

“How Can I Grow Through Forgiveness”

Ephesians 4:31-32

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Ephesians 4:31-32

³¹Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³²Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Introduction

There are two different aspects of forgiveness as seen in verse 32, “*forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*” There’s a horizontal aspect: where we forgive one another. But there’s also a vertical forgiveness: God has forgiven us through Christ.

The vertical forgiveness – God giving us His approval by cancelling our debt and penalty of sin through Christ.

Because we are forgiven, we receive all the blessings in Jesus Christ. Out of this vertical forgiveness flows our horizontal forgiveness.

The horizontal forgiveness - Shining the forgiving love of God in Christ to others

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“How does an unforgiving heart hinder my growth?” If you have an unforgiving heart, it means there is darkness in your heart. It hinders you from receiving the light of God’s love. For you to receive His forgiveness, you need to see your sins and repent. But when you are unable to forgive others, which is sin itself, it means you are blind to your own sin. You are not ready to receive God’s forgiveness if you are unable to forgive others.

When you cannot forgive other people, you are letting other people control you. You are not in control of your heart. You are reactively resenting rather than proactively forgiving. You are cherishing this darkness that hinders you from receiving the light of His forgiving love. You are cherishing poison in your heart that is making you rot.

Nelson Mandela, a man who spent thirty years in prison due to racism, said, “*When a deep injury is done to us, we never heal until we forgive.*” We do forgive for the glory of God, but it’s also necessary for our own good to forgive. To forgive means giving up *for* your soul. There is tremendous negative impact when we do not forgive. Unforgiveness creates tremendous hurt, pain, and division. It hinders your spiritual life, it hinders those around you, it hinders the Church – it hinders the glory of God.

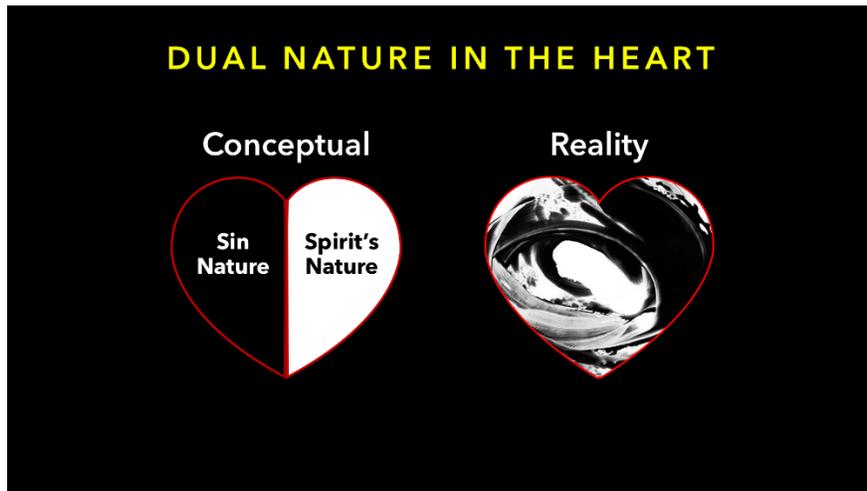
In Ephesians 6, there’s cosmic spiritual battle, but sometimes it happens in the small sphere of our hearts:

Ephesians 4:26-27 ²⁶Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷and give no opportunity to the devil.

Satan works in a cosmic way through the culture of this world, but Satan can also work individually, in every one of us when we embrace the sin in our hearts. When you forgive, it doesn’t change the past, but it will surely change the future.

I. The analysis of the unforgiving heart- Sin nature

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.



We have dual nature. There is a sin nature, which expresses itself through sinful desires. And we have a spiritual nature, which expresses itself through spiritual desires. They're in constant battle with one another. Jonathan Edwards said that our hearts are always seeking for the highest pleasure and minimum pain. When we cannot forgive, we are operating on our sin nature. Our sin nature says, "I can't forgive you because I didn't get what I wanted because of you." Or "I got what I didn't want because of you."

The essence of our sin nature is to be exalted, as seen in this verse:

Genesis 3:5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

We are so proud. We have either high pride (i.e. "I'm great.") or low pride (i.e. "I'm terrible, but I want to be great."). We all want to be as high as God. Our anger when we can't forgive is the wrath that we are showing out of our desire to be God.

