

Colossians 3:12-14 “Forgiving As We’ve Been Forgiven”^{**1}

Main Idea: One of the most powerful ways we can put the gospel on display is by forgiving as we have been forgiven. To do that, according to Colossians 3:12-14, we must consciously put on three things—right attitudes, right actions, and the right aim.

- I. We must put on the right attitudes (12).
 - A. We need to see ourselves as God sees us.
 1. We are the elect of God.
 2. We are holy ones.
 3. We are people loved by God.
 - B. We need to relate to others as God does.
- II. We must put on the right actions (13).
 - A. We're to bear with each other.
 - B. We're to forgive each other.
 1. Here's what forgiveness *isn't*.
 - It's not feeling something.
 - It's not forgetting something.
 2. Here's what forgiveness *is*.
 - It's a declaration.
 - It's a promise.
 - It's a choice to do with others what God did with us.
- III. We must put on the right aim (14).
 - A. We should strive to be known as people who love.
 1. It's a prerequisite for unity.
 2. It's an evidence of maturity.
 - B. We should settle for nothing less.

Make It Personal: Let's ask ourselves...

1. Is there anyone I'm not treating as the Lord treated me?
2. Is there anyone I'm failing to love as the Lord loved me?

Scripture Reading: Colossians 3:12-14

How can we make Christ known to a world that doesn't want to hear about Him? Here's a powerful way. By forgiving as we have been forgiven.

Several years ago Chuck Colson took a team of Prison Fellowship workers to the Indiana Penitentiary. While there they had services with the inmates, but it was as they prepared to leave that God worked in a very amazing way. Colson recounts:

My schedule was extremely tight, so after we finished ‘Amazing Grace’ we said our good-byes and began filing out. We were crowded into the caged area between the two massive gates when we noticed one volunteer had stayed back and was with James Brewer [a death row inmate] in his cell. I went to get the man because the warden could not operate the gates until we had all cleared out.

‘I’m sorry, we have to leave,’ I said, looking nervously at my watch, knowing a plane stood waiting at a nearby airstrip to fly me to Indianapolis to meet with Governor Orr. The volunteer, a short white man in his early fifties, was standing shoulder to shoulder with Brewer. The prisoner was holding his Bible open while the older man appeared to be reading a verse.

‘Oh, yes,’ the volunteer looked up. ‘Give us a minute, please. This is important,’ he added softly.

‘No, I’m sorry,’ I snapped. ‘I can’t keep the governor waiting. We must go.’

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see WBC 5/23/99.

‘I understand,’ the man said, still speaking softly, ‘but this is important. You see, I’m Judge Clement. I’m the man who sentenced James here to die. But now he’s my brother and we want a minute to pray together.’

I stood frozen in the cell doorway. It didn’t matter who I kept waiting. Before me were two men: one was powerless, the other powerful; one was black, the other white; one had sentenced the other to death. Anywhere other than the kingdom of God, that inmate might have killed that judge with his bare hands—or wanted to anyway. Now they were one, their faces reflecting an indescribable expression of love as they prayed together.

Though he could hardly speak, on the way out of the prison Judge Clement told me he had been praying for Brewer every day since he had sentenced him four years earlier.”²

When we forgive other people as we’ve been forgiven by God, we put the gospel on display. Of course, when that fails to happen, the wrong message is broadcast.

We saw an example of that last week in the story Jesus told in Matthew 18 about an unmerciful servant. This was a man who owed his master 10,000 talents, over a billion dollars in today’s currency, was facing debtor’s prison but begged, and received a pardon from his master. The king chose to absorb the debt and let him go free.

But he immediately found his fellow servant who owed him 100 denarii, about \$17,000, and began to choke him, saying, “Pay up!” When the second servant pleaded for time to repay, the first servant showed no mercy but had him thrown in prison.

For comparison purposes I shared that if you stacked \$17,000 in hundred dollar bills the stack would be ¾ inch high. But the stack of one billion dollars would be one mile high. The whole scenario is unthinkable. It’s unthinkable to be forgiven a mile high debt and refuse to forgive a ¾ inch debt.

