

“Forgiveness”
Colossians 3:12–17
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April 11, 2021 • Sunday Morning Sermon

Colossians 3:12–17 says [12] *Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, [13] bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. [14] And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. [15] And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. [16] Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. [17] And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.* This is God's Word.

I'm going to start this study by sharing with you one of my strengths and then a little later I will share with you one of my weaknesses. One of my strengths is I like to provide the opportunity for my wonderful wife, Brenda, to apply the sermon I'm going to be preaching other than anybody else than myself. I have allowed her to practice for the last couple of weeks what I'm going to share with you today. So that is one of my motto's that Brenda practices what I preach. One of my weaknesses is I have what I call I.C.H.D. – insensitive Christian husband disorder. That's me, for I can be very insensitive at times. When I told her a few weeks ago that I would be preaching we realized it would be four days after she had hip replacement surgery but the reason, she would not want me to preach then is because she would need my most attention and she knows I can tend to get a little uptight and stressed when I am preparing to teach so she knew I'd be useless. Also, this day is our 34th wedding anniversary, April 11. I did leave her at home today but I left her in the hands of a godly woman but with all that has been happening I didn't get her anything so now she has another opportunity to forgive. The fact that I know how long we have been married should at least count for something, but with all that said she has had many opportunities over our lives to practice forgiveness.

In all seriousness, today we will consider one of the greatest gifts of a converted soul and one of the most powerful virtues in the Christian life. That is, being forgiven by God and then by His Spirit enabled to be able to forgive others. Stories of forgiveness range from sweet to the supernatural. A sweet story I heard years ago was about a little girl named Lucy Magnum. She was off an island in North Carolina on her boogie board in less than two feet of water and a shark attacked her, bit her leg, and she was laying there bleeding. Fortunately, her dad was a doctor and they brought her up to the shore as she was crying and said, 'dad am I going to die?' He said 'no sweetie, you're not going to die.' Just an hour later she said 'I hate sharks, for dolphins are way better.' We agreed with her. A week later she came back and said 'I forgive that shark for I don't think he really meant to do this.' That's a sweet story of forgiveness.

A more profound, supernatural story would be the killing of the five Amish girls in a school house several years ago. Charles Roberts was a milkman who delivered milk to an Amish community one day came into a school house, locked the door shot ten little girls, then killing himself and five of the little girls died. The amazing thing was immediately that community began to rally around the family of killer, to the point they set up a fund to support financial the wife of the killer. Some of the family members of the girls who died, after burying their own

daughter went the next day to the funeral of the killer of their daughter and hugged the wife and family. They said, 'she needs our forgiveness, love and support.'

A lack of forgiveness in our lives can be devastating. David Murray a professor at Reformed Seminary does a lot of counseling and in an article, he wrote a while back he answers the question, what are the most common causes of depression? He said the third most common cause of depression in Christians is an unforgiving spirit and he went on to say 'although every sin depresses the spirit to some degree or another, an unforgiving spirit is by far the most damaging sin. Christians may have been forgiven by God for massive offenses yet they can find it extremely difficult to forgive others of much lesser offenses.' This is one of the reasons we need to look at this important subject.

I'd like to give a little context as we look in the book of Colossians. The overall theme in the book of Colossians is the total and complete sufficiency of Jesus Christ in His Person and in His work, especially His work in redeeming us and reconciling us to Himself and then transforming our lives throughout our lives by His Holy Spirit. Colossians 3 helps us think about priorities and perspective in life. Paul tells us to have an eternal heavenly perspective and that we should live by the eternal values of God's Word. This is what he says binds us in the body of Christ in unity with one another.

So, Paul uses the metaphor of putting off and putting on. We are to put off all that remains in the old life prior to our conversion. We are continually to be putting on the virtues we have as we're converted and come to Christ. Then Paul singles out in this text we'll be looking at this incredible virtue of forgiveness and how as we practice this as believers in the body of Christ, it is the cure for fractured and strained relationships.

