

# **FORGIVING Others – AS Christ Forgives US**

## **Eph 4:32; Col 3:13 Key to Our Own Forgiveness**

Light on the Rock

by Philip Shields

SUMMARY: Passover is all about the greatest of all forgiveness. Jesus reminds us we must forgive others their trespasses or else Father won't forgive us our trespasses. This sermon explains how true forgiveness is costly, but also very satisfying. Eph 4:32 says we are to learn to forgive others the way God forgives us. Though we can't forgive the sin penalty, we can grow to forgive in the manner God does. In fact Scripture requires it. Learn what God does when He forgives, and find out what He leaves behind with the forgiveness – something we must also do.

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I presume we all understand we need badly to be forgiven by God for our sins, faults and shortcomings B or there is no spiritual future for us. God forgives us when we repent. There are dozens of scriptures that assure us of God=s mercy, His forgiving attitude to us.

God's forgiveness of us is not the main topic of this message, but we will delve in and out of that topic as it touches on our topic today.

Turn to the sample prayer that Jesus taught us in **Matthew 6**, as we look at today=s topic:

### **Matt 6:12-15**

“And forgive us our debts, *as we forgive our* debtors.

13 And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

**14 "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."**

This is the warning and command I'm going to be talking about today: forgiving those who have hurt us and sinned against us, or risking ourselves not being forgiven by God. I hope you find this message will ring new bells for you, in your quest to understand godly forgiving better. We can simply talk about letting people know they are forgiven – but I want to go further: forgiving the way Jesus forgives. Forgiving people from the heart, and in the same way that Jesus forgives us, goes far beyond just letting someone off the hook. That's what we'll cover today.

As I prepare this transcript in 2008, it is during the Passover season. What better time to review the fact that especially in this season of forgiveness, that we should learn to become awesome forgivers ourselves, especially in light of the mountain of sin debt for which we have had to be forgiven.

If we don't properly and fully forgive all others, we will not be forgiven. If we=re *not* forgiven by God, we=re still in our sins, and won=t have salvation B and will be damned forever. So can it be any clearer how important this topic is – and that we're learning it and practicing it?

**Can man forgive a fellow man – of sins?** Some say people can't forgive sins, only God can. They quote what King David says in Ps 51 B "against You, You only, have I sinned." That's all true, but it's also true there are numerous verses that command us to forgive one another. So how do we unite those 2 concepts?

Human beings cannot remove, pay for, or forgive the spiritual eternal death penalty for unrepented and unforgiven *sin* of other men B but we can forgive how we feel about people who have hurt us or sinned against us. We also can restore the relationship B and still leave the eternal spiritual penalties – or redemption -- and all spiritual outcome, to God.

So I hope that explains that.

I want to be sure to also mention that even though you and I can be forgiven by God and man, and though the spiritual death penalty can be blotted out by God when He forgives us, and though we can be made right with God spiritually again B restored, redeemed, justified B there may still be consequences we have to endure in this life.

David was forgiven of his murder of Uriah B but he had serious consequences to endure: the fact we still read of that sin today, the fact that the son born from the adulterous union died, and several other consequences.

So nothing I say today changes the fact that though we may forgive any who have sinned against us, they may still have to live through other consequences of their actions. But those consequences would generally not be because of punitive actions *we* are taking against them.

***Think about this question: of all God's traits, if you could choose just one B let's say His power, His mercy, His justice B which of those 3 would you select? Without a doubt, my choice would be his mercy. Mercy is so tied into His love – His greatest attribute of all.***

On the surface, you might think forgiving others is something you're already real **good** at. I once thought **I** was good at it. I'm not. I find forgiving the way the **Bible** says to, actually very hard. And that's what we'll look at today B forgiving those who have hurt or offended us, in the same way as the Bible says we must, so we will also be forgiven.

Let's jump in.

### **A DEBT TO BE FORGIVEN:**

**It's interesting that God considers a wrong done to someone, a wrong that must be forgiven, as a debt owed by the person doing the wrong.** That's why Matt 6:12 says "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors". It's translated "debts" in practically every true translation. The Greek is "opheilema" (of-i'-lay-mah); meaning *something owed*, i.e. (figuratively) a due; a debt.

The wrongdoer, who has hurt us, sinned against us, maligned us, or in some way done anything bad to us B is now indebted to us. But some of these debts can be hard, even impossible sometimes for the sinner to repay. They can be bells that cannot be unrung. There are things we do that we can't go back in time and undo. I know. I have too much of my share of that kind of thing. And it can weigh heavily on the sinner to have such a debt B like a huge credit card debt of \$950,000, let's say, that cannot be repaid.

***So God makes it simple to forgive the one who has been hurt or sinned against: He says, "Just do what I do – forgive the debt. Let it go. Move on". But that's hard.***

This is a crucial understanding, because forgiving from the heart costs something. We have to give up our hurt. We have to spend our pride and our sense of our right to have justice, to get back at someone, to "make them pay". When we let them off the hook, in effect we are the ones paying off their debt. Forgiving costs the person doing the forgiving. That's the point.