No wonder the king threw the first servant in prison. And Jesus said in the punchline, “So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart (Matt 18:35 ESV).”

If we’ve been forgiven, we are to forgive. Forgiveness received, when it’s fully appreciated, will lead to forgiveness shared. The title of Jay Adams’ helpful book captures this thought, *From Forgiven to Forgiving*.

But this raises the question, *how?* How do we forgive someone, in practical terms? How do we prepare ourselves to do it? How do we grant forgiveness when we’ve been sinned against in a way that reflects how God has forgiven us? That’s today’s message.

Paul’s letter to the church at Colosse shows us how. Colossians 1 & 2 show us what we have in Christ. Colossians 3 & 4 show us how to live in light of what we have. Gospel understanding leads to gospel implications. The gospel moves us from being forgiven people to forgiving people.

Colossians 3 addresses four gospel implications. The first is **priorities**, addressed in verses 1-4. We are to seek the "above things," to live according to God's priorities. A grid we’ve used in the past, to seek to be God's kind of person, partner, parent, parishioner, provider, and player.

The second is **communication**. Verses 5-11 teaches us that if we want to create a climate for good communication in our relationships, we need to eliminate three types of sins—moral sins (5-7), interpersonal sins (8), and conversational sins (9-11).

² Chuck Colson, *Loving God*, pp. 193-4.

Then there's the gospel implication of **family roles**. The gospel changes the way we do family, and in verses 15-21, Paul gives practical counsel concerning how we are to relate to each other in the home.

But before us today is the gospel implication addressed in verses 12-14, **relationships**, and specifically, what to do when our relationships become strained.

This message is not for you if one of two things is true. One, you are a perfect person and you live with perfect people. Or two, if you happen to live on a planet by yourself. It takes two people to produce a potential relationship strain, so if you happen to own your own planet, this isn't for you.

But for the rest of us living on this planet with other sinners, there is a tremendous need for the practical counsel given in verses 12-14. Beloved, we are sinners. Granted, if we've repented and put our trust in Jesus Christ we've been saved from the penalty of our sins. But we're still sinners, and we bump into each other at times. Then what?

Then we have a tremendous opportunity to put the power of the gospel on display, by forgiving as we have been forgiven. Doing that, according to Colossians 3:12-14, we must consciously put on three things—right attitudes, right actions, and the right aim.

I. We must put on the right attitudes (12).

Listen to verse 12: "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."

Some wardrobes are not appropriate for certain situations, are they? On July 23, 1983, at around 1:00 in the afternoon, a pair of cut off shorts and a pull over t-shirt would have been inappropriate for me. Why? Because I was standing at the altar on my wedding day.

If you were going to change the oil in your car tomorrow, a suit and tie wouldn't be appropriate either. You select your attire to fit the occasion, right?

Did you realize there's a wardrobe that's appropriate for the Christian, and in our text, Paul tells us what it is. He uses a clothing illustration, in verses 5-11 he tells us what's inappropriate, and in verses 12-14 what's appropriate. We're to "put off" certain old-life vices, and then "put on" certain new-life virtues.

We're in the "put on" section this morning. What are we to put on? First of all, right attitudes, like compassion and kindness. But that's not natural. Selfishness is natural, so how do we get there? According to verse 12, we start here.

A. We need to see ourselves as God sees us. Quite frankly, if we are struggling to forgive someone, the problem is likely a breakdown right here. How does God see us? If we are in Christ, three things are true of us.

1. *We are the elect of God.* We are "God's chosen people." The Greek word is *eklektoi*, hence, the elect of God. We are people God chose. We'll develop that more fully momentarily.

2. *We are holy ones.* Though translated by the singular "holy" in the NIV, ESV, and KJV, the Greek term is actually plural (*hagioi*). The same word was used in 1:2 and translated "saints" (in the KJV). It means to be set apart.

The opposite of holy is "common." A believer is a person whom God has set apart for sacred purposes. We're no longer "common," that is, like the rest of the world. We've been "sanctified" (a related term) and now belong to God.