Henry Brandt has been given the title of the father of modern day Biblical counseling as he practiced counselling for over 40 years and died several years ago at the age of 92 but one of his books I use a lot is titled The Heart of the Problem. In this book he recounts a story of when he was in Uganda during the bloody civil war there where they experienced shortages of food and water with all kinds of thefts going on. He was asked to come there and preach in a small village. He was having a lot of difficulty getting out to the village and questioned his driver if they should continue and he said 'yes' even though they had to stop at numerous check points and the soldiers were very rude and scary.

This is what he says when he finally got there; 'We finally get to the destination. I sat on the platform looking out at the audience. I knew most of them were hungry. They were shabbily dressed and I knew no one in this audience had stood in front of a closet packed full of clothes and wondered what to wear. What could I say to these people when I had never wondered what I would eat or what I'd wear? I knew many had suffered the death of a family member. Many of their families were scattered with some having fled into the forest to avoid being mowed down by hostile gun fire. I prayed silently, 'Lord, I don't know what to say to these people. God, You have to help me.' The only thought that came to me after I prayed that was, 'the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, for against such things there is no law.'

After the meeting, a raggedly dressed man approached me and said 'You seemed very uncertain about your message, Dr. Brandt. I want to assure you that the Holy Spirit works right now at this time I Uganda.' As they started walking down the road the man told me to look at a beautiful house on a hill (which was his) and said that Idi Amin soldier's came and took over that house as their headquarters and a few days later they came to his business, closed it down and took and took his Mercedes Benz and he had nothing. All he had was a cow and a chair he took

from the house. He needed some fly spray to help my cow so he sold his chair. The cow died anyway and it didn't help. He had lost everything during this time. He said one day that when he had sat on this box that he thought he would burst into hatred and animosity and then a man came and knocked on his door. This man was a missionary who said he had come to tell me that God loved me. That's all he heard and said 'God loves me!!' he exploded. In a rage he said he picked the man up and threw him out of his house, he could hardly contain himself.

This is what an unforgiving spirit does. It makes us angry and bitter and we can hardly contain ourselves. We can understand that with all this man went through. So in this study we want to think about this idea of having a forgiving spirit. There are three aspects of the section of Colossians 3:12–17 that I want to focus on in this study. One is preparing our hearts to be able to forgive. Secondly, the actual practicing of forgiveness and then thirdly, how we can stay on the path of forgiveness and unity in the body of Christ.

So let's look at the first one of preparing our heart as we look back at Colossians 3:12 which says [12] *Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.* The heart is what the Puritans used to call heart work. They often said heart work is hard work. Why is heart work so hard? It is because it requires of us to practice something that generally we all despise. That is denying ourselves and regarding others as more significant, more important, better than ourselves. This is the principle from Philippians 2:3 which says [3] *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.*

John Calvin in one of his commentaries asked a profound question of the Christian. He said 'How is it that desires that are hurtful toward our neighbor enter into the heart of a believer?' How is it that a converted soul would have desires and attitudes in his heart that are harmful to other believers? He says it's because we stop loving our neighbor as ourselves and we love ourselves alone, we strive for ourselves alone. Calvin goes on to say that the heart that harbors unforgiveness is empty of love. That's not how the believer should be.

Notice how Paul describes the Christian in Colossians 3:12. We are chosen by God by His free grace, set apart for Him, holy and loved by God. We are to have compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. These are awesome truths that should motivate us and enable us to love people from the heart. The key to all of this is that we are the elect of God, holy and beloved and it should soften our hearts. It should also fill our hearts with compassion to the very ones who we don't think deserve compassion. Romans 12:21 says [21] *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

John Calvin ask why is it important that we practice humility and meekness? He says because there is no way we will show kindness and mercy to others if we don't bring ourselves down, forsake our haughtiness and make ourselves nothing so we can be everything to other people. This is powerful. One of my favorite passages that speaks of the patience of the Lord is Romans 2:4 which says [4] *Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?* I love how patience, kindness and repentance are together here in order to lead men and women to Christ. These are the graces that should adorn us as believers for they should fill us from within so they shine from without to all those around us. That's what prepares us to forgive.