What did it cost God to forgive mankind? Was it just a matter of saying "you're forgiven?" No way. When a debt is cancelled, the one cancelling the debt is out the money. There's a definite cost. The cost of marking our sin debt "Paid in full" was the brutal death of God's only Son. God paid a tremendous cost in order to forgive us all.

Let's not forget this as we proceed. Forgiving is costly – but it pays us back in spades when we do.

### **SIGNS WE NEED TO GROW IN THIS ABILITY to truly FORGIVE OTHERS:**

- **IF WE REALLY WANT REVENGE.** Sometimes we dress vengeance up in a tuxedo so it looks better and we call it "seeking justice". Be careful. Justice *is* something that has to happen. But it's sometimes a pseudonym for revenge. God *is* a God of justice, but He warns us to remember His approach is that "Mercy triumphs over justice" (James 2:13). The first part of that verse tells us God won't be merciful to someone who has not also shown mercy.

*We want VENGEANCE B but God says, AVENGANCE is mine!"* That=s why when Joseph's brothers were afraid Joseph would extract vengeance on them after Jacob died, Joseph's response was "Am I in the place of God?"

- **We get ourselves off the hook by claiming "only God can forgive sin, so there's no point in even discussing this, because I'm not in a position to forgive him or her anyway."**

Sounds good, but it's only partly Biblical. God, and God alone, can forgive the penalty of sin and erase it from our record. That part is true. But it is clear, as we'll show today, that God's children are like their Father and also forgive offences, accept the person back into fellowship, and more – just like Father does. So if you're avoiding the company of certain ones because of this cop-out, beware. God may well use the same standard on you.

- **IF WE GOSSIP, ARE a gossip, or LISTEN to gossip or READ gossip columns like the Enquirer type magazines.** Gossip is a way of getting back at people or not letting a person=s faults be buried. And always remember: **Those who gossip to you will also gossip about you.** Why? Because that's what they are: gossips. We do what we are. Gossips gossip. Even about you. If you gossip, you're an accomplice to the ill will and it shows you also have an unforgiving heart. (By the way: we all gossip to some degree. It stinks, and must stop.

A sign you=re growing is when you refuse to listen to gossip B but change the subject. Remember listening to gossip makes you an accomplice of that sin.

- **ANOTHER SIGN: WE FIND INNOVATIVE WAYS TO AVOID CERTAIN PEOPLE'S COMPANY, but we're "nice" about it. (All whitewashed on the outside, but inside full of dead men's bones).** We don't attend the same church and hope they don't come to ours; we don't invite them to dinner, for example.
- **WE ARE FINDING IT HARD TO TRUST ANYONE**
- **WE STILL feel BITTER when we think of certain ones (be honest now)**

This is especially true when someone has badly hurt our wife or husband, or one of our children. It is so hard to forgive from the heart in those instances.

- **Another sign we need to grow in forgiving: Months or years after a bad event, we can chronicle exact details of what happened. Or worse yet, we recorded all the details, "lest we forget".**

**1 Corinthians 13:4-8**

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, **it keeps no record of wrongs.** 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. 8 Love never fails ..(it doesn't give up on people)"

A sign you're growing in this area is when someone wants to apologize to you for something hurtful they thought they had done to you, and you truly don't even know what they're talking about. That's a good sign.

- **We need to grow in godly forgiving if we buy in to the world's belief that certain sins can never be overcome. We give up on God in those cases. Typically we apply these to alcoholics, homosexuals and sex offenders especially – and this justifies us thinking we can remain harsh against such people, "because they'll just re-offend eventually anyway".**

My personal conviction is that this is a slap in God's face when we think that way. God in us, that's what the Holy Spirit is, can overcome and conquer all sin, all bad habits and addictions. Notice the list of sins in the list below, put into the past tense. "Such were some of you..."

**1 Corinthians 6:9-11**

"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, 10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. **11 And such WERE some of you.** But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."

Remember again 1 Cor 13 B the love chapter: love NEVER FAILS, Love always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

What if God had given up on ME, or on you? People might. People *have* given up on others. Thank God He doesn't!

- **Related to the last point, if we say: "THIS SIN HE OR SHE=S DONE IS ASIMPLY UNFORGIVABLE!"**

Can that possibly be true, that something we can do is simply unforgivable? Ever hear that phrase, Ahe=s done some things that are simply unforgivable"? I=ve heard ministers say that. That phrase shows a complete lack of understanding of God=s mercy. And one more thing: it shows a lack of understanding of how much each of us has had to be forgiven.

The only "unforgivable" sin I can think of is the sin you won't repent of. Sin against the Holy Spirit, Jesus said. But no matter how dastardly a person's words or actions were, yes they can be forgiven upon deep heartfelt repentance.

