

October 31, 2021

# Love Keeps No Record of Wrongs

1 Corinthians 13:5d

## The mathematics of the gospel

Last Lord's Day we read that "[love] is not irritable," that is, love is not easily angered. Being easily angered is the fruit of a selfish heart. This morning, we see the second fruit of a selfish heart. "Love," Paul says, "...is not resentful." The Greek is "...love does not λογίζομαι (logizomai) evil." The KJV translates it "[Love] thinketh no evil." That's a legitimate use of λογίζομαι, because λογίζομαι includes the idea of mentally judging or mentally considering something. The early Church Father Chrysostom taught this clause teaches us that love does not *suspect evil* in others.<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Edwards likewise taught here love does not engage in *uncharitable judgments* of others.<sup>2</sup> Of course this is true. But Paul also uses λογίζομαι as a mathematical or accounting term. Especially when he uses it in connection with the gospel.

**Romans 4:3** "For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was *counted* [λογίζομαι] to him as righteousness.<sup>3</sup>

When we believe Jesus Christ at His Word, and receive Him as He offers Himself to us, then His record is *counted* [λογίζομαι] as ours. God in Christ no longer *counts* [λογίζομαι] our trespasses against us (**2 Corinthians 5:19**), but *imputes* [λογίζομαι] Christ's righteousness to our account (**Romans 4:5**). This is

<sup>1</sup> Roy E. Ciampa & Brian S. Rosner, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The First Letter to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), pg. 647

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2013), pg. 204-205

<sup>3</sup> v.4-5 "Now to the one who works, his wages are not *counted* [λογίζομαι] as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is *counted* [λογίζομαι] as righteousness."

the mathematics of the gospel. And I believe *this* is the foundation of what Paul is saying here.

### **Forgive like God in Christ has forgiven us**

In other words, just as Christ *keeps no record of wrong against us* though we have sinned against Him, we are to *keep no record of wrong* though we have been sinned against.<sup>4</sup> We are to forgive *as* God in Christ has forgiven us. Thus the NIV translates this verse, Love "...keeps no record of wrongs."<sup>5</sup> Or the NASB: Love "...does not take into account a wrong suffered." Or the ESV: "[Love] is not resentful."<sup>6</sup> Beloved, the way you forgive others tells your spouse, your children, your co-workers, what gospel you believe. How we choose to forgive will not only shape all our lives, but is a test of whether we will to heaven when we die. Jesus said in **Matthew 6:14-15** "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

### *The Big Idea...*

Refusing to forgive others *when they are repentant* is altogether opposed to true Christian love, therefore love keeps no record of wrongs

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<sup>4</sup> "Fee's summary underlines the theological basis of this aspect of love: 'Just as God in Christ does not 'reckon our sins against us' (2 Cor. 5:19), so the one who loves does not take notice of the evil done against him/her in the sense that no records are kept, waiting for God or man to settle the score.'" Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 147

<sup>5</sup> CEV: Love "...doesn't keep a record of wrongs that others do"; or GWT: Love "...doesn't keep track of wrongs." WEYMOUTH: Love does not "...brood over wrongs."

<sup>6</sup> "This may mean, 1. It does not plan or devise evil. But the expression is (ó kakός) *the* evil, and not (*kaka*) *evil*. Comp. Matthew 9:4. 2. It does not impute evil, i.e. attribute evil motives to others, or is not suspicious. The sense is good in itself, but not so suitable to the connections as; 3. It does not lay the evil which it suffers to the charge of the wrong-doer. Instead of being resentful, it is forgiving."Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2018), pg. 270

## ★ The Doctrine of Forgiveness

## ★ The Duty of Forgiveness

## ★ The Delight of Forgiveness

### I. The Doctrine of Forgiveness

#### **Counterfeit forgivenesses**

As per usual, let's start with what Paul is *not* saying. I want to draw attention to four counterfeits of forgive that are not in step with Christian love.

