate that it is done _____you." – John Stott
 - d. 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. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."
 - e. "What the Cross shows us is that if God came into the world and presented Himself to us, we would kill God. God sent His Son into the world to speak the truth and to be the truth. To have seen Jesus when He was on this earth was to see the Father. And what did we do to God when He came? We killed Him. In this act, sin overplayed its hand and showed itself for what it really is. We overplayed our hand and exposed ourselves for what we really are . . . we are murderers, murderers of God." – Milton Vincent
 - f. "Sin is a deicide. Every sinner, if he could, would kill God, for he says in his heart, 'No God.' He means he wishes there were none. He would be rejoiced indeed if he could learn for certain that there was no God. In fact, that is the bugbear of his life, that there is a God, and a just God, who will bring him into judgment. His secret wish is that there were no religion and no God, for he might then live as he pleased. Now, when a man is made to see that sin in its essence is the murderer of Emmanuel, God with us, his heart being renewed, he hates sin from that very moment." – Charles Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit: Sermons Preached and Revised*, Volume 21, 344.

THINK: When you gaze at the cross, you're not just witnessing Jesus dying, you're witnessing _____.

5. "O my soul, remember and rejoice that Christ has purchased my forgiveness and justification at the cross!"
- a. Ephesians 1:7 – "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses."
 - b. Romans 5:8-9 – "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God."

The two aspects of justification (a legal declaration re: your guilt before a holy God):

(-) _____
 (+) _____

- c. One woman's application (after her husband committed adultery): "Over time, I began to see my own sinfulness and God's grace and mercy for my sins. It was very hard to look at my own contribution to the breakdown of my marriage. I wanted to just focus on his part and leave the blame there, but God opened my eyes and helped me to see that, even as a victim of my husband's sin, I could not claim innocence in my marriage, and certainly not before a holy God."

"The gospel gave me power to forgive my husband. Christ had died for both our sins, dying in our place and drinking the full cup of God's wrath we deserved for our sins. Through the revelation of this truth, I was humbled and disarmed – we were more alike than different. From this standing place, forgiveness flowed." – Dave Harvey, *When Sinners Say 'I Do'*, 109.

THINK: When you gaze at the cross, you're not just seeing sins forgiven, you're seeing _____.

6. "O my soul, remember that I am purchased and owned by God; and now I live to serve *His* purposes, not mine."
- a. In purchasing me, Christ took ownership of me, an ownership which includes _____ owed to me (Matthew 18; Matthew 25:45).
 - b. Romans 12 – "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

- c. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 – “...You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

THINK: When you gaze at the cross, you realize that God wasn't just purchasing your salvation, He was purchasing _____.

7. “O my soul, remember that fellowship with Christ in His suffering brings resurrection power and life.”
- a. “Forgiveness can be a costly activity. When you cancel a debt, it does not just simply disappear. Instead, you absorb the liability that someone else deserves to pay. Similarly, forgiveness requires that you absorb certain effects of the other person's sins and you release that person from liability to punishment. This is precisely what Christ accomplished on Calvary.” – Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker*
- b. John 12:24 – “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”
- c. Luke 9:23-24 – “And he said to all, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.’”
- d. “Thankfully, the gospel teaches me that dying is not an end, but a beginning. For after Christ took up His cross and died, God raised Him from the dead (Eph 1:20), exalted Him to the highest heaven (Phil 2:8-9), and drew Him into His bosom (John 1:18). These facts surrounding Christ's resurrection stand as proof positive that God will not leave me for dead, but will raise me similarly, if I would only allow myself to die. Indeed, on the other side of each layer of dying lie experiences of a life with God that are far richer, far higher, and far more intimate than anything I would have otherwise known (Rom 6:4).

“In God's economy, death is the way to life. ‘Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it,’ Jesus says, ‘but whoever loses His life for My sake, he shall find it (Luke 9:23-24).’ Indeed, the more conformable I am made to the death of Christ, the more I experience freedom from sin (Rom 6:6-7) and taste the power of the resurrection of Jesus Himself (Phil 3:8-10). The path to such power is paved with many dyings, and each stage of resurrection is achieved with each incident of dying to myself and reckoning myself dead to sin (Rom 6:11).

“The more I contemplate the gospel, the more I understand that this ‘word of the cross’ (1 Cor 1:18) stands as a blueprint for my own life story. The death that Christ died is the death to which I also am called, and the death to which I am called is my entry point to union with Christ and life at its fullest (Rom 6:5). So, come what may, I’ll let no one take this death from me!” – Milton Vincent, *A Gospel Primer for Christians*

THINK: When you gaze at the cross, you’re not just seeing the end of a horrific death, you’re seeing the gateway to _____.

B. Three cautions regarding “getting to the place of forgiveness”

1. Getting to the place of forgiveness is not permission to delay forgiveness “until you’re good and ready.”
2. Getting to the place of forgiveness is not dictated by your feelings/emotions.
3. Getting to the place of forgiveness does not mean that forgiveness is a gradual process.

In her book, *Choosing Forgiveness*, Nancy Leigh DeMoss talks about one of the myths of forgiveness. She explains:

“There’s a . . . myth that keeps many people from experiencing the reality and blessings of forgiveness in their lives—that forgiveness requires a long, drawn-out process . . . I’ve heard people say, ‘I’m moving toward forgiveness,’ . . . — sometimes even after years of counseling and therapy. There’s no question that for some people, coming to grips with the awful offenses they’ve been forced to endure can be a long and arduous journey. The road just to get to the place where forgiveness is barely palatable is often a story in itself.

“But I’ll just say this from experience: I’ve watched believers ‘working their way’ toward forgiveness for years and years and never getting there. In fact, I might even go so far as to say that when forgiveness is seen primarily as a work in progress, it seldom becomes a work in practice.

“The choice to forgive does not have to involve a long, extended process—any more than God’s forgiveness of us is a slow-moving, wait-and-see, not-till-I’m-good-and-ready series of events and checkpoints.”

“. . . by God’s grace, you can choose to forgive in a moment of time, to the level of your understanding at that point. And though much more may be required of you down the line, the reality of being released from the prison of your own unforgiveness can happen today. This moment.”