- **DECIDING "this person has taken ADVANTAGE OF ME ONE TIME TOO MANY and I can=t forgive him anymore"**

**Luke 17:3-4** "Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. 4 *And if he sins against you seven times in a day*, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' *you shall forgive him.*"

We=ll see later how even the injunction Aif he repents@ B takes on some beautiful nuances.

### **SO WHY DO WE NEED TO FORGIVE OTHERS**

1. We=ve already seen that we won=t be forgiven ourselves if we don=t forgive others.

#### **James 2:12-13**

"So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. 13 For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. *Mercy triumphs over judgment.*"

So let=s learn to forgive, and quickly at that...

#### **Even while we=re praying B (cite) Mark 11:25-26**

"And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything *against anyone*, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. 26 But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

#### **AND DON=T HANG ON TO IT TOO LONG:**

**MY DAD=S STORY B** *Ado it while you can@ B I felt badly about my dad. I held a grudge inside though we=d spend time together because of the hurts he had caused me. One year I wrote a really nice complimentary letter about all he had done and how I admired him.*

*Got a letter back from my dad. He wrote that he had had no idea I felt so positively about him and he had wept as he read my letter. It meant so much to him to know I didn't hate him or that I wasn't thinking he was some sort of creep.*

*It made me feel so good too, to hear we were reconciled, happy and thrilled.*

*Two days later, I got a phone call from my mother. Her news: my father had just passed away that day. Just two days after I heard he knew I had forgiven him.*

We must not wait to forgive, especially someone we know would love to be forgiven. We may not have the opportunity in this life, if you wait. And if we want God forgiving us B then we have to get on the stick and do it. There are people who know they've badly hurt people, but the offended ones won't forgive. It's tough for an offender to forgive himself if he can't experience true forgiveness from the Body of Christ.

## **2. THE 2<sup>ND</sup> LESSON OF THE STORY OF MATT 18 and the 2 debtors: FORGIVING OTHERS SHOULD REMIND US HOW MUCH WE HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN BY GOD.**

If we're not forgiving of others, it's because we have no idea of how big our own sin debt is. We obviously have no idea of the enormity of the cost paid to forgive each of us.

That's why, in John 8, there's the story of the woman caught in the act of adultery B and if you know the story, Jesus ended up by saying, 'Let him who is without sin cast the first stone'. Part of what He was saying was: 'Hey, be aware of your own faults, debts and sins'.

Interestingly, the only One who had no sin, was the only one without a stone in His hand.

Brethren, forgiving a debt B looking at physical debts for a second B costs you. It costs you, the one forgiving the debt. Forgiving a debt is not easy, nor is it ever cheap. Accepting the fact that forgiving is costly, hard, and incurs some loss of a sense of justice or revenge not being exacted -- somehow makes it a bit easier to do.

When God forgave us, neither did it come easy for God. It required the most immense sacrifice, love, agony, and wrestling with the decision in the Garden of Gethsemane.

So when we let someone off the hook, and forgive them, it helps us appreciate what God has done for each of us too. No wonder God says that when we love and bless and forgive our enemies, those very actions identify us as the children of God:

### **Matthew 5:43-47**

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, 45 *that you may be sons of your Father in heaven*; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

We're still talking about why we need to learn to be more forgiving:

**3) Receiving forgiveness, especially from God's children, makes it easier to accept forgiveness from God and to forgive one's self.**

When a wretch sees you forgive them, they catch a vision of God Himself. They see God in your behavior... for good or bad. You represent God, in a way, because you call yourself a Christian, and claim to be a part of His very body (the church is the body of Christ). So what you do, or don't do, in regard to forgiving, is perceived at least subconsciously by the offender, as what they feel God must be thinking and feeling about them also.

Put it another way, its easier for a wretch to believe God has forgiven him/her if they see God's people doing it. If especially God's people are unforgiving, it's harder for them to believe GOD could forgive them. That's why Barnabas was so instrumental in helping Paul get his life back, after being a part of even the murder of Stephen and others, as Barnabas welcomed Paul and gave him the right hand of fellowship.

I know this first hand from both sides of the equation. Sometimes people who meant the most to me have cut me off at times in my life when I needed them most. The pain was enormous. I had to see past them to see that God wasn't cutting me off, even if people who claimed to be God's people were cutting me off. My God promised me that He would never forsake me or forget me (Hebrews 13:5).

Can unforgiving and unaccepting people really be very converted anyway? For it takes someone deep in the faith to understand that we are members of the body of Christ and members of one another (Romans 12:4-5) – and so if I reject fellowship with a member of God's body, or cause them pain, I am rejecting and causing pain to my Master Himself. For what I do to even the least of these His brethren, I'm doing to him. So think hard and long about forgiving. Surely if I understood what it took for God to forgive me and accept me into His fellowship, I should be slow to be harsh towards anyone.