3. *We are people loved by God.* Dearly loved (NIV). Beloved (KJV & ESV). We are people who *are loved*, and the One who loves us is none other than God Himself.

We used to be His enemies (see Ephesians 2:1-3), but God loved us. We were once without strength and ungodly (see Rom. 5:6-8), but "God demonstrated His own love for us" and "Christ died for us."

This is who we are, the elect of God, holy ones, people whom God loves. In the Old Testament, these terms depicted Israel. Now Paul applies them to the church.

Let that sink in. Is that how you view the church? If we're going to relate rightly to each other in the church, we need to see each other as God does. We are God's elect, holy, loved. This understanding is foundational to forgiveness.

Election is not a controversial doctrine in the Bible. According to Paul, it's at the heart of a proper understanding of who we are. In fact, the entire flow of Scripture exalts God for His electing love.

In Genesis 12, God chose a pagan man named Abram and said, "I've chosen you and I'm going to bless you and your descendants." And God did.

Then in Genesis 25, God chose one of Abraham's grandsons, Jacob, not Esau, and promised to bless his family. And in spite of Jacob's deceit, God blessed him and turned his twelve sons into a nation, a chosen nation, Israel. The prophet Isaiah referred to Israel as God's "elect" (or "chosen ones," 45:4; 65:9, 22; see Deuteronomy 7:7-8).

What's more, according to Genesis 49:10, God chose one tribe out of the twelve, the tribe of Judah. And eventually God chose one descendent of Judah, Jesus, to be the Messiah. In Isaiah 42:1, God refers to the Messiah as "mine elect in whom my soul delighteth" (KJV).

So in the Bible, election is a marvelous reality. God chose a man (Abraham), then He chose a family (Jacob's), which became His chosen nation (Israel), out of which He chose one tribe (Judah) to be ancestor of the ultimate chosen one, Jesus.

But there's more. The New Testament indicates that God has chosen a special people to be a love gift for His chosen Son. It's the Church. From eternity past, the Father selected a bride for His Son. Jesus mentioned this in His prayer in John 17:1-2. On the night before Jesus gave His life to redeem the love gift that He prayed, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that He might give eternal life *to all those you have given Him.*"

The New Testament calls this chosen people "the elect" (KJV; often translated "chosen ones" in the NIV). Paul wrote in Romans 8:33, "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen ["God's elect"]?" Jesus said in Luke 18:7, "Shall not God avenge His elect (KJV)." Peter began his letter in 1 Peter 1:1, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to *God's elect.*" Paul began Titus with these words, "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of *God's elect.*"

So rather than being a debatable doctrine, for Paul, it's a go-to doctrine. It's the doctrine he goes to for motivation to do evangelism in tough times (2 Tim. 2:10). And in our text it's the doctrine he goes to for motivation to forgive.

Notice the connection between being the chosen people of God (in verse 12) and forgiving each other (in verse 13). If God views me as one who is elect, holy, and beloved, and if He views you the same way, then I need to think about you as He does.

B. We need to relate to others as God does. "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves" as follows. Paul lists five virtues in verse 12.³

³ In contrast to the list of five vices in verse 5 and a second list of five vices in verse 8--all of which must be put off--we need to put on these five virtues.

First, put on "*compassion*." "Bowels of mercies" is how the KJV puts it. Listen to a comment by historian William Barclay (157), "If there was one thing the ancient world needed it was mercy. The sufferings of animals were nothing to it. The maimed and the sickly went to the wall. There was no provision for the aged. The treatment of the...simple minded was unfeeling. Christianity brought mercy into this world."

Are you a merciful, compassionate person? Do you jump all over other people when something irritates you, or do you show them compassion?

We're also to clothe ourselves with "*kindness*," a word that means goodness which is kind. It's grace in action. It's part of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22.