This is how our sin nature operates in terms of forgiveness – three phrases when we cannot forgive:

A. I cannot forgive God

It's always wrong to hold in your heart, or voice with your mouth, anger against God. Emotions indicate what we love, believe, and desire. When we accuse God of not doing what we believe He should, what we are really saying is, "I want to be God and I am using You to serve me." But we must believe that God does nothing without reason for our good and for His glory.

However, don't confuse honest questioning God, based on faith, as rebellion against God. We can ask honest questions because there can be a discrepancy between what we know of God's character and His promise, and what is happening. In Psalm many people ask, "Why Lord, what's happening?" They're not rebelling against God, but they are question what they see because they trust in God. It's ok to ask honestly ask God, when you are confused, how He is going to fulfill His promises.

But when we question God out of rebellion, we need to remember who God is in the Scripture. Reject your blasphemous thoughts. Repent. Recognize your limited view and knowledge. God is working a million things for our good and for His glory, though we may not be able to see it. So, react in obedience. Ask God that you may be able to see, seek, and persevere through those times.

B. I cannot forgive myself

When you cannot forgive yourself, you are replacing God with yourself. God is supposed to be the judge. However, you're placing your own standards and goals above God's. You want your own approval, so

you cannot forgive yourself though you have been forgiven by God. That is sin in itself because you are trying to be God in that situation. You are regretful but not repentant. In this kind of situation, when you cannot forgive yourself, you are not seeking for God's forgiveness. You are not living according to His standard, His approval.

Oprah Winfrey said, *"Forgiveness is giving up the hope that the past could have been any different."* If you made a mistake, go to God because you are living for His approval. Repent and keep going.

C. I cannot forgive others

When you can't forgive others, it is because they do not meet your standard to receive forgiveness. It reveals our sinful desire to be God – wanting to show the wrath of god (little "g" – "I am god."). In these moments, this verse is helpful:

Romans 8:1 *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

When you cannot forgive yourself, God forgives you through Jesus Christ, He doesn't condemn you. God's approval is what you should live for and He says there is no condemnation through Jesus Christ. Repent of the sin of wanting to live according to your standard and approval. Repent of your desire to be God and meditate on His forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

When you can't forgive others, remember that not only does God not condemn you in Jesus Christ, but He does not condemn other people.

II. The analysis of the forgiving heart- Spiritual nature (20:31)

Ephesians 4:32 *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

In our spirit's nature, instead of wanting to be God, now we want God to be God. We want Him to be exalted. This is the DNA of Jesus Christ, the second Adam. As we battle and fight, we become more and more like Christ.

This verse in Ephesians 4 is in the context of how we used to have the old self, but now we are putting on the new self. You used to be someone who was unforgiving, but now you need to forgive. This is the operation of the spiritual nature. When it says, *"Forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you"*, it's more than an example for us to live by – because we have been forgiven, we must forgive. Through this phrase, God is empowering us – it is by His power and grace that we can forgive others.

Ephesians 3:16-17 ¹⁶*that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,*

Through His Spirit, God is empowering us so that we can fight against our sinful desires and forgive others.

¹⁷*so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love,*

Gandhi said, *"The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is an attribute of the strong."* Gandhi wasn't referring to power from the Holy Spirit. But as Christians, we receive power from the Holy Spirit. Weak people cannot forgive, but only those who are in Christ. We receive empowerment to forgive through the Word and prayer. When we receive His forgiving power, we can release that forgiving power of God to others. We used to embrace darkness, but now the light of His love comes so that we can shine the light. It is only by His grace and love we can do this. Therefore, we need to have love and humility in our hearts to be able to forgive people. Somebody said, *"Forgive others as quickly as you want God to forgive you."*

III. Implications of Biblical Forgiveness (26:26)

A. You have no capability to forgive without God

Ephesians 4:32 *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

In our sin nature, we are completely incapable of forgiving without the power of God. Just as we cannot have real love on our own because of our totally depraved hearts. Apart from rebirth of our spiritual nature through the Holy Spirit, we cannot have a genuine heart. We do everything selfishly for ourselves. We have no light for us to others on our own.