We went to see the musical stage play called “**Les Miserables**”. Its about a man who had stolen, and it seemed he could never put it behind him. He escapes from prison, takes on a new name B starts a new life, new reputation, but someone finds out who he really is and all his past comes back up again. He=s distraught. He can=t seem to put his past behind him. Many won=t let him. The fact that they won=t, makes it harder for him to forgive himself and to move on.

The musical may be different in its ending than the book...

**But in the end of the musical we saw, someone says to him, as she forgives him, IN THE PLAY: AHe who loves, he who forgives another, has seen the face of God.@**

How true. *That=s why Paul tells the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians to reinstate and forgive the repentant sinner* who had previously been put out of the church, so that Satan would not have undue advantage and embitter this man. (Please read **2 Cor. 2:6-11**. We need to practice it more)

This is also why Jesus restored the feet and legs of the lame, gave sight back to the blind B to show them they could now move ahead with their lives. It had a spiritual meaning.

**4) We also need to learn to be forgiving, because holding on a grudge will be just as destructive to the one refusing to forgive as the one from whom forgiveness is being withheld.** Holding on to bitterness is like a terrible acid that will corrode its own container – you!

Or to put it positively: forgiving others releases us from the horrible bitterness and allows *us* – not just the offender -- to move past a painful offence.

**6. FORGIVING OTHERS WILL RESULT IN HUGE BLESSINGS FOR THEM B AND FOR US as well.** I=ll just state this point now, but will spend considerable time on it later.

**HERE ARE THE TWO passages I WANT TO BUILD THE REST OF THE SERMON ON**

**Ephesians 4:30-32**

“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, *forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.*”

(We can=t do the latter part of this verse til the first part happens B a kindness, tenderheartedness...)

**Colossians 3:12-16** “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 13 **bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; *EVEN AS CHRIST FORGAVE YOU, so you also must do.*** 14 But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. 15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.”

I believe Paul is teaching us not just to let someone off the hook – but to do it in the same way as Jesus would. Certainly that includes forgiving from one’s heart. So HOW does Jesus forgive? That’s the focus of this sermon.

**Here=s a test to see if we can forgive the way Christ does:**

- what if the person has committed the same offence against you more than once or twice?
- What if the person hasn’t said he or she is sorry? Would you offer a forgiving heart?
- What if the offence is particularly ugly and personal B affecting your loved ones?
- How forgiving are you of *yourself*? This entire study is also about that B forgiving yourself. Many of us find forgiving ourselves particularly difficult and painful. We are masters at self-imposed condemnation and guilt. It’s like we have sentenced ourselves to a lifetime of suffering. I know the feeling. I struggle with this very same thing.

**SO, WHAT DO WE HAVE TO BE DOING, TO FORGIVE AS CHRIST DOES?**

**\* We must forgive from DEEP within our hearts if we’re to forgive “as Christ has forgiven”**  
**Matthew 18:35**



"So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, *from his heart*, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."

Being able to forgive completely from the heart, regardless of what has been done to us, starts with the attitude that says, "I'm no better. I've done things just as bad as so I surely must forgive--" which is the lesson again in John 8, the story of the woman caught in adultery: "he who is without sin, let him cast the first stone." And at the end of the story, Jesus tells her, "Neither do I condemn you."

**\* HOW DOES GOD FORGIVE? He lets past be past.** God forgets our sin when He forgives. He doesn't keep bringing it up and neither should WE have to keep bringing up sins that God's blood buried long ago. It is wrong to spiritually grave-dig in the blood of the Lamb.

**Psalm 103:10-14**

"He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. 11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; 12 *As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.*"

If we continue reading, God reveals the frame of mind each of us needs to have as we view one another, especially the sins of one another:

**Psalms 103:13**

"As a father pities his children, So the LORD pities those who fear Him. 14 For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust."

Forgiving like God or Christ does, means we gently remember our own frailty and shortcomings, and we understand circumstances, we understand human weakness, for in our case, we are weak too. "But by the grace of God, there go I".

**\* Christ, and people who are LIKE him, EXTEND AN ATMOSPHERE OF FORGIVENESS EVEN BEFORE THE OFFENDER ASKS FOR FORGIVENESS OR REPENTS**

Remember Jesus' words as they unjustly and mercilessly crucified Him?

**Luke 23:32-34**

"There were also two others, criminals, led with Him to be put to death. 33 And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left. 34 *Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."*

So far, there's no evidence anyone had asked for forgiveness. In fact, they're reviling Him, taunting Him, ridiculing Him. They certainly were NOT repenting yet. It's easy to say "I'll forgive them when they repent". Jesus offers the attitude of forgiveness even before they repented.

Someone who had the mind of Christ (Stephen), did the same thing. While they were killing him and stoning him, what does Stephen say in prayer?

### Stephen

#### Acts 7:59-60

"And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep."