Think of the transformation in our own lives, in our families, in all of our relationships, indeed in the whole world if the Christian was adorned regularly with compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. This is what Colossians 3:13 tells us to do, practice patient forgiveness.

Colossians 3:13 says [13] *bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.* The idea of bearing with one another is putting up with, enduring and it has the application of suffering because that's the old word here for bearing – long suffering. It can't be long suffering if you don't suffer a long time. It's the idea that we will wait patiently for the repentance of that person who has offended us rather than fly off in contempt and hatred towards them. It's what we are called to do as believers.

Think about God waiting for us. His waiting for us to repent is not a further form of punishment, it's that His patience is to lead us to repentance. II Peter 3:9 says [9] *The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.* God patiently waits for those rebels to become transformed and become His children. That's what God wants from us.

Here, I'll share another weakness of mine. I realized very early on in my marriage I was not very patient and kind. I wish I could say I cleared that up after the first week or so but really I didn't and I found numerous way to justify my impatience and unkindness to the ones I loved the most – my wife and then my kids. I wish I could blame it on a daddy wound when I was little or that my dad was impatient – he was a little impatient but he was a great godly man – or some disorder but I can't. God finally began to convict me of it. Actually it was when I was reading Jonathan Edwards book, Charity and Its Fruits and his exposition on love being patient and kind. It was then I started saying 'God, change me in this area' and I began to make a little bit of progress. I would make two steps forward and then three or four back, but I can remember like it was yesterday when my wife and I were in a mild disagreement and she said something to me I'll never forget. She asked me a question that revealed my impatience and unkindness to her and it cut me to the core of my being. I realized I really do want to make progress in this area. It was at the moment that God began to do a greater work. My wife would say I'm not perfect but I'm better so now I may make four steps forward and two back but it is still a challenge to be patient and kind to the very ones I love the most and why is that?

It is simply because I am selfish, self-centered and I want my own way. That's the problem. I'm a terrible sinner. I need a great Savior. Those of you who know the Word know that those are the very opposites of love for the Bible says that love does not seek its own (I Corinthians 13). We see it all over our society today, don't we? We see a society that seems to have no notion at all of forgiveness. It's a society of someone constantly talking about exacting what they believe is justice or greater punishment on those who displease us or offend us. For a world of lost souls to live that way should not really surprise us, but for members of the body of Christ to live that way, it has to break God's heart that we would be so unloving, unforgiving and constantly blaming other people for the problems in this world. I believe, one of the saddest indictments of our sinfulness is our unwillingness to forgive others – sinners just like us – or our unwillingness to ask for forgiveness of someone that we've hurt. This is the very opposite of what it means to love God and it's the very opposite of how He treated us.

Romans 5:8 says [8] *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* At our worst was when He loves us the most. So our forgiveness of others is to be based on God's forgiveness of us. Again Colossians 3:13 says [13] *bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.* How did Christ forgive? He forgave immediately for it wasn't based on how we did or if we improved and He forgave us

freely out of His grace. He forgave us fully. He forgives us continually and He does this for all eternity. This is how we should forgive for this is what frees us as believers if we will do so.

Unwillingness to forgive others is a serious thing for it is a clear rejection of God's command because He commands us to forgive. We are to do this as God's people. You might say that some people don't deserve forgiveness but we're all in that boat. None of us deserve it but praise the Lord that He didn't think that about us. This reminds me of a passage in Luke 6 that is so powerful.