B. You have no right to forgive others without God

Ephesians 4:32 *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

Not only are we incapable to forgive, but we have no right to because in our sin nature we are always sinning. We are always hurting others and God. We are always using others to get what we want. We are also hurt by others because there is absolutely no light at all without God. All the light we have is of God, so no one has the right to forgive others. Which is why David says:

Psalm 51:4 *Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words
and blameless in your judgment.*

David did sin with Bathsheba and against Uriah, but in a secondary sense. He first and foremost sinned against God. In a primary sense, all our sins are against God. When we hurt other people, it's a violation against His commandments about people. Though this does not mean we do not sin against others, but we sin against God through other people.

When we forgive others, we should not be doing it with the attitude that they offended us, but that they offended God. As we forgive others, they can experience the same forgiveness that we receive from God. We forgive others with the humility of a fellow sinner. If we can see our sins and the dual nature inside of us, we should never and can never, have a judgmental attitude. We can't be arrogant people. No sinner is worse than us.

C. You have the responsibility to forgive, so that you can minister to others

Ephesians 4:32 *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

Though you might not have the right, you have the responsibility to forgive others, so that you can minister to them. To minister means to give to others what you received from God. While forgiveness might be a choice, it is not an option for Christians. You communicate your hurt in order to help them to repent of their sins to God; not acting like you are God. When we show the light, we are only reflecting the light.

This is true of justice movements. Many people are so angry at others as if they are God. But when you confront others for their sins, the goal should always be so that they can repent to God and be restored to God.

1. When others offend you, help others to repent from their sin against God

Matthew 18:15 *If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.*

You are not trying to confront the person who offended you, as if you are God. “*Between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.*” Go and tell him his fault. This is not an expression of anger, but a persuasion of love. It should lead to their repentance so that they may be restored into the body of Christ; that there may be spiritual unity. The goal is to hear, “I’m sorry Jesus.” Show them their darkness so that they can receive the light of forgiving love from God in Jesus Christ.

2. When you offend others, help others not to sin against God

Matthew 5:22-24 ²²*But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire. ²³So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*

Verse 22 says, “*everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.*” If someone remains in their anger against you, they are sinning – they are liable for judgement. Verse 23 also says, “*If you are offering your gift at the altar and remember that your brother has something against you...*”. In this case, someone has something against you. This verse insinuates that it may or may not be your fault. But regardless, that person is still angry at you.

Whether or not it’s your fault, it is good to go to them and reconcile so that they may not sin against God. You are releasing God’s forgiveness to them through our forgiveness. We need to have a theocentric forgiveness of other people, not a self-centered forgiveness.

There is an old and difficult, but great, quote from a man named Lorezno Scupoli. In 1846 he wrote a book called *Spiritual Combat*, and this is what it says:

“Know that when unhappily thou thinkest any evil of thy brother, some root of the same evil is in thine own heart. Therefore, whenever it comes into thy mind to judge others for some fault, be rough against thy self, as guilty of the saying and say in thine heart, ‘How is it that I, wretched being, buried in this, has far heavier fault, dare to lift up my head, to see and judge the faults of others?’ And thus the weapons which, directed against others, would have wounded thee, being used against thyself, bring healing to thy wounds. And be very sure that all good and kindly feelings towards thy neighbor is the gift of the Holy Spirit; and that all contempt, rash judgement, and bitterness towards him, comes from thine own evil and from the suggestion of Satan.”

When you feel like you’re judging other people, judge yourself with the same judgement to see your won heart. You have the same evil heart. Then the thing that would have hurt you, can actually heal you and help you to grow through the process. If you judge others, Satan may use that to divide the body of Christ – to hinder the glory of God. C.S. Lewis said, “*Everyone thinks forgiveness is a lovely idea until he has something to forgive.*” It’s so true. We think forgiveness is a beautiful and wonderful thing, until you need to forgive. Then it becomes such an ugly and painful thing.

IV. How can I grow through forgiveness? (41:02)

Ephesians 4:32 *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

A. Reason in your mind that God is judge

Ephesians 4:32 *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

“*God in Christ forgave you*” - the foundation is not others’ forgiveness, but it’s God’s forgiveness to us. We are living for the approval of God. God will judge everything in this world to some degree through the consequence of sin. There is temporary justice and judgement in this world, so that people will fear God and repent of their sins. But there is final justice coming, so do not worry if evil prospers in this world now.