Here's a helpful insight from *When Sinners Say 'I Do'* by Dave Harvey: "Kindness says to our spouse, 'I know you are a sinner like me and you will sin against me, just like I sin against you. But I refuse to live defensively with you. I'm going to live leaning in your direction with a merciful posture that your sin and weakness cannot erase.'"⁴

I love that phrase, *lean in your direction*. That's what we do when we put on kindness. We develop a merciful posture and lean into the other person.

Thirdly, put on "*humility*." Humility is a trait that causes one to see himself as the object of divine grace. I know what I deserve, and it's not what I have received, so I choose to treat you from this point forward, not as you deserve, but as the object of my grace.

Put on, fourthly, "*gentleness*" (or "meekness," ESV, KJV). This isn't doormat terminology. This is power under control. An ox in its yoke is meek, full of power but under the control of its master. This is how I see myself, how I posture myself as I relate to you, with power to do hard things but under the control of my Master (and yours).

Finally, we're to be clothed with "*patience*." *Makrothumia*, literally "wrath that is put far away." Do we ever get angry in our relationships? Yes, but when we do we put on makrothumia and attack the problem not the person. So by keeping in step with the Holy Spirit, a person clothed with patience can put up with people who try his patience.

You'll notice that all five virtues have to do with interpersonal relationships. And what's more, all five virtues are characteristics of God Himself, seen perfectly in the person of Jesus Christ.

God is compassionate (Lam. 3:22). God exhibits kindness to sinners (Rom. 2:4). Christ exhibited humility (Phil. 2:5) and gentleness (Matt. 11:29). God demonstrates patience (2 Pet. 3:9). When we put on these five virtues, we are choosing to relate to others as God does.

Let's be practical. How do we "put on" these virtues? They're not abstract traits. They are evidences of *Christlikeness*. Christ was compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, and patient, right? So to have them, we must be connected to Him. And to be connected to Him, we must be *in Him*.

But we can be "in Christ" and be cranky instead of kind, can't we? What's the problem? Christ is *in* us, but we're not allowing Him to live *through* us.

By the way, the tense of the verb "clothe yourself" (aorist) indicates this is a wardrobe that's *not* supposed to change.

"I've got a right to be grouchy once in awhile, don't I? I mean, I'm only human." No, on both counts. I do not have a right to be grouchy, and I am not *only* human. Who are

⁴ from *When Sinners Say 'I Do'* by Dave Harvey

we? We are God's chosen ones, holy, and beloved. And as such, we clothe ourselves in every relationship with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

So forgiving as we've been forgiven starts with putting on right attitudes. Anybody need an attitude adjustment? Everyday, don't we? And the gospel makes it possible.

II. We must put on the right actions (13).

Two specific actions indicated by two Greek participles in verse 13 (ESV), "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."

A. We're to bear with each other. Paul uses an interesting word. To "bear with" means "to endure" or "to put up with." It can be translated "to hold up" or "to hold back." This of course is what God does. He "forbears" sinners in that He "holds back" the judgment they deserve.

The reason this action is commanded is because it's not what we do naturally. Young person, what do you do when your brother or sister wears your favorite shirt without asking? Dad, what's your bent when your son borrows your favorite tool and fails to put it back? Our instinct, and we know it well, is to let them have it.

Quite honestly, a key to healthy relationships is learning to bear with each other. This goes for our families, our church family too. Instead of moving into hyper-corrective mode, there are times when Proverbs 19:11 is in order, "A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is his glory to overlook an offense."

So when we feel tension rising, we need to start here. Bear with each other. If we can overlook it, then we overlook it. We cover it with grace and move ahead together.

But what if the problem is due to sin? What if someone in the relationship actually violated God's standard? That's where the second activity enters the picture.

B. We're to forgive each other. "Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." The word translated "grievances" ("quarrel," KJV; 'complaint' in the ESV) is *momphane* in the Greek. It comes from the verb "to blame" and thus means a blameworthy cause.⁵

So we're not talking about personal preferences now. We're to bear with each other when it comes to those. The issue here involves legitimate blame. I've been sinned against. By you. And now I have a grievance.