Luke 6:32–36 says [32] *“If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. [33] And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. [34] And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. [35] But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, **for He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.** [36] Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.*

God Almighty is kind because He gives breath to the ungrateful and the evil everyday and showers them with His common grace and blessings. You might object thinking I don't understand what you have been through with another person but reading Charity and Its Fruits I came across Edwards's idea of objections to a meek, quiet spirit that bears injuries/offenses from others. Over several pages he asks six questions about these objections but this is what he says about objection 1;

“Objection 1. Some may be ready to say, that the injuries they receive from men are intolerable; that the one who has injured them has been so unreasonable in what he has said or done, and it is so unjust and injurious and unjustifiable, and the like, that it is more than flesh and blood can bear: that they are treated with so much injustice that it is enough to provoke a stone, or that they are treated with such contempt, that they are actually trampled on, and they cannot but resent it. But in answer to this objection, I would ask a few questions.

First, do you think the injuries you have received from your fellowman are more than you have offered to God?” (No!) Second, do you not hope that God will have mercy upon you, and that Christ will embrace you in His dying love, though you have been such an injurious enemy, and that, through His grace, He will blot out your transgressions and all your offenses against Him, and make you eternally His child, and an heir of His kingdom? (Yes, absolutely!) Third, when you think of such long-suffering on God's part, do you not approve of it, and think well of it, and that it is not only worthy and excellent, but exceeding glorious? (Yes, absolutely!) Fourth, if such a course be excellent and worthy to be approved of in God, why is it not so in yourself and why should you not imitate it (towards others)? Fifth, would you be willing, for all the future, that God should no longer bear with the injuries you may offer Him, and the offenses you commit against Him? (No one would say that.) Sixth, did Christ turn again upon those who injured and insulted and trod on Him, when He was here below, and was He not injured for more grievously than ever you have been?”

We have heard Jesus' words on the cross when He said 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.' That is powerful! I remember a story about Jeremiah Castille who played football at Alabama and then went onto the pros. He coached at our high school and would preach often at prisons. One night he was preaching at a particular prison and as he was preaching he noticed a man on the end of one of the rows with his head down and his head in his hands. Jeremiah stopped and walked over to the man and asked him to stand up. The man stood up and he said 'I forgive you and I love you.' He hugged him and the reason that man was in

prison was because he had killed Jeremiah's brother and how powerful that was. The news reporter said to Jeremiah, 'that's just not natural' and he said 'no it's not, it's supernatural.' Everyone of us has the supernatural love of God poured out in our hearts. Jeremiah said he knew at that moment that man needed his love and forgiveness, and he needed nothing from him especially revenge. That is the power of forgiveness.

I want to go back to the story of the man in Uganda who had kicked the missionary out of his house. The missionary came back and told him he wanted to tell him about the love of God in Christ. The man was furious and the more the missionary talked the more angrier he got but then he said it was if all of a sudden the Spirit came over him and he trusted Christ at that moment. After he trusted Christ he still the house he used to live in occupied by soldiers, his car being driven around by them and still had nothing but God began to work on him. The missionary read this verse to him from Matthew 6:14–15 which says *[14] For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, [15] but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.* It was as if a bright ray came into his life and realized he needed to forgive those soldiers of all they had done to him. He began to have love in his heart for those who had taken everything from him. He told Brandt, 'you're right that we can all have what we want for free but you must do it on God's terms for we must forgive men who mistreat us.'

Who do you need to forgive today? Think about that. Who do you need to ask for forgiveness from? These are powerful words that heal fractured relationships, fill us with hope and will set us on a path of joy and peace. That's the path we want to stay on as believers and that's the last part of this text in Colossians 3. Staying on the path of forgiveness is probably more difficult than getting on the path of forgiveness.

Colossians 3:14–17 says *[14] And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. [15] And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. [16] Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. [17] And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*

Charles Bridges said 'Lovelessness is the cause of unforgiveness. Love is the only cure. Love is a loving grace.' Paul says in I Corinthians 13 that love is the greatest of all virtues. Love flows from all things. I love what John MacArthur says about forgiveness when he said this; 'love is extremely forgetful when it comes to remembering the wrongs and injustices committed against us. Many times people say it's better to forgive and forget but I think it's better to say love remembers and keeps on forgiving.' It reminds me of the story of Clara Barton the founder of the Red Cross. One day a friend pointed out to Clara a person who had done a wrong to her asking her if she remembered what she did to her and her response was 'No, I distinctly remember forgetting that.' This is the freedom of forgetfulness of forgiving others.