#### **Counterfeit #1: Therapeutic Forgiveness**

Chris Brauns in his book *Unpacking Forgiveness* defines therapeutic forgiveness as "...ceasing to feel resentment or anger over an offense or perceived offense."<sup>7</sup> In other words, "Forgiveness is a *feeling*. It is ceasing to *feel* resentment or bitterness."<sup>8</sup> What's the problem with this definition? To be sure, not *feeling* resentment or anger is a good thing. The problem is, that this type of therapeutic forgiveness is entirely *individualistic*. Therapeutic forgiveness reduces forgiveness to something that happens privately in one's own heart. But when the Bible teaches on forgiveness, is the Lord's *main* concern that you feel some private feeling? No. Forgiveness is *not* an activity that takes place within the self only. Forgiveness *necessarily* involves two or more people. It is not an emotion, but a *transaction* between people.<sup>9</sup> **Ephesians 4:32** "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, *forgiving each other*." Joseph's brothers weren't concerned *primarily* with how Joseph felt, they wanted Joseph to forgive *them* (**Genesis 50:17**). Jesus wasn't concern *mainly* with how his disciples felt when they were sinned against him, but rather that they went outside of themselves

<sup>7</sup> Chris Brauns, *Unpacking Forgiveness: Biblical Answers For Complex Questions and Deep Wounds*, (Wheaton, IL.,: Crossway, 2008), pg. 64

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 65

<sup>9</sup> cf. Stanley D. Gale's *Why We Must Forgive*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), pg. 22 for an articulation of a unilateral forgiveness.

and forgave their brother (**Luke 17:3-4**). That's the **first counterfeit**: forgiveness is *not* a private feeling.

### **Counterfeit #2: Unconditional Forgiveness**

How does God forgive sinners? Does God have any conditions that must be met in order for Him to forgive them? Yes. Repentance. **Acts 20:21** "I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus."<sup>10</sup> It is 100% true that God has commissioned the Church to preach the *free offer* of the gospel to every tribe, tongue and nation. But what must one *do* in order to be forgiven? Repent. And it is 100% true that for all who do repent, they do so *because* the Holy Spirit gave them the gift of repentance. **Acts 11:18** "God [grants]...repentance that leads to life." But *that* God grants repentance doesn't negate the need for repentance. God *never forgives* a sinner who doesn't repent.<sup>11</sup> Case in point is the two men that were crucified next to Jesus. One was forgiven of his sins and one was not. What was the difference? The one thief repented. "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" (**Luke 23:42**). Or think about Jesus's instructions when it comes to Church discipline in **Matthew 18**. What would warrant a Church member to be excommunicated? Not his sin *per se*, but his refusing to repent. **v.17** "...if he refuses to listen even to the church [*if he doesn't repent*], let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector [*let him be to you as an unbeliever*]." Jesus, in fact, teaches repentance as a condition for forgiving others. **Luke 17:3** "Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and *if he repents* [*the required condition*], forgive him." Now someone may object and say that Jesus forgave without conditions when he cried out at His crucifixion: "Father, forgive

<sup>10</sup> NIV

<sup>11</sup> Arminianism argues that God has already forgiven all our sins but the sin of unbelief or non-repentance. But that means that we have one sin that we must pay for. But Psalm 130:3 says If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" No one is able to pay the penalty for even one sin. James 2:10 "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it." Jesus must even pay for our sin of unbelief. Which invincibly leads us to embrace the doctrines of grace. Cf. J.I. Packer's Introductory Essay in John Owen's *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2007), pg. 61-62

them, for they know not what they do” (**Luke 23:34**). Did Jesus forgive without repentance? No. Actually He wasn’t doing any forgiving at that moment. Rather, as one author says: “Jesus *prayed* that those who crucified him *would be forgiven in the future—he did not thank God that they were already forgiven*. If they had already been forgiven, such a prayer would have been superfluous.”<sup>12</sup> Jesus, out of the infinite depths of His compassion prayed for their forgiveness, which in effect was Jesus praying for their repentance. Forgiveness without repentance is the tacit approval of sin. Dietrich Bonhoeffer called forgiveness without repentance cheap grace, and he blamed the rise of Nazism on it.<sup>13</sup> If repentance is not required, then it encourages the person to persist in doing evil. And this is to violate God’s justice. If Divine forgiveness requires repentance, then how much more should human forgiveness require it. That’s our **second counterfeit**: forgiveness without repentance .