The Father of the prodigal son was looking for his son to return, for we read "seeing him afar off...". The Father did not require a track record of new behavior before forgiving. Nothing like that. In fact he is forgiving the son before he even heard completely, at least, what the son had to say:

#### Luke 15:17-24, 20

"But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, 19 and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'"

20 "And he arose and came to his father. ***But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.*** [Father hadn't heard any words of repentance yet] 21 And [THEN] the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. 23 And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; 24 for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry".

### \* If we're growing in forgiving like Christ does, we will be willing to forgive even if the offense is repeated!

Some misunderstand John 8 B Ago and sin no more@. Would Christ not have forgiven the adulteress if she committed adultery again? Are you different from me? Do you not find yourself repenting of the same shortcomings, sins and mistakes? What if God were like us, and refuse to forgive us if we did the same stupid thing over and over? ***We justify the refusal to offer forgiveness by saying "they obviously haven't repented". What if God said that about us*** if we commit the same sins more than once or twice or even 10-15 times? Surely we all have gossiped more than once. Surely we all have coveted, lusted, lied, broken the sabbath, dishonored parents, etc. more than once or twice.

#### Matthew 18:21-22

"Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."

**Luke 17:1-4** "Then He said to the disciples, "It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come! 2 It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. 3 ***Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him;***

*and if he repents, forgive him. 4 And if he sins against you seven times in a DAY, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him."*

After all, this is what God does for us! Again though – most of us would claim a person who has sinned against us seven times in one day and says he repents, can't really be repentant by our estimation of the fruit. However, Jesus' words are clear: "you *shall* forgive him."

*How ELSE does Jesus forgive us?*

**\* JESUS OFFERS THE WAY TO FORGIVENESS even before the offender has repented. Jesus *DIES FOR AND PRAYS FOR THE OFFENDER EVEN BEFORE THE OFFENDER REALIZES HE=*S sinning or heading the wrong way.**

I'm going to spend a lot of time on this point because it is a huge point. We should not only forgive someone who has hurt us, or sinned against us, but pray for them – even before they have repented, as you will soon see in Scripture. Please note: we are not to associate with brothers and sisters who persist in a life of sin (1 Cor. \*\*\* ), but we still have to have a conciliatory attitude of hoping they will see their error and repent. In the meantime, we have to remember we also have had so much we've been forgiven of too.

We already know that in Rom 5:8 it says A... God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that *while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*"

**Luke 22:31-32**

"And the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. 32 **But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail;** and *when you have returned to Me*, strengthen your brethren."

Jesus even knew Peter would turn on Him, would deny him... as he says in the next 2-3 verses, but was already praying for him. That is our example. Even if we know people are conspiring against us or on a track that will hurt us, we still need to be praying *for* them as Jesus did for us.

**In Zechariah 3:1-5** we read of Yahweh standing up for and defending a High Priest who had goofed up so badly that he's described as being in excrement covered garments (the Hebrew "filthy"). And then the Eternal restores Him to His office (putting the clean turban on his head). Jesus defends His Body. We are members of one another – and surely we should defend and pray for one another also.

**1 John 1:8-2:2** says even more: Jesus is our Advocate, our defense attorney.

**JOB B interesting account here.** Be turning to Job 42, which recounts Job's repentance before Yahweh. God is going to ask Job to do something extraordinary. We start with Job's words.

**Job 42:6-10**

6 *Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."* 7 And so it was, after the LORD had spoken these words to Job, that the LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "My wrath is aroused against you and your two friends, for you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has. 8 Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, go to

My servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; ***and My servant Job shall pray for you.*** For I will accept him, lest I deal with you according to your folly; because you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has."

[How easy would it be for US, had we been Job, to pray for "friends" like these, after all the mean things they had said to Job?]

9 "So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did as the LORD commanded them; for the LORD had accepted Job.

**(We lose the meaning in the KJV B At the Lord turned the captivity of Job..@)**

**10 And the LORD restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends.** Indeed the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before SKIP TO V 12: Now the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning;"

This is a good place to start as we learn to forgive the way God does. Pray for our adversary. Pray FOR the person you've had a fight with. Ask for good things. Pray for their weaknesses and for your own shortcomings too, while you're at it. Thank God for that person – even if that person is your very own spouse or offspring or parents.

*When we pray for one another, miracles happen in our relationship.* I've done things that many consider unforgivable. But my wife has forgiven me. And she prays for me, accepts me. And I pray for and accept her. And what miracles of hope, faith and love begin to happen. Apply this to all people.

Rather than praying that God stop the mouth of a slanderer who is slandering you, rather than pray that God take their life or bring a curse on them, pray for their blessing and peace. Did you know God even told the Jews to pray for the peace of Babylon, the city which had taken them captive? What an example (Jeremiah 29:7).