When that happens—and it inevitably does when you put two sinners in the same room for a period of time—what am I supposed to do? I am supposed to do the very same thing the Lord did with me. For starters, He loved me too much to allow me to stay in my sin. So He didn't ignore my sin. Instead He dealt with it. How?

By forgiving me. What does that mean? What is biblical forgiveness? I think there's so much misunderstanding here that we need to slow down and begin with the negative.

1. *Here's what forgiveness isn't.* There are two common misconceptions.

•It's not feeling something. "I've had it with my spouse. Our marriage is over. Don't talk to me about forgiving. That's impossible because I just don't feel it."

When I hear that kind of talk, and I've heard it many times in marriage counseling, I have some good news to share with the person. Nowhere in the Bible does it say you have to *feel* like forgiving in order to forgive. Feeling is not a prerequisite to forgiving. So if you're waiting for a feeling, you're waiting for something you don't need.

⁵ Gromacki, 141

•It's not forgetting something. "How can I forgive him when I can't *forget* what he did to me?" That question has led to many fractured relationships, sad to say, unnecessarily so. Does the Bible teach that we must forget in order to forgive? No, that too is a paralyzing myth.

When God forgives, He doesn't forget, does He? Can an omniscient God not know something? Did God forget that David committed adultery with Bathsheba? No, in fact, He recorded the event in the Bible. No, you need not forget in order to forgive.

2. *Here's what forgiveness is.* According to the Bible, there are three components to forgiveness.

•It's a declaration. It's not feeling something. It's choosing to say something from the heart, a declaration: "I will not use the sin you have committed against me as a basis for how I will treat you."

•It's a promise. If you've sinned against me, and you come to me and say, "I was wrong for what I did. Will you forgive me?," when I say, "Yes, I forgive you," I am promising you three things.

1) I will not bring it up so as to hurt you. I will not use the event as leverage against you the next time we face a problem, "Well, you owe me one." No you don't. I forgave you. May I speak candidly? Right here's the reason why many families don't have peace. They don't forgive. They hold grudges. They give the silent treatment. What's tragic is that God's way is so much better! When we forgive, the slate is wiped clean and we move on. Yet there's more. When I forgive you (or you forgive me) it involves a second promise.

2) I will not talk about it with others so as to hurt you. Which, sad to say, is what we often do. Instead of dealing with the problem God's way, we talk to people who are not a part of the solution. What does the Bible call that? Gossip. When I say "I forgive you" I am promising I will not do that. And thirdly...

3) I will not dwell on it myself. I will not brood, sulk, or have a pity party over the transgression. When I say "I forgive you," it's settled, done, case closed.

Milton Vincent offers a helpful definition: "forgive. (a) to send away sin from between you and the one who sinned against you and to hold that sin against the offender no more; (b) to release ("send away") the offender from the consequences they deserve from you as a result of the sins they have committed against you; and (c) to positively favor them with blessings they do not deserve."

Perhaps you're wondering, "Isn't that hard to do?" Sure, but what part of living the Christian life *isn't*? Didn't Jesus say, "Without Me you can do *nothing*." No, I cannot forgive based on my own strength, but I can with God's. Indeed, I *must*, for thirdly...

•It's a choice to do with others what God did with us. It's not forgive and forget, so stop waiting. According to the Bible, it's forgive in order to forget. If we choose to forgive, what we will discover is this. As time passes, we *will* think less and less of the offense. Forgiveness is like a shape knife that cuts away the tentacles of the offense and sets us free to serve God and love our brother.

In his book, *When Sinners Say I Do*, Dave Harvey tells Cindy's story. Cindy's husband, Jeremy, committed adultery and sent their marriage into a tailspin. How did her husband's adultery affect Cindy? She says "a darkness and loneliness" engulfed her, "almost as if someone had died." "I turned to God and cried out desperately for help day and night."

Then by God's grace, Jeremy experienced the conviction of God, repented, sought God's forgiveness, and then his wife's. Now what? How could she forgive him?