### **Counterfeit #3: Forgiveness Without Consequences**

It is a false forgiveness that says ‘Well, so-and-so has repented, so now we must carry on like nothing has happened.’ This type of forgiveness is so incredibly harmful, and it has led to abuse in many Churches: ‘So-and-so repented so there is no need to contact the authorities.’<sup>14</sup> When David sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah, God 100% forgave him. **2 Samuel 12:13** ‘David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the Lord.’ And Nathan said to David, ‘The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die.’’’ But this did not remove David’s consequences. The sword never departed from his house. David’s baby son died. His son Amnon raped his daughter Tamar. His son Absalom then murdered Amnon. Then Absalom stole the kingdom from his father only later to be himself killed. David was forgiven but the Lord *did not*

<sup>12</sup> “Jesus surely could have forgiven them on the spot himself, had they been repentant on the spot. We know from elsewhere in Scripture that Jesus had authority to forgive sins. Indeed, there were times when he told people that their sins were forgiven (e.g., Luke 5:20-24; 7:49)” Brauns, pg. 145.

<sup>13</sup> cf. Brauns pg. 69-70

<sup>14</sup> Or “Jesus says you must forgive, so you must stay with your cheating spouse.”

remove all the consequences. That's our **third counterfeit**: forgiveness that cancels all consequences.<sup>15</sup>

### **Counterfeit #4: Forgiveness Without Reconciliation**

That is a common assumption today, I have wrongly held this view, that "...you can forgive someone *but not* be reconciled to them."<sup>16</sup> But let's consider how God forgives. Can you think of any place in the Bible where God forgives someone and isn't reconciled to them? No. The whole purpose of forgiveness is reconciliation. God in Christ did not count our trespasses against us, *so that* He could reconcile the world to Himself (**2 Cor. 5:19**). Forgiveness without reconciliation is like the Trinity without Jesus. The two must go together.<sup>17</sup> If the offender is truly repentant, then our forgiveness must have some measure of reconciliation in view. That's our **fourth counterfeit**: forgiveness without reconciliation.

### **The gospel principle of forgiveness**

So then what is the true nature of forgiveness? How must we forgive? Please turn to **Ephesians 4:32** "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, [*here it is*] forgiving one another, *as* God in Christ forgave you." What's the key word? *As*. Paul gives that two-letter qualification to all our forgiveness. It's *not* simply forgive one another. It's forgive one another *as* God in Christ forgave you. Our forgiveness must follow the same pattern *as* God forgiving us in Christ. How did God in Christ forgive us?

<sup>15</sup> "One of our pastoral staff members once shared in a meeting that forgiveness does not mean the elimination of consequences. A number of people immediately reacted, saying, 'That isn't forgiving.'" I stepped in at that point and said, 'If as your senior pastor I disqualified myself from ministry, you would forgive me right? Say, if I robbed a bank but was later repentance, you would all forgive me, right?' They all agreed that they would. But they also agreed that if I did rob a bank, I would need to forfeit my job as their senior pastor." Brauns, pg. 58

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 58

<sup>17</sup> I believe this is what David was trying 'forgive' Absalom apart from 'reconciling' with him. Absalom murdered Amnon, and fled the country. Joab then worked to bring Absalom back because he knew the king's heart longed for his son. David granted Joab's request but then wouldn't let Absalom into his presence. And this caused more trouble than if Joab simply stayed away. cf. 2 Samuel 14

1. **God in Christ forgave us graciously.** The Greek word for *forgive* ἀφίημι aphiēmi means ‘to release someone from the debt they owe you.’<sup>18</sup> It’s why the Lord’s prayer says “...and forgive us our *debts*, as we also have forgiven our *debtors*” (**Matthew 6:12**) Our forgiveness cost us nothing. But it cost Christ everything. That’s what the cross is: Jesus *freely* paying the debt that we owe God for sinning against Him. God freely canceled the record of debt that stood against us by nailing it to the cross (**Colossians 2:14**). Just as God in Christ *freely* released us from our debt against Him, we must *freely* offer forgiveness to others.
  
2. **God in Christ forgave us upon the condition of *repentance*.** Though God doesn’t require us to pay our debt of sin, He makes our forgiveness dependent upon repentance. **Acts 3:19** “Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out.” Therefore we must do the same. It is *unloving* to approve of unrepentant sin. It is *unjust* to forgive sin not repented for. Now if someone *objects* and says: “...but if we wait to forgive until the person repents, then we will become bitter.”<sup>19</sup> That’s not true. Jesus commands us love and pray for those who have sinned against us. **Matthew 5:44** “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”<sup>20</sup> If we are loving our enemies, and praying for them, and offering them forgiveness, then we will not become bitter while we are waiting for their repentance.
  