We are to forgive the debt we perceive they owe us. We are to pray for them, for their forgiveness, that God restore their lives, that God bring joy into their hearts. Doing so restores us! Doing so releases us of the bitterness we feel in these situations. We will experience incredible blessings from God in the process.

***For example: Has your husband committed adultery, or your wife committed adultery? If so, it has just about shattered your marriage. I understand this.***

God realizes how devastating that is and God allows a divorce in that situation. But before jumping into a divorce, at least try the way of forgiveness and see if it can work for you. It has worked for us. My wife and I will be celebrating our 33<sup>rd</sup> year of marriage and it's getting stronger every year. I certainly won't judge or condemn anyone who chooses the allowed path of divorce. I'm just asking us to not jump into that process automatically. Even God divorced Israel eventually, but not right away. It took many, many repeated infidelities before He did.

But even if you have chosen the path of divorce, still pray for the offending ex-partner. It will do him/her good – and do you a lot of good too.

**Matt 5:43-48**

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, **LOVE your enemies (those who are against you and hate you), bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,** 45 **that you may be sons of your Father in heaven;** for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? 48 Therefore you shall be perfect (mature, fully grown, complete), just as your Father in heaven is perfect"

The Greek word "perfect" is teleios, meaning complete in growth, full age.

*Here are some examples of God=s people who have done this very thing:*

**Num 16:19-22 THE STORY OF KORAH=S REBELLIONB ALONG WITH OTHER LEADERS** B has a GREAT LESSON besides the usual one about AUTHORITY that this passage is used for:

19 And Korah gathered all the congregation against them at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then the glory of the LORD appeared to all the congregation.  
20 And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 21 *"Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment."*  
**22 Then they fell on their faces, and said, "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and You be angry with all the congregation?"**

God told them to get away from those rebels, but Moses and Aaron did not immediately obey God. They didn't separate themselves but first prayed for them, among people who wanted to kill them B in order to protect them from God=s wrath. God was touched by that.

Of course the 250 rebelling elders were killed by God. You can read that yourself. My *main* point is yet to come up!

**Num 16:41-50** "On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, saying, "You have killed the people of the LORD." 42 Now it happened, when the **congregation had gathered against Moses and Aaron**, that they turned toward the tabernacle of meeting; and suddenly the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared. 43 Then Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of meeting."

**44 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 45 "get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment." And they fell on their faces.**

(Brethren, they didn't immediately get away. Watch what happens instead. They stopped right there and prayed for them instead for the people. They prayed: "No God! NO God! Don't God. These are your people, the sheep of your flock, they are people we love....Please God, don't destroy them."

**46 So Moses said to Aaron, "Take a censer and put fire in it from the altar, put incense on it, and take it quickly to the congregation and make atonement FOR them; for wrath has**

*gone out from the LORD. The plague has begun."* 47 Then Aaron took it as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and already the plague had begun among the people. So he put in the incense and made atonement for the people. **48 And he stoop between the dead and living; so the plague was stopped.** 49 Now those who died in the plague were fourteen thousand seven hundred, besides those who died in the Korah incident. 50 So Aaron returned to Moses at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, for the plague had stopped."

**Remember Moses and Aaron did this for people who were about to stone them. They had to be forgiving,** in order to be able to do what they did and stop a deadly, dangerous plague from God. They ran right into the midst of where the plague was killing people. That's incredible.

Could you and I have been as forgiving – or would we have stood on the sidelines cheering God on as a few more thousand collapsed in death and dying? Be honest. It took a ton of conversion and presence of God's spirit in them to be able to do this. You and I will have a similar opportunity in the years ahead, just wait and see, when we too will be tested to see if we can forgive and pray for people doing very cruel things against us. The end time tribulation is called the worst time the world has ever seen. We will all see at least a part of it, I believe.

A great catastrophe is about to happen in Ezekiel 22. Please turn there. God is seeking someone to "stand in the gap". It's written there for our admonition.

#### **Ezekiel 22:29-31**

"The people of the land have used oppressions, committed robbery, and mistreated the poor and needy; and they wrongfully oppress the stranger. **30 So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one. 31 Therefore I have poured out My indignation on them;** I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath; and I have recompensed their deeds on their own heads," says the Lord GOD"

This is a prophecy that in the end time God will be looking for an Aaron, a Moses, who would stand up in the gap between the living and the dead – and there was none. Brethren, we've got to become those type of people, lest Yahweh smite the earth with utter destruction. Remember what it says at the end of MALACHI 4, in verses 4-6, that if the end time Elijah work does not restore the relationship of fathers to their children and children to their fathers, God will smite the earth with utter destruction. That=s what Aa curse@ there means. *And yes, there will be an end time Elijah, for it says right there in Mal 4 that it is that particular end time Elijah who will come just before the great and dreadful day of the Lord. That=s language reserved for the very end of days.*

#### **MY OWN STRUGGLE WITH THIS**

I've had 2-3 people who over time have spread a lot of evil dirt about me. It has hurt me tremendously. It has caused friends to desert me. I intellectually knew I should pray for them, bless them and forgive them, but it sure wasn't easy. I also knew if I was unsuccessful in doing so, my own many sins would remain unforgiven.