"Forgiveness is costly," explains Dave Harvey. "And sometimes it costs more than we think we can give. It's as though forgiveness flows between us through a pipe having three valves. All three must be open for forgiveness to move from one person to another."⁶

"The first valve, controlled by the one who sinned, is repentance and a request for forgiveness...The other two valves are controlled by the one sinned against, and these valves can be every bit as difficult to turn as the first... Valve two is a mercy valve. It releases the person who sinned from the liability of suffering punishment for that sin... Opening the third valve requires the willingness of the one sinned against to absorb the cost of the sin."

"So there it is. There is nothing in us that would naturally choose the way of full, biblical forgiveness. It's just too hard, and adding to the challenge is the fact that the extension of true forgiveness can never guarantee we won't be wronged again. So why even consider it? Because forgiveness, full and free, is precisely what has been accomplished for us on Calvary. And the one who had been forgiven is now able to forgive others. Forgiven sinners forgive sin."⁷

Then Dave Harvey explains, "It is this truth that ultimately made the difference for Cindy... This may shock you, but in order to forgive Jeremy for his sin, Cindy had to first get a fresh look at her own sin."

Listen now to Cindy as she shares her experience:

"Over time, I began to see my own sinfulness and God's grace and mercy for my sins. It was very hard to look at my own contribution to the breakdown of my marriage. I wanted to just focus on his part and leave the blame there, but God opened my eyes and helped me to see that, even as a victim of my husband's sin I could not claim innocence in my marriage, and certainly not before a holy God. The gospel gave me power to forgive my husband. Christ had died for both our sins, dying in our place and drinking the full cup of God's wrath we deserved for our sins. Through the revelation of this truth, I was humbled and disarmed – we were more alike than different. From this standing place, forgiveness flowed."⁸

That's how forgiveness works, and when it does, it portrays the gospel for all to see. Yet there's one more aspect of forgiving as we have been forgiven. Right attitudes (12), right actions (13), and thirdly...

III. We must put on the right aim (14).

Verse 14, "And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." What is the right aim?

A. We should strive to be known as people who love. Jesus said, "By this will all men know you are my disciples if you love one another (John 13:35)."

Here Paul goes back to basics, puts it simply, and gives us the bottom line. How can we clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience? How

⁶ Dave Harvey, When Sinners Say 'I Do', 106.

⁷ Dave Harvey, p. 108.

⁸ Dave Harvey, When Sinners Say 'I Do', 109.

can we forbear and forgive difficult people? It boils down to this. *Love*. We're to be known as people who love God and love each other.

That's it. That's to be our aim in life. Jesus said that loving God and loving neighbor is the fulfillment of the law of God (Matt. 22:37, 39). Above all else, put on love.

But let's be clear. If forgiveness is costly, and it is, so is love. Listen to C. S. Lewis:

"Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable. . . . the only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell."⁹

If it's so costly, why should we love then? Paul gives us two incentives at the end of verse 14.

1. *It's a prerequisite for unity.* Love "binds everything together in perfect harmony (ESV)." Relationships are like a fast moving merry-go-round. The pull is outward, and if you give in to it, you will miss the joy of the ride. Love, which binds everything together, won't let that happen. "You're not going anywhere, and neither am I. We're going to love each other and resist the pull to run."

But not only is love a prerequisite for unity...

2. *It's an evidence of maturity.* Love binds everything together in *perfect* harmony. The Greek word is *teleiotos*. It means "completeness." Beloved, we must settle for nothing less than this aim in our relationships. When we fail to love we're showing our immaturity, for love is the bond of completeness. Therefore...

B. We should settle for nothing less. "Above all these virtues put on love." Above bearing with, and forgiving one another? Yes. Forgiveness is a means, not an end.¹⁰

So when a person says, "Oh I forgive you, but I just don't want to be around you anymore," he or she is missing the point. That's not what God does with us, "Oh, I forgive you Brad, but I just don't want to be around you anymore." The aim of forgiveness is a restored, loving relationship, all made possible by the gospel of Christ.

This is why preaching the gospel to ourselves on daily basis is essential. The power to forgive and love comes from the gospel.