3. **God in Christ forgave us in order to be *reconciled* to us.** The glory of our forgiveness is that God wanted to be reconciled to us, He wanted to be with

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<sup>18</sup>“In Biblical forgiveness, the forgiving person pays the price of forgiveness.” Brauns, pg. 55

<sup>19</sup>“Contrary to conventional understanding, I believe the notion of automatic forgiveness itself fosters bitterness. We are created with a standard of justice written on our hearts. When we forgive someone who is not repentant, we are acting in a way that is unjust. Deep down we are saying that forgiveness must sometimes happen at the expense of justice.” *Ibid*, pg. 147

<sup>20</sup> You and I are required to put away all bitterness towards those that sin against us. **Ephesians 4:31** “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.”

us. *Therefore* we must aim at reconciliation. That's what Paul commanded the Corinthians to do for the man who was caught in sexual sin in ch. 5. In his second letter, *after the man repented*, he told them in **2 Corinthians 2:6-8** "... this punishment by the majority is enough, <sup>7</sup> so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. <sup>8</sup> So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him." Therefore just as God in Christ forgave us and reconciled Himself to us, so all our forgiveness ought to aim at reconciliation.<sup>21</sup>

4. **He forgave us, but He doesn't cancel all consequences.** When God forgave David for his great sin, He didn't remove all consequences. He disciplined David in order to help him understand the graveness of sin, *so that* David would be more and more conformed to the image of Christ. Likewise was we forgive others, we ought not to cancel those consequences that would be appropriate. If a man steals and later repents, he ought face the consequence of paying restitution.

Therefore since we are to forgive *as* God in Christ forgave us, we must abide by these four things. **1)** Forgiveness must be offered graciously; **2)** Forgiveness can only be given to the repentant; **3)** Forgiveness must aim at reconciliation; **4)** Forgiveness doesn't cancel the consequences.

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<sup>21</sup> "Take, for instance, the case of a woman who has been raped. Does she need to be reconciled to the rapist *if he is repentant*? Let me answer that question in three parts. First, I have stressed, forgiveness does not mean the elimination of all consequences. Certainly in a case like a violent sex crime, part of the consequences would be that the rapist would have limited access [if any] to the victim...Second, a Christian victim must be willing to forgive a repentant rapist graciously. I flinch even in writing that. I have no idea what it would be like to suffer in that way. Yet Christians are called to forgive others the way God forgives them. In a case like this, the victim might communicate to a repentant rapist through a letter or through a supervised meeting. If you are a Christian, always remember this whatever someone has done to offend you pales in comparison to what you have done to offend a holy God...Third, if the rapist were to become a Christian, or if both parties are Christians, there is the hope of heaven. And in heaven all relationships with God's people will be completely and totally restored." Brauns, pg. 59-60

## **Principle: Being unwilling to forgive *the repentant* is against Christian love**

So we arrive out our **main principle** this morning: Refusing to forgive others *when they are repentant* is altogether opposed to true Christian love. Weaponizing sin against others, holding sin over their heads of others, or holding a grudge, refusing to be reconciled is fundamentally against what it means to love others. Four reasons *why* this is true.

### **1. Unforgiveness is to adopt a vengeful spirit.**

Absalom refused to seek Christ-like forgiveness with Amnon when he raped Tamar. His bitterness poisoned him for two years, until he murdered Amnon in cold-blood (**2 Samuel 13**). He took vengeance into his own hands *because* he didn't deal with sin they way that God has prescribed. All who refuse to offer forgiveness are engaging in some degree of vengeance.<sup>22</sup>

### **2. Unforgiveness is to adopt an accusing spirit.**

To refuse to *offer* forgiveness, or to refuse to forgive the repentant is to play the role of Satan. He never stops accusing us. **Revelation 12:10** says he is the accuser of the brethren who accuses them day and night before our God.<sup>23</sup> Those who keep a record of wrongs becomes an accuser like Satan.

### **3. Unforgiveness is to adopt a self-righteous spirit.**

Those who refuse to forgive others have set themselves up as the standard of righteousness. They can't forgive because '...they would never do anything like that.' They forget that they aren't worst sinners than they are, *only* because of the grace of God. When the heathen king Ahimelech didn't sleep with Abraham's wife Sarah, God told him "...it was I who kept you from sinning against me" (**Genesis 20:6**). The unforgiving person has forgotten that the reason he/she doesn't sin *more than they do* is because God is preventing them.