The people I speak of do not seek my peace. Paul says to live at peace with all men, if it is possible (Romans 12:18). So though I'm sure they would not have come over to our home for dinner even if I

had wanted, I could at least pray for them to be forgiven, to be blessed. But as I prayed, I still felt a lot of pain and anguish in my heart for the enormous stress and pain they had caused us. So I had to first pray that God would help me be able to do what He does, and to forgive from the heart. I had to admit my heart was not in it at first. I had to first pray God would help me do what I should as a Christian, regardless of the hurt and trouble others were intent on sending me. Of course, many times when people are angry with us and out for vengeance, we have certainly provided them with the reasons for them to be angry, haven't we? So I'm not trying to say I was faultless and they were evil. No, that's not what I'm saying. I'm just saying I found it hard to do what I've been saying so far.

So please hear me. This isn't easy stuff to do. I'm struggling with it myself.

So first I prayed that God would help me obey Him and forgive everyone from my heart. I asked God to help me forgive, help me bless, from my heart. I asked holy Abba to help me mean every word. Then I asked God to please:

- remove any wrong attitudes and spirit within me that could keep me from obeying the command to forgive from the heart
- bless the cruel people in my life. To help them find peace and "have a life" in Christ, to have peace, to be materially blessed.

As I did so, something remarkable happened. Without going into it, because it is intensely personal, I was tremendously blessed in a bunch of ways. Suddenly, dramatically. The blessing that came to me, as I prayed, was so dramatic, so real, so incredible that I simply burst into tears of joy and relief. It was a complete miracle and again—I cannot divulge what happened. I can only tell you that it was a complete miracle.

But the miracle did not happen until I let go of – yes, -- my hate. I had to let go of my hurt, my despising, my real desire for revenge. I had been so badly hurt that I really wanted the worst for these people before I began a deep repentance of my own foul attitude. I had a lot of growing to do. Remember Jesus teaches us that as we love our enemies in real terms, and do good to those who have hated us, in real terms – we are showing we are children of Holy Abba, our Father in heaven. Remember Jesus even put the ear back on the guy who had come out to capture him when Peter had hacked off the ear.

There's more to Stephen's story. AS he forgave them, as he asked for their blessing, look what GOD did for him:

**Acts 7:58-60**

**"and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep."**

God certainly heard that prayer and rewarded that prayer with a vision of glory the rest of us would die to see! Now read the next few verses in Acts 8, and see that Saul – who became the Paul of the Bible – was one of those cheering on the execution. Paul originally persecuted the church terribly.

Can you imagine what it will be like when Paul and Stephen meet in the resurrection? I assure you, it will be very, very moving as Paul asks Stephen's forgiveness, and Stephen will remind Paul, "Those were my last words, Paul – 'Lord, do not charge them with this sin'. Of course I forgive you. I forgave you when it was happening." And with tears of joyful gratitude, God's love will be demonstrated for us all.

### **WHICH LEADS US NATURALLY TO THE NEXT POINT!**

**\* GOD LEAVES A BLESSING TO THOSE HE HAS FORGIVEN. gives THEM GIFTS. INVITES THEM TO DINNER B and RESTORES THE RELATIONSHIP FULLY.**

**STORY OF POLYCARP=S EXECUTION.... how he made them dinner first, washed feet, etc.**

God's restoration of forgiven sinners is clearly pictured in AThe peace offering@ of ancient Israel B for it was a shared meal between God, the priest and the one doing the offering! They were at peace, and they were enjoying a meal together. That=s the picture! Enjoying fellowship again with one another. So who out there could be invited to your home for a meal?

**cite JOEL 2:12-32 read it later, I won=t have time to go thru it completely now** B it shows how God leaves a blessing when He forgives. Yes, though there often may still be consequences to sin, God also often leaves behind a blessing with His forgiving. Notice Joel 2's wording.

### **Joel 2:12-32**

12 "Now, therefore," says the LORD, ***"Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning."*** 13 ***So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God,*** for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm.

***14 Who knows if He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him-- a grain offering*** and a drink offering for the LORD your God? (.... I'm jumping now to verse 18)

18 ***Then the LORD will be zealous for His land, and pity His people.*** [now watch the blessings!]

19 The LORD will answer and say to His people, "Behold, I will send you **grain** and new wine and oil, and you will be satisfied by them; I will no longer make you a reproach among the nations.

20 "But I **will remove far from you the northern army**, and will drive him away into a barren and desolate land, with his face toward the eastern sea and his back toward the western sea; his stench will come up, and his foul odor will rise, because he has done monstrous things."

