

**“Practicing Forgiveness” Colossians 3:13, Sermon Notes**  
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**Saving Grace Bible Church**  
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**Morning Worship Service**

“Bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.” (Colossians 3:13 NAU)

In 1969 a book by the title “The Sunflower” was written by Simon Wiesenthal

- In this book the author demonstrates a difficult circumstance that a Jewish World War II prisoner found himself facing in 1944
- A Nazi commander was on his deathbed about to succumb to his injuries and he needed a Jew to confess his sins
- The Nazi told a story how he and his soldiers captured a Jewish family in a house and then called for the family to come out. The family would not come out so the commander directed his Army to surround the house, set the house on fire, and shoot anyone who came out
- The Jewish family died in the blaze

The commander recounted to the Jewish prisoner what he had done and the he asked for forgiveness

- The Jewish prisoner said no
- And now years later the former prisoner is wondering whether he had done the right thing

The book has elicited many kinds of responses

- Some say he should have forgiven
- Others say absolutely not, the man does not deserve forgiveness
- Some say it would cheapen forgiveness to have granted forgiveness in light of such a great sin

The book was republished in 1976 with an expanded chapter accounting the responses from psychologists, theologians, and others willing to speak to the issue. He asked 32 people to speak to the issue brought up in the original publishing of the book in 1969

The book was updated and again republished in 1997

The story is captivating. For it raises many questions. Among those questions are these:

1. Can horrific sin, like murder, be forgiven?
2. Can we go back and forgive people for historical sins?
  - a. IE can we go forgive the British for killing so many of our countrymen?
  - b. Should America seek forgiveness for separating from Britain?
3. Can we forgive sins not directly committed against us?
  - a. Can a person grant forgiveness for sin not committed against them?

- b. For example: do we, those who have not been hurt in the World Trade Tower bombings, have the right to forgive Osama Bin Laden?

The questions are important and all of these issues surround complexity of forgiveness found in the book "The Sunflower."

By taking on the subject of forgiveness we are not promising an easy journey

- We are not saying that you will like all of the trails you are taken down. We are not even saying you will like all of the discoveries we find from God's Word

But what I will tell you is this, when you understand forgiveness you will not only appreciate the greatness of the God you and I serve, but you will marvel at His great kindness towards you, and more importantly you will demonstrate the forgiveness towards others

We are going to face challenges as a ministry

- People will sin against each other, even in this Church
- There will be misunderstandings that will lead to personal hurt
- There will be suffering among our people and therefore the need for forgiveness to be on display

A failure to be a forgiving people leads to a congregation that is:

- Bitter – Bitter and hurt at others for offending them or sinning against them
- Angry – at people who sin against them
- Resenting
- Depressed – because pain and suffering over the hurt which is replaying in their mind has them reliving the sinful event over and over

When this goes on long enough eventually people do not want to stay around so they leave

Or others may rise up against the leadership of the Church and cause divisions

As a Church we need to understand the forgiveness issue and make sure we remind ourselves often that forgiveness needs to be part of the fabric of our lives. We need to be characterized by forgiveness. We need to guard this work and the people around us by being a people who regularly forgive

- For this reason, I want to draw your attention to Col 3:13

"Bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you." (Colossians 3:13 NAU)

This text is very rich and from it we learn of at least two qualities we need to exercise in the church if we are going to be protected from spiritual dangers

- We will exercise these attributes if we are walking in Jesus Christ. (review Colossians)

Here is our outline as we navigate through this section:

- 1. Bearing with One Another**
- 2. Forgiving One Another**

### **1. Bearing with One Another**

Paul Tells us here to bear with one another

Literally the word means to hold up or to bear with one another, but when translated the greater idea is to endure one another

Idea of endurance: Matt 17:17, Mark9:19; 1 Cor 4:12;2 Tim 4:3

Translated in Acts 18:14 as “to put up with you”

Here the idea is that Paul is calling the church to be regularly enduring one another

This is very important

- We can get easily offended
- We can ignore people because of their weakness
- We can distance ourselves from people who are not like us