<sup>22</sup> Additionally, "...those who pursue revenge are basically saying that God cannot do his job." *Ibid*

<sup>23</sup> Zechariah 3:1 "Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him." Also see Job 1:9-10; 2:4-5

#### **4. Unforgiveness is to adopt an anti-Christ spirit.**

How does Christ forgive us? Though we have earned an eternity of wrath and condemnation and fiery hell, “He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities...as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.”<sup>24</sup> To keep a record of wrongs is opposite to the heart of Christ, who knows our frame and remembers that we are dust. The person who refuses to offer true forgiveness has an anti-Christ spirit.

That's **the doctrine of forgiveness**. Love keeps no record of wrongs, because that is a vengeful spirit, an accusing spirit, a self-righteous spirit and an anti-Christ spirit.

## **II. The Duty of Forgiveness**

3 duties...

### **1. Informatory Use**

Our first duty is to consider a tough objection. Someone might say “Pastor it's easy for you to talk about freely offering forgiveness but you don't know what I've been through, you don't know what others have done to me.” You're right I don't know. And I never said forgiveness is easy. I believe that forgiveness is one of the hardest things that we are forced to regularly deal with. This room is full of people who have had unspeakable things done to them, molestation, rape<sup>25</sup>, abuse, betrayal. How do you get to the place where you would be willing to forgive those who have done such things to you? Loved

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<sup>24</sup> Psalm 103:10, 12

<sup>25</sup> cf section "God in Christ forgave us in order to be *reconciled* to us" above and its corresponding footnote.

ones, the first thing is that you take it to the Lord in prayer. Cast all your cares on Him because He cares for you.<sup>26</sup> Entrust yourself to Him who judges justly.<sup>27</sup> Then remember the gospel.

### The either/or of the gospel

**EITHER** Jesus has paid for that person's sins against you **OR** that person will have to pay for their sins in hell. If Jesus paid for that person's sins then look to how much your Savior had suffer in order to redeem that person. All the filth and vile wickedness of that person was put on the Lord Jesus Christ. He suffered the infinite wrath of His holy Father for that sin. Jesus suffered more than you ever did or ever will in order to deal with that sin. And He promises you that very soon all the pain will be swallowed up in victory. He will dwell with [you], and [you] will be his people, and God himself will be with [you] as [your] God.<sup>[4]</sup> He will wipe away every tear from [your] eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."<sup>28</sup>

### The future even the devils fear

**BUT** if Jesus didn't pay for their sins, then they will go to hell for all eternity. There is nothing more dreadful. The devils who are mightier than us tremble and shudder at the thought of hell (**Matthew 8:29**). If those proud spirits are afraid, then it must be inconceivable terrifying to *mere* men. Jonathan Edwards helps us imagine that horrifying day:

"...there will then be an end for ever to all hope, to every thing that men hang upon in this life; the soul then shall know certainly that it is to be miserable to all eternity, without any remedy. It shall see that God is its enemy; it shall see its Judge clothed in his wrath and vengeance. Then its misery will begin, it

<sup>26</sup> 1 Peter 5:7

<sup>27</sup> 1 Peter 2:23

<sup>28</sup> Revelation 21:3-4

will that moment be swallowed up in despair; the great gulf will be fixed between it and happiness, the door of mercy will be for ever shut up, the irrevocable sentence will be passed. Then the wicked will know what is before them...all [their] fears shall come upon [them]; it shall come upon [them] as a mighty flood, and there will be no escaping."<sup>29</sup>

Don't you see? God has given you these truths to help you forgive those who have sinned against you. Contemplate, consider, meditate hard on these truths. If Jesus has already been punished for the sins of those who hurt you, then how could you not offer them forgiveness? But if they are destined for ruin and eternal damnation, how could you not be moved with pity and compassion for them?<sup>30</sup>

## 2. Experimental Use

That brings us to our **second duty**: we must *examine* ourselves. Dear congregation, has the gospel transformed the way you forgive? Remember that our forgiveness must follow the same pattern *as* God forgiving us in Christ. So test yourselves:

Do you forgive others *as* God in Christ as forgiven you?

Do you freely offer forgiveness to all people just *as* God in Christ freely offers forgiveness to all people?

Do you lovingly wait for repentance before you forgive just *as* God in Christ required repentance from you? Do you see that repentance is necessary for the

<sup>29</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 2*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust), pg. 881

<sup>30</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer says here: "It is only when God's wrath and vengeance are hanging over the heads of one's enemies that something of what it means to love and forgive them can touch our hearts...when we recognize that those who have offended us will face the vengeance of God, at that point we will begin to feel true love and compassion for them." *Ibid*, pg. 141 ,147

good of those you want to forgive? Do you see that repentance is necessary to rightly reflect God's justice?

Do you pursue reconciliation with those who have sinned against you just *as* God in Christ has been reconciled to you?

What if the person who has sinned against you is *not* repentant? Are you obeying Jesus to love and pray for them *so that* they can be forgiven?<sup>31</sup> Have you put away all all bitterness and wrath and anger towards them in the mean while? **Ephesians 4:31** “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.”

What if the person(s) is engaged in ongoing destructive sin? Citizens just think of the wicked and vile sins our state commits against children. Are you leaving room for the vengeance of the Lord?<sup>32</sup> The Apostle said “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”<sup>20</sup> To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.”<sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (**Romans 12:19-21**). Or have you adopted a revengeful spirit?

Children are you training yourselves ahead of time to forgive those who wrong you? Just like a runner must train for a race, so we must train our spirits to be forgiving. Boys and girls have you been forgiven by the Lord for you sins? Has your guilt been thrown into the sea of forgetfulness, and covered by the blood of Jesus?

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<sup>31</sup> Romans 2:4 “...not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”

<sup>32</sup> 2 Timothy 4:14-15 “Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message.”

Do you have accusing spirit? Does you keep a record of wrongs against your brother or sister, husband or wife, children or parents who have already repented?

Do you see your sins as bad as others, or do you have a self-righteous spirit about your own sins, thinking that it was you not the Lord who has preserved you?

Dear congregation is your life marked by a forgiving or unforgiving spirit?

### 3. Admonitory Use

That brings us to our **third duty**: we must *rebuke* ourselves. If you are a person who says “I just cannot forgive” or “I will not forgive”<sup>33</sup> then you must question whether are you even saved.<sup>34</sup> Being *willing to forgive others* is a test as to whether we will go to Heaven when we die. Jesus said in **Matthew 6:14-15** “...if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, <sup>15</sup>but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” Now two things that Jesus is *not* teaching here. 1) Jesus is *not* teaching that we are saved by works—saved by forgiving others. No amount of forgiving others could ever atone for our sins. We must have Christ crucified, buried, and risen in our place in order to be saved. What Jesus is teaching here is that all who have been truly forgiven—justified through faith alone—have been indwelt over by the Holy Spirit, and they are now marked by a willingness to forgive others. 2) Jesus is *not* teaching that we should automatically forgive others without repentance, but that we as Christians ought to possess a spirit that is willing to forgive anyone. One author puts it like this: “Christians should offer grace to all people. We should wrap up forgiveness as a present and make it available to anyone who will accept, regardless of the offense. But it is not the offense that conditions forgiveness,

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<sup>33</sup> Brauns, pg. 119

<sup>34</sup> Unforgiveness a sign of condemnation (Romans 3:14) and damnation (Matthew 18:32-35).

but the repentant heart. Whether or not they unwrap the present and accept the gift so that forgiveness takes place is up to them.”<sup>35</sup> But if you are not willing to forgive others, how can you say you belong to Jesus Christ? How are you any different than that servant who refused to forgive a debt of \$100 after the king had forgiven him for millions? (**Matthew 18:21-35**). The king said to him “... should you not have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?” Then the king put him in prison until he could pay it all. But that meant hell because the debt was an unpayable debt especially if you have no means to pay it back. As one author said “Saying ‘I cannot or will not forgive,’ is essentially another way of saying, “I am thinking of going to hell.”<sup>36</sup>

So those are our duties. **1)** We must carefully consider the state of every person who has sinned against us. Either their sins have been paid for by Jesus Christ, or they will will pay for their own sins in hell. Both realities should move us to willingly offer forgiveness. **2)** We must examine our own hearts for any areas that we might be resentful or might be keeping a record of wrongs that is contrary to true Christian love. **3)** If we are unwilling to forgive, we must warn and rebuke ourselves, because God says the one who does not forgive, He will not forgive.