***21 Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice, for the LORD has done marvelous things!***

22 Do not be afraid, you beasts of the field; for the open pastures are springing up, and the tree bears its fruit; the fig tree and the vine yield their strength.

23 Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God; ***for He has given you the former rain faithfully***, and He will cause the rain to come down for you-- the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month.

***24 The threshing floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil. 25 "So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust, my great army which I sent among you.***

***26 You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you; and My people shall never be put to shame.***

27 Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel: I am the LORD your God and there is no other. My people shall never be put to shame.



Now watch – God offers HIS Spirit and SALVATION!

28 **"And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh;** your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. 29 *And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.* 32 **And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.** For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the LORD has said, among the remnant whom the LORD calls."

*Isn't that just amazing? That's the way God wants US forgiving one another: from the heart, and leaving a blessing behind us!*

God does the same thing for the Laodecian church at the end of Revelation 3. After warning them to repent, He says if they do He'll share His throne with them, eat with them, and share His life with them. What an awesome God we have. And He wants us to be the same way.

**\* GOD DOESN'T GIVE UP ON THE OFFENDER anytime SOON - - BUT PUTS THEM BACK TO WORK FOR HIM RIGHT AWAY.**

A story is told of an IBM junior executive who had lost 2 million \$\$ in a bad deal. The CEO came in to talk to him. The junior executive assumed he'd be fired. The CEO's answer: AAre you kidding? I=ve just spent 2 million educating you? No way can I afford to let you go now!@

BPaul - after all he=d done against Christians B was allowed to write much of the New Testament!

- Peter, even after he publicly denied B 3x B the very Christ he had followed B was still allowed to be the main leader of the early church.

- Paul forgave John Mark, and God used Mark to write a beautiful gospel account of the life and message of Jesus Christ, even after Mark had deserted them on a missionary journey.

***Remember a previous point, that forgiving this way helps the offender forgive himself and be able to move on too. If we don't forgive one another, and let them back into the fellowship, the person can feel like they're a lost cause. No hope. It's easier to see God's forgiveness of you when you experience God's forgiveness through His Body, the church.***

In the example of the sinner in Corinth, Paul disfellowshipped the sinner. Once Paul could see fruits of repentance, it wasn't long before Paul is telling the Corinthians to bring the man back in lest he be overcome with too much sorrow, for we are not ignorant of Satan's devices. (2 Cor 2:6-11) There's a message there for all of us. There are times to punish sin and disfellowship – but there are also times when we need to welcome the person back into fellowship. It shouldn't take years and years. Jesus forgave the thief on the cross at once. The woman caught in adultery at once. Paul was allowed fellowship into the Body at once. Other times we are talking about days or weeks. Miriam was put out of the camp for a week as punishment and a lesson (Numbers 12:15). But only a week. There's a lesson for us not to be too harsh.

**HOW CAN WE GET TO THIS LEVEL OF FORGIVING:**

● **This is impossible without the mind of God.** Ask for a forgiving attitude as God has. Ask for his mind to be in you. Then let his mind be in you, which was in Christ Jesus (Phil 2:3-6). As we become more like God, we will become like God even in this matter of forgiving as God does. Ask God to transform us, for this kind of forgiving is a major transformation.

\* Realize we *can* be as accepting of former sinners and we can extend loving forgiveness.

\*Realize that ***people are not your enemy. Our enemy is Satan, the Adversary. It is Satan's attitude in people*** that makes them do what they do. We wrestle not against flesh and blood. Always see Satan as your main adversary, not the people he is using. I find it easier to forgive as I practice this more and more.

\* **REMEMBER how much YOU have been forgiven. If you can=t, you have not come to see yourself yet. WE have been forgiven of much.**

\* **Accept people as they are B leave the changing to God.**

**Romans 15:7**

‘Therefore receive (welcome, accept) one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.’

\* **LET GOD SORT THE JUSTICE OUT B FORGIVE AND FORGET. LET IT GO! LET IT GO!! LET IT GO!!!**

**Proverbs 10:12**

AHatred stirs up strife, But love covers all sins@ B certainly, the LOVE OF GOD for us covers all sins literally!

**Vengeance is God=s. Don=t seek justice. Seek Mercy. Don=t retaliate or even want to.**

**Make a list of those you need to forgive – right now – and then apply the points in this sermon.**

- with those you can, invite them over for dinner. Give them a gift.

B PRAY for, lovingly, these people.

B Do it now or real soon, before you put it off.

As we let go of the hurt, and sincerely ask God to bless those who have hurt us, the one who is really blessed is the one asking for others to be blessed. Remember how God doubled Job's fortunes, but only after he prayed earnestly for his friends' welfare and forgiveness? That's the lesson. In the end, you are the one who is healed the most.

And now you'll find an awesome peace will envelope your life when you do this. God bless you all..... Till next time, Philip Shields saying Good bye and God be with you as you walk the forgiving life – remembering how much we each have had to be forgiven.