Do your best to reconcile and forgive. But even if you do your best and not all relationships are reconciled, do not worry too much. Everyone is responsible for their own heart their actions. Romans 12:18 says, “*If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*” Do your part to try and live in peace.

B. Realize your dark reactions of your sinful nature- pleasure or pain

Ephesians 4:32 *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

When you can’t forgive someone, that’s the dark side operating within you. Forgiving someone doesn’t always mean that you no longer feel the pain of their offense. There will be pain even if you have forgiven someone. Therefore, we need to constantly and consistently forgive.

There will always be reaction-sin in our hearts because we have sin nature. Reaction-sin is when others may have caused the first wound, but you are causing the rest by keeping it. Forgive and let it go or it will eat you alive. You may think they made you feel this way, but when you won’t forgive, you are the one inflicting the pain on yourself. So, reason in your mind that God is the judge, but realize your dark reactions of your sin nature when people sin against you.

C. Repent for your foundational desire to be God – Your desire to be God

Ephesians 4:32 *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

When we are unforgiving, it’s because of our foundational desire to be God. You are angry and want to inflict wrath as god. The offender is not meeting your terms; whether the offender is God, yourself, or others. Though they might be meeting God’s terms – God may have forgiven them- but you can’t. Repent for your foundational desire to be God.

D. Receive the light – forgiveness and love

Ephesians 4:32 *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

The next three points are talking about the operation of your spiritual nature. Think about these three words under this point: pain, pleasure, power. When somebody offends you, there is pain. When you see your sins, there will be pain. But that pain should quickly be replaced by pleasure. Though there is pain because of our sinful desires, because of Jesus Christ, there is no condemnation. God has already forgiven you. Pain should quickly be replaced by pleasure until you receive the light – power. There’s pain of your sin nature, pleasure of your spiritual nature, and lastly, the power that comes from God. God in Christ forgave you, so now you have the capability to forgive others. The uphill battle becomes a downhill slope. Receive the life and forgiveness in your spiritual nature.

E. Release the light – react in love

Ephesians 4:32 *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

Then, release the light. React, not in your sin nature, but in your spiritual nature, in love. There are two kinds of love: comforting love and confronting love. These two must always go together.

Forgiving someone who has sinned against you doesn't mean you cease longing for justice. Forgiveness doesn't mean that you are to ignore that was done or you deny the sin that was committed. It doesn't mean that you close your eyes in mortal atrocity and pretend that it didn't hurt. It doesn't mean that it doesn't matter whether or not the offending person is called to account for their actions; nor are you being asked to diminish the gravity of the offense. Every sin people commit is heavy enough for Jesus to die for.

But human justice is to help the sinner fear God and to help other possible victims, so that the sinner will not hurt more people. But our desire for justice cannot be for perfect or complete justice. Our desire for justice is only to help them see a glimpse of the final justice that is coming, so that they can repent and be restored to God, so that God will be glorified through them. That must be our goal, rather than merely showing the wrath and justice of God. Some might say, "That's not fair. They really hurt me. If I forgive, who will take up my cause and nurse my wounds?" God will. Romans 12:19 says, "*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.'*"

Do your part as much as it depends on you. If everything is not right, then God will deal with the offender in His own way at the appropriate time. He is much better at it than us. Also, forgiveness doesn't mean that you make it easy for the offender to hurt you again. They may hurt you again, or others. It's their decision. You may need to set boundaries on your relationship with them. When Adam and Even sinned, they were naked. But God gave them clothes to wear, covering their shame. We need to always cover others' shame.

If you establish rules to govern and limit your interactions with them in the future doesn't mean you failed to truly forgive them. Forgiveness doesn't mean you become a passive doormat for their continual sin. True forgiveness is not satisfied with simply cancelling the debt; it longs to love again. True love never aids the sin of another. Romans 12:18, "*If possible, so far as it depends on you*" try to love. Often in a sinful world, if there is a tremendous problem, even when the reconciliation and restoration is successful, the relationship may never fully return to what it was before.

But there also must be comforting love. Thomas Watson defined forgiveness like this: "*Resist revenge, not returning evil for evil, wishing them well, grieving at their calamities, praying for their welfare, seeking reconciliation so far as it depends on you, and coming to their aid.*" I would add "wanting to cover them and restore them." React in love.

F. Repeat if you need to in the future

Ephesians 4:32 *Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

If you need to in the future, repeat this verse. Reason in your mind that God is the judge, realize the dark reactions of your sin nature, repent of the foundational desire to be God, receive the light, release the light, react in love, and repeat.

The word *forgave* in this verse is in aorist tense. Meaning, *one* action in the past has biding significance in the present. God forgave us once and that has impact for us now. The word *forgiving* in this verse in the

middle, present participle – the present tense. Because God did it once, we are to and able to forgive all our lives. We need to show that love to other people. And God will continuously empower us with the power that is immeasurable – more than we can ask or imagine. We can forgive again and again by His grace and power.

A repeat of your anger isn't an indicator of ineffectiveness of your past repentance, but a reflection of your present sinful heart. You are either not getting what you want or what getting what you don't want, in that present moment. You need to go through the process of forgiving when you want to retaliate again in the future. Unforgiving anger is like a bell: initially it's loud, but as you keep forgiving by His grace, it will slowly die out.

Forgiveness is not forgetting. People use Jeremiah 31:34, "*For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*" to say that you can't remember sin. But this verse is talking about how God graciously resolved not to hold us liable for our sin. Because God cannot forget things; He is omniscient.

Forgiveness is rarely a one-time climatic event. It may be a life-long process. But one day, you will be free when you die or when Christ returns. However, forgiveness needs to begin somewhere. There will undoubtedly be a moment when you decisively choose to forgive. It may be highly emotional or spiritually intense. But it doesn't necessarily mean you will never need to do it again. Every time you see that person, you may need to say, "Oh my soul, remember, you need to forgive them."

Forgiveness is not a feeling, but a promise

- I promise, that I will not bring this matter up again with you
- I promise, that I will not bring this matter up again to myself
- I promise, that I will not bring this matter up again to others
- I promise, that I will do, what I've just done, again and again, until I can forgive like God in Christ

Forgiveness is not a feeling but a promise. "I promise that I will not bring this matter up again with you." Sometimes, you may need to deal with it, for your own good. But once you decide to forgive, you have to promise not to bring that matter up again.

Forgiveness also means to promise not to bring this matter up against yourself. Don't constantly think about it, condemning yourself, others, or God. It also means promising not to bring this matter up against others. Don't talk about it with other people if you have forgiven - if God has forgiven. Lastly, it is also a promise to do what you've just done again and again until you can forgive like God in Christ. Forgiveness is not a feeling, it's a commitment. Forgiveness is a fight.

The most powerful picture of forgiveness I've seen was at a CFC funeral. A young CFC member died due to an auto accident. He was riding his scooter when he was hit by grandmother in her car. Hundred of people wrote tribute about how this man impacted their lives. But I remember during that funeral, there was a line of people coming in, one by one. There was one grandmother walking towards the line. You didn't have to know who she was, but for one look, you knew she was the one that had hit me. She started weeping so hard she couldn't continue walking towards the line. But the family, who had just lost their loved one, just embraced her and forgave her. "It could have happened to anyone. It's not your fault." They covered her. I don't know if I could have done that if my child was killed by someone. Even though we were the ones that crucified His Son, just as God has done for us, we should picture that in our lives.

There's a lot of news about falling leaders. Not just spiritual leaders, but in political, sports, everywhere. It seems when people make mistakes, they are buried in society. It is true that the church should have a higher standard on holiness. But if we mediate on the Bible we see: Paul, a forgiven murderer; Peter, a forgiven coward denying Jesus; David, a forgiven murderer and adulterer; Rahab, a forgive prostitute; Mark, a forgiven quitter of ministry.

All of them restored to serve God. It must also be true that the Church of Jesus Christ should have a higher measure of forgiveness; a higher magnitude of restoration than the world.

The power of the Gospel has the power to change and restore people. Many people at CFC sin, repent, fight – many leaders and many older people – but they are forgiven and restored. Whenever I see them serve, it brings me great joy. I love seeing restored people serve again. It shows God's forgiveness, who in Christ showed us forgiveness, so that we can show that forgiveness to others.