### III. The Delight of Forgiveness

#### The story of Chris Carrier<sup>37</sup>

On December 20, 1971, ten year old Chris Carrier was living with his family in Coral Gables, Florida. His school bus dropped him off the last day before Christmas break, and a man approached him. He said his name was ‘Chuck’ and he convinced Chris he was a friend of his fathers and asked if he

<sup>35</sup> Brauns, pg. 147

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 128

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 54 - 59

would like to surprise his dad with surprise party. So Chris got into the car with him. When 'Chuck' kept on driving and driving, Chris became worried because he no longer recognized where he was out, but it was too late. Finally 'Chuck' pulled over in a remote area, went to the back of the vehicle and brought back an ice pick and lit cigarette. He then forced Chris to the ground where he began stabbing him and burning him. A ten-year old boy was no match against the strength of a man. All Chris could do was cry out "Father, forgive him because he doesn't know what he's doing." Finally 'Chuck' put the ice pick down, threw Chris in the car, drove to the Florida Everglades where he shot Chris in the head and hid his bleeding and burned body in the bushes. You can imagine how desperate his parents were when Chris didn't come home from school. By the grace of God, he didn't die. For six days he lay unconscious in those bushes. When he woke he didn't know that Christmas already passed. A hunter found him bloodied and called the police. The bullet had passed through one temple, behind his eyes and out the other temple. He lost vision in his left eye. But the nightmares that terrorized the boy lasted for years. He often slept at the foot of his parent's bed. Though the boy was traumatized in body and soul, he prayed to the Lord for the man who hurt him. And when he was asked what he would do if he could meet the man, he said he would 'jump at the chance.'

Twenty years after his kidnapping, Chris received a call from the police who had originally investigated the crime. A man whom they had suspected of the crime but lacked sufficient evidence had admitted to Chris's kidnapping. His name was David McAllister. He was dying in a nursing home. So Chris, now 30 something years old went. McAllister confessed to Chris that it was him. Christ held his hand and told him that he had forgiven him. When he left, he told McAllister to rest well. McAllister said "I will now." But that was only the first time they met. There were many more meetings. Eventually reconciliation followed. Christ eventually took his own daughters to see the man. He shared the gospel of Jesus Christ with David, and this man professed faith in the Son of God. McAllister later told a CNN reporter that Chris Carrier was the best friend he ever had.

## The best friend you'll ever have

Beloved how could Chris ever forgive such a man? Because Jesus Christ had forgiven Chris's sins. That ten-year old little boy did not earn heaven because he was the victim of a horrifying crime. That ten-year old little boy gained Heaven because Jesus Christ had paid his sin debt on the cross. When Jesus cried out in agony τετέλεσται—"It is finished"—He meant the debt has been paid, the enemy has been defeated, death has been swallowed up, the wrath of God has been propitiated.

My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought! —

My sin, not in part, but the whole,

Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more;

Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord, O my soul!

## The Freedom of a Christian

During the Reformation, Martin Luther discovered the infinite greatness of this Friend of sinners. He imagines the gospel as the story of a great king marrying a prostitute.

"Here, this rich, upstanding bridegroom, Christ, marries this poor, disloyal little prostitute, redeems her from all her evil and adorns her with all his goodness. For now it is impossible for her sins to destroy her, because they have been laid upon Christ and devoured by him. In Christ, her bridegroom, she has her righteousness, which she can enjoy as her very own property. And with confidence she can set this righteousness over against all of her sins and in opposition to death and hell and can say, "Sure, I have sinned, but my Christ, in whom I trust, has not sinned. All that is his is mine and all that is

mine is his." As it says in **Song of Solomon 2:16**: "My beloved is mine, and I am his."<sup>38</sup>

That's *why* Chris is forgiven, because Jesus is the best friend he ever had. And that's why Chris could forgive a man like David McAllister. Beloved this is why you can forgive, because Jesus Christ has shown Himself to be the best friend your soul ever had.

### **Final exhortation**

So I urge you, I exhort you in the name of Christ, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."<sup>39</sup> Put away your resentment, put away any record of wrongs that you are holding against others.<sup>40</sup> That's what Christian love does. Because that's what the love of Christ has done for you.

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<sup>38</sup> The Freedom of a Christian 1520: The Annotated Luther Study Edition, translated by Timothy J. Wengert, copyright © 2016 Fortress Press. pg. 17.

<sup>39</sup> Ephesians 4:32

<sup>40</sup> Consider the four promises of forgiