

GROWING — Empowered to Forgive

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What is the context for how we are to understand forgiveness?

Love is the sum of the law; a motive of caring for others more than ourselves. If we are to understand anything about Christianity, it needs to be bathed in an understanding of love.



Forgiveness is the highest expression of love: giving to others the opposite of what they deserve, sacrificing on their behalf.

1 John 4:10

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

The New International Version. (2011). (1 Jn 4:10). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Understanding Forgiveness

The miracle of a debt being forgiven is akin to someone paying off a bank debt instead of us. It is a remarkable idea that God so desires a relationship with us that he paid off the debt that we incurred through our betrayal from him.

Sometimes we see forgiveness as a cold transaction to appease the wrath of an angry God.

Sometimes we read John 3:16 as, "for God so hated the world that he killed his only son." This is filtered through a very skewed understanding of God and forgiveness.



The stakes of seeing forgiveness like this is to then throw forgiveness around with empty words and miss out on the profound insight forgiveness gives us into love.

Old Testament Context — Absorption

In Levitical sacrifice, when someone commits an unintentional sin, the animal figuratively "absorbs" the cost of that sin so that a person may be able to stand in God's presence.

The blood of that animal **absorbs** and decontaminates the darkness of that sin so that we may have free standing in God's presence.

We see this idea of absorption being taken to the max by Jesus:

1 Peter 2:24

He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed.

The New International Version. (2011). (1 Pe 2:24). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

2 Corinthians 5:21a

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God

The New International Version. (2011). (2 Co 5:21). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Psalm 103:10

Matthew 6:12

And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors

The New International Version. (2011). (Mt 6:12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Jesus always forgives our sins against God, but there is another thing going on: those who sin against us as we sin against others.

Jesus takes care of all the sins in God's court while we are responsible for absorbing the cost of others' sins against us in our courts.



We still need to forgive crimes committed against us.

A True Living Sacrifice

Colossians 1:24

Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.

The New International Version. (2011). (Col 1:24). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.



We still suffer for the sins of the church.

Romans 12:1

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, **to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice**, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

The New International Version. (2011). (Ro 12:1). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Because Jesus has forgiven us, **we become the sacrifice**, the old testament lamb or goat, absorb the cost of what other people have done against us.

When we become the sacrifice, we say,

*"I am deciding to longer have your sin be a barrier between you and I; I will bear the cost of what you have done. Justice is served by me **giving up my right** for you to be punished and I will not treat you as your sins deserve."*

In that way, we practice the full extent of what forgiveness really means.

Forgiveness absorbs the personal and relational consequences of people's sin by loving them freely and generously.

We end up treating them as if they never sinned against us. And this is how Christians are called to live. Forgiveness is the key to relationships. Instead of seeking a self-serving sense of justice, we overlook the offense.

- Not suppressing
- Not minimizing
- Not ignoring

It is a conscious choice not to relate to the other person through the filter of their sin but through the filter of the image of God in them.

Forgiveness is the foundation of marriage.

Forgiveness is the foundation for community when we take up the call to absorb each other's sin.



The only way to overcome evil is to bear the cost of other's sins. Evil will not thrive if we practice true forgiveness of other people's sins.

Two Centuries of Racism

This idea is most exemplified by the Charleston Church massacre. The survivors extended true forgiveness to the killer of their fellow family and church members.

To forgive is to set a prisoner free and to discover that the prisoner was you
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In this, we see the unification of mercy and justice, which is another way to understand what love is. Love is the marriage of mercy and justice.

Over-Application of Principles

Forgiveness is not to let a pedophile come babysit our children. We love our children by protecting them and extend mercy and boundaries to a recovering pedophile by protecting them from that situation.

Forgiveness is the foundation of relationship, but it doesn't tell us all of how we are to go about relationship.



While bearing the cost of forgiveness, we are moving toward relationship and not away. We are concerned that our pursuit of happiness turns us away from relationship.

Boundaries

Boundaries are healthy up until it turns us away from relationships completely. They're not healthy if they move us toward self-protection.

Self-Care

We must be wise in how we reach out to others. We don't want to expose ourselves to dangerous and toxic situations uncritically, but if we look at our King's example, he entered into a cruel, abusive, and murderous world and absorbed the cost of our sin. If we follow King Jesus' example, he calls us to do the same.

If we live our lives to the end goal of self protection and over exercised boundaries, we will never see love triumph over evil.

Jesus Absorbs our Burdens

When Jesus absorbed our burdens, we are now clean and decontaminated in Christ. Because we are in Christ, if we absorb others' sins, Jesus ends up absorbing them too. He enables us to do the impossible, giving us the grace to not be crushed under the weight of others' offenses.

When we say, "I forgive you," we mean, "I am going to absorb that cost, and Christ will carry that cost with me so that I won't be crushed by your offense."

Forever Grateful

When we truly forgive someone and don't hold their sin against them, we will see a small glimpse of how profound the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is.

You will realize how costly and beautiful the work of Jesus Christ on the cross is.

The West has the luxury of unforgiveness. In more impoverished and collective cultures, we need to forgive in order to survive. But in cultures where we're looking out for number 1, we don't need each other as much. The luxury comes at a high cost.

The cost is that if we don't forgive others, Christ will not forgive us.

How we forgive others affects how we relate to them, but also how God relates to us.



And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors...

For if you forgive other people when they sin against you,
your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive
your sins.

The New International Version. (2011). (Mt 6:12). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