To help, let's ask ourselves two personal questions.

Make It Personal: Let's ask ourselves...

1. *Is there anyone I'm not treating as the Lord treated me?* Dear friend, God didn't treat us as we deserve. At the cross, God treated Jesus the way we deserved to be treated so that He might treat us as joint heirs with Jesus. That's grace.

Have you experienced the grace of God? You can become a child of God today by accepting God's provision of Jesus for you.

And if you've received God's grace, you're now in a position to show God's grace in the way you treat others.

⁹C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, 169.

¹⁰ "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love (1 Cor. 13:13)."

But some of us have refused to do that. We won't let go of the past. In some cases, it wasn't even a sin issue. Perhaps someone did something we didn't appreciate and we've held it against them ever since. We need today to choose to bear with one another.

In some cases, a legitimate sin was committed against us. But we've responded in a way that ignores the gospel. Instead of granting forgiveness and pursuing love, we've been letting the offense continue to keep us apart.

We need to change clothes today. We need to strip off the rags of an unforgiving spirit and put on the Christ-like garment of forgiveness.

In her book, *Choosing Forgiveness*, Nancy Leigh DeMoss talks about one of the faulty thoughts that keeps forgiven people from forgiving:

“There’s a . . . myth that keeps many people from experiencing the reality and blessings of forgiveness in their lives—that forgiveness requires a long, drawn-out process “I’ve heard people say, ‘I’m moving toward forgiveness,’ . . . — sometimes even after years of counseling and therapy. There’s no question that for some people, coming to grips with the awful offenses they’ve been forced to endure can be a long and arduous journey. The road just to get to the place where forgiveness is barely palatable is often a story in itself. “But I’ll just say this from experience: I’ve watched believers ‘working their way’ toward forgiveness for years and years and never getting there. In fact, I might even go so far as to say that when forgiveness is seen primarily as a work in progress, it seldom becomes a work in practice. “The choice to forgive does not have to involve a long, extended process—any more than God’s forgiveness of us is a slow-moving, wait-and-see, not-till-I’m-good-and-ready series of events and checkpoints.” “. . . by God’s grace, you can choose to forgive in a moment of time, to the level of your understanding at that point. And though much more may be required of you down the line, the reality of being released from the prison of your own unforgiveness can happen today. This moment.”¹¹

2. *Is there anyone I'm failing to love as the Lord loved me?* It's so easy to say, "Yes, I love everybody. I don't have a problem with anybody." But is it true? Is there anyone in your life (particularly a brother in Christ) that you intentionally avoid, or are refusing to greet in Christian love?

If there is someone that you are not loving as the Lord has loved you, it’s probably because you’ve been hurt by that person, and don’t want to be hurt again. But the Lord’s solution is far superior. He will enable you to love that person by embracing the gospel.

Listen to Milton Vincent, in *A Gospel Primer for Christians*: “Thankfully, the gospel teaches me that dying is not an end, but a beginning. For after Christ took up His cross and died, God raised Him from the dead, exalted Him to the highest heaven, and drew Him into His bosom. These facts surrounding Christ’s resurrection stand as proof positive that God will not leave me for dead, but will raise me similarly, if I would only allow myself to die. Indeed, on the other side of each layer of dying lie experiences of a life with God that are far richer, far higher, and far more intimate than anything I would have otherwise known. In God’s economy, death is the way to life. “Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it,” Jesus says, “but whoever loses His life for My sake, he shall find it.” Indeed, the more conformable I am made to the death of Christ, the more I experience freedom from sin and taste the power of the resurrection of Jesus Himself.

¹¹ Nancy Leigh DeMoss, *Choosing Forgiveness*

The path to such power is paved with many dyings, and each stage of resurrection is achieved with each incident of dying to myself and reckoning myself dead to sin. The more I contemplate the gospel, the more I understand that this “word of the cross” stands as a blueprint for my own life story. The death that Christ died is the death to which I also am called, and the death to which I am called is my entry point to union with Christ and life at its fullest. So, come what may, I’ll let no one take this death from me!”