The Church is funny

- In any church there are people you really enjoy being around and there are people you have to work to be around
- There are different levels of maturity
  - Some who think they are in Christ but are not. These are difficult people to be around because they are selfish, and say selfish things, and act in selfish ways
  - Some who are new in Christ and are immature and have yet to grow in maturity
  - There are some who have been in Christ for a long time but have patterns of immaturity which cause them to be self-absorbed and useless in the lives of others
    - They have not helped someone else grow in godliness in years because they are too self-consumed
  - Then you have those of different economic class, different social class, different personalities
  - Different genders, different levels of spiritual maturity
  - Different training, different experiences, different giftedness

The Church is filled with people who are different than us and here Paul says we are to endure one another

- Don't be easily offended
- If you are offended or hurt by someone seek restoration. Don't bury the hurt. If you can drop it and release it without affecting your relationship then release it. But if you cannot release it then you need to seek your brother to seek restoration

This can be especially true with a teacher in the Church

- We can become offended with what someone said
- We can start to read into their statements and leap to conclusions
- We can assume the worse about their positions and the logical conclusions of their teaching
- We are called to endure them. We are called to bear with them. Go, talk, seek clarification

Running, hiding, avoiding people, distancing yourself does not help you or the church

- It will only create separation in the body of Christ and will hinder us from growing together and learning to appreciate one another

To say it a different way, we are not to be easily offended

- Sometimes those who claim to be the most mature are those carrying the greatest bitterness towards others
  - Have you ever noticed that? Guys having rich knowledge of theology, lots of personal experience and they are petty in relationships
  - This is immature and ungodly
- The truly godly are those who endure difficulties to press on to greater character

Mind you, I am not saying we ignore sin. I am saying you overlook the personal offense of sin and seek Christ's honor by protecting the Church from petty offenses and by helping others draw closer to Christ

- They draw closer by seeing what the scriptures say about their actions
- Helping them live according to God's Word

SGBC will be strong if it is a placed filled with godly believers who are enduring the immaturity of the other members of the Body of Christ

## **2. Forgiving One Another**

"Bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you." (Colossians 3:13 NAU)

- Paul called us to forgive each other. He called us to forgive just as the Lord forgave us
- The Church is to be a place where people are regularly forgiving each other of their sins
  - It is important we understand what Paul is saying here
  - Many think if we talk to someone about their sin we are not forgiving them. i.e., if you sin in an outburst of anger and then you recognize you were wrong and you say, "I am sorry" many assume that should be enough. If a brother comes back to you and talks to you about your outburst of anger you get angry again because they are supposedly not forgiving
  - Forgiveness means to drop the issue and never bring it up again
  - Can I forgive someone and still be angry?
  - Can I forgive someone and just not want to talk to them or see them again?

- This issue of forgiveness is very important to understand and we can error easily in our understanding or practice of forgiveness

Paul Tripp in his book entitled “What did you expect?” states the common reason why we do not offer forgiveness

- 1) Debt is power – We can hold something over the other person’s head
- 2) Debt is identity – This allows us to be self-righteous and exalt ourselves over others by identifying them with the sin
- 3) Debt is entitlement – They owe me because of the great sin they have sinned against me
- 4) Debt is weaponry – we use their fault to jab and stick at them like a knife we keep digging in. Tripp says we use it like a loaded gun
- 5) Debt puts us in God’s position – We judge and deal out consequences

The allurements of unforgiveness is strong so we need to be ready to fight against the temptation of keeping track of people’s faults

Signs you are struggling with unforgiveness:

1. You keep replaying the sins committed against you over and over in your mind
2. You are thinking about ways you can have revenge or “fix” the problem
3. You are up late thinking about this issue
4. You are easily angry and irritable
5. You have not peace in your life
6. You are depressed

- Here Paul calls us to forgive one another

What is forgiveness?

Two words in the New Testament

- a. Xarizomai – the root of this word is xaris. If you know your Greek you will know that the word xaris means grace. The idea of xarizomai is the giving of a gift

In the NT the word is used twice in reference to showing favor in court. Ac 3:14 talks about Barrabbas being set free and Paul being given over to the Jews in Acts 25:11, 16

It is to be construed in the terms of the basic sense of “to give.” In particular it has the idea of “pardoning” 2 Cor 12:13

2 Corinthians 12:13 “For in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the churches, except that I myself did not become a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong!”

- Paul is asking the Corinthians to grant him favor
- He is seeking their pardon

The word means to grant, give, bestow on; deal generously or graciously with, forgive, pardon; hand over or release (of a prisoner); cancel a debt (Lk 7:42, 43); be returned (Phm 22)

- So when we are forgiving we are forgiving others by bestowing upon them something we must give
  - We are giving them peace
  - We are giving them an open opportunity to a restored relationship
  - We are not dealing with them according to their foolishness
  - We are canceling their debts and not holding their transgressions against them

This word has the idea of the gracious remission of faults. Lk 7:42

- Jesus’ parable to two debtors
- One owing 500 denarii and the other 50 denarii
- Denarii is 1 day’s wage

“When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?” (Luke 7:42 NAU)

- This word has the idea of kind hearted and lavish favor upon others in releasing them from guilt

Or to say it another way it is an attitude of gracious release

Remember that the word *xaris* means unmerited favor. This is the idea of showing favor in acquittal

Therefore when we forgive this way we are graciously releasing people from their debts. We are showing them favor

- b. *Aphiemi* – it means to send off, to release, to let go

To release someone from a legal relation. I.e., to release them from a marriage (divorce) or to release them from a debt

This is the more legal setting free or letting go

Or it has the idea of the cancellation of sin

- The releasing of a debt

It is a choice to release someone from their debt. To release from liability. To release someone from suffering a penalty. To choose to show favor

Luke 17:3 “Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.”

- Legally release him from his debt

This word carries with it the legal process of releasing someone from personal obligation

- Set someone free
- To remove from obligation

So the obvious question then is what word is used here in Col 3:13?

It is charizomai; the first word

Paul is calling us here to freely give others what they do not deserve, that is freedom from their debt

Now notice our text again

“Bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.” (Colossians 3:13 NAU)

NOTICE: “whoever has a complaint against anyone”

Who is the one who is to forgive? The one who has a complaint against someone else is to forgive

- How do you know when you need to forgive?
- Who should be offering forgiveness?
- When you have a complaint against someone
- The person hurt by the sin is the person who should be offering up forgiveness

We cannot offer up forgiveness for someone else. Forgiveness can only come from the offended party

Notice the second key to this text

To whom does the burden of forgiveness fall in this passage?

Upon the person who has been offended

- If you are offended, if you have a complaint, you need to be forgiving

Objections:

1. Does this mean I let them get away with their sinful behavior?
  - a. If I release them then how will they change?
  - b. How can I let them free when they have hurt me so bad?

Remember this, to release someone from a debt to you does not release them from the responsibility they have to seek God

- They still need to repent to God
- They still need to seek God’s forgiveness
- They still need to restore the relationship which means they will seek your forgiveness and they will seek to change the wrong and avenge their evil (2 Cor 7)

- They still need you to bear their burden to help them see their sin and turn from it (Gal 6)

All I am saying is that you can release someone from a personal debt to you and at the same time minister to them to help them see the foolishness of their ways

How is this done? How are we to forgive?

“Bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.” (Colossians 3:13 NAU)

- We are to forgive just like Christ has forgiven us

## 2) Free forgiveness

Forgiveness is freely given and is a lavish release of any sin debt. This position says that Col 3:13 and Eph 4:32 are teaching us the extent by which we are to forgive. This position says that we have been forgiven everything so we should forgive everything. The point of this kind of forgiving is to be lavishly freeing people from any debts they may have with you

I freely fully unconditionally release them from any personal debts. This fulfills Matt 6 “forgive us our debts as we have forgiven our debtors.” This fulfills the idea of 1 Pet 4:8 “Love covers a multitude of sins.” Or Ps 32:1 “How blessed is the man whose sins have been forgiven, whose transgressions have been covered.” Or even Mark 11:25-26

Mark 11:25 "And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions. <sup>26</sup> "But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions."

Notice this passage says when you are standing before God praying and we remember a sin against us we forgive or God will not forgive us

- Jesus does not go into any description as to the process of forgiveness or the condition of forgiveness
- He just says that we are to forgive without any mention as to the other person’s response. This is a command to forgive and it is made unconditionally and unilaterally

Also 1 Cor 13 says that we are not to take into an account a wrong suffered. God’s lavish and sacrificial love was extended towards us when we were forgiven and should be extended towards others

There are also problems with this view:

1. How can forgiveness be offered without repentance?
2. How do we handle severe sins that destroy relationships?
3. If we have forgiven someone of their sins what grounds do we have to bring it up again?

How we should forgive like Jesus Christ:

Is not a feeling. I don't feel like forgiving

It is not the ability to forget

It is a choice to release someone from their debt. To release from liability. To release someone from suffering a penalty. To chose to show favor

It is not excusing sin

“You have to absorb personal liabilities. Not absolving from consequences.”

It is the ability to say, “You owe me nothing.”

1 Cor. 13:5; do not keep records of wrongs

Show favor. God forgave every complaint. All and every complaint

We do not absolve people. God still judges

I would like to make the case that forgiveness is part of the process of restoration and is not fully enjoyed until restoration has been completed

Let me see if I can help wrap up why forgiveness is difficult to grasp

- These two components seems to be
- Forgiveness involves two components
  - Debt
  - Relationship
- Mostly been described by being
  - Unconditional or
  - Conditional

Forgiveness is a gracious gift given by the offended to the offender which releases the offender from personal obligation to satisfy the sin debt. Forgiveness has to be freely offered and freely given or it is no longer forgiveness but rather payment for sin. – Unconditional nature of forgiveness, being forgiving

At the same time forgiveness is relational and seeks to rebuild personal relationships. Without relationships there is no need for forgiveness. – Conditional expression of forgiveness, practicing forgiveness

Here is the problem, for a relationship to be restored there needs to be confession and repentance. But to require confession and repentance is to take payment for sin and nullify forgiveness

- When we sin two things occur
  - A debt is incurred
  - A relationship is broken
- For sin to be addressed
  - The debt needs to be paid or forgiven
  - The relationship needs to be restored
- For the debt to be satisfied
  - It must be paid off
  - Or it must be forgiven
  - God freely forgives us

- He removes the impossible debt
- This is what makes our relationship with God so marvelous. He has released us from an impossible debt
- A debt we have been adding to our whole lives
- Only God can release us truly from our debts
- For the relationship to be restored
  - The sinning party must deal with their sin or in the case of God at salvation God changes our nature so that sin is no longer our master. God gives us a change of heart. God deals with our sin nature
  - We cannot expect to have a restored relationship if the sinning party is still acting sinfully
  - This sin must be dealt with for restoration
- Also the offended party must release the offending party
  - We must release the person of the debt for the relationship to be restored
  - No longer think about it. No longer bring it. Remove it as far as the east is from the west

Our confusion with forgiveness is that we often think that releasing someone from their debt is solving the debt problem and the relationship problem

- It is not

Here in this passage Paul is telling us we are to forgive like Christ and release people from their debts

- It is our duty to do our part to keep the Church healthy and alive and long suffering by bearing with the weaknesses of others

The next time you are in the middle of conflict with another person and sin has taken place remember you are called to endure your brother and forgive him

- Seek to release him from his debt to you
- Seek to restore his relationship to you

We have an obligation to help one another in this way because this is what Christ has done for us

Let us stop measuring our maturity by how many scripture passages we have memorized, how cogent our systematic theology is, or how many sermons we have listened to, or even how long we have been a Christian

- Instead let us measure our maturity by how we live like Christ
- Forgive one another Just as Christ has forgiven you

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