Notice how we're to stay on this path of forgiveness from this Colossians text. We are to put on love, let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts and that is to allow the truth of God's Word reign in our hearts and dictate all of our actions. Isaiah 26:3 says *[3] You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.* We can have peace amidst great chaos when our mind is stayed on Him and trust Him. Colossians also tells us to be thankful for a lack of thankfulness is a grave sin. Pray daily that God fills your heart with thankfulness continually. Also let the Word of Christ dwell deeply within you. Don't live by the wisdom of this world but by the wisdom of Christ and His Word. Sing joyfully with God's people and

because of the grace of God. This reminds me of something Martin Luther said; 'let's go sing a song together and spite the devil.' I love that because the devil hates to hear our songs of praise and God loves them especially when we've been offended and are going through difficult times. Finally, we are to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and do everything to the glory of God. If we do this we will be set free.

I would like to close by sharing finding the freedom through forgiveness. This is adapted from a sermon I listened to a while back but I use it all the time and it's by Tim Keller from his Proverbs series. It is from sermon number 21 that is titled repairing relationships. He gives four great steps in how we can find freedom through forgiveness. The first step is to forsake the position of superiority. This comes from Proverbs 24:17–18 which says *[17] Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles, [18] lest the LORD see it and be displeased, and turn away His anger from him.* Keller says you cannot remain with an unforgiving spirit with a person unless you feel superior to them. I've had a few people debate me on this but think about it. This calls for humility and meekness as we went over earlier.

The second step if you need to release them from their debt, what they owe us and this is seen in Proverbs 17:9 which says *[9] Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends.* Covering an offense doesn't mean covering it up but absorbing the cost. It would be like picking up the check for everyone in the restaurant that other people owe.

The third step is you extend kindness to them. Romans 12:21 says *[21] Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.* Do not avenge yourself. If you don't want to talk to a person you need to forgive or be in their presence then you haven't really forgiven them. You have to be kind to them from the heart and the first three steps are heart work – doing the internal work of the heart. These are things you do before you ever go to the person. I love Matthew 18 about going to people in offense but it's not the only passage in Scripture that deals with reconciliation.

The fourth step is we engage them to restore them to God and to you. Once you have done the heart work which is hard work, then you can do this fourth step. If you go too soon or immediately when you haven't done the heart work they will know that you are just coming to punish them more because of what they have done against you. Galatians 6:1 says *[1] Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.* These are four practical steps that are powerful if you will just apply them as you look to the Lord Jesus for what He has done for us, focusing on Him and feeding Him to others.

II Corinthians 5:18–19 says *[18] All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; [19] that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.* Can you think of anything greater than this? We get the opportunity to tell others about this as well. If you have never come to Him today that is the first place to begin so let's pray together.

Prayer:

God, calls you to be reconciled to Him today so if you have not trusted Christ pray simply in your heart; Lord Jesus, I have sinned against You, I deserve Your punishment and displeasure but I ask that You would forgive me because You are a forgiving God so come into my heart and change me to make me the person You want me to be. Lord, minister healing to Your people

who have been hurt many times by others but free us through forgiveness constantly looking at Your forgiveness towards us and I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

- I. Heart Preparation for Practicing Forgiveness (12)
- II. The Divine Practice of Patient Forgiveness (13)
- III. Staying on the Path of Forgiveness and Unity (14–17)

Life Takeaways

Forsake the position of superiority (*Proverbs 24:17–18*)

Release them from their debt (*Proverbs 17:9*)

Extend kindness to them (*Romans 12:20, 21*)

Engage them to restore them (to God and you) (*Galatians 6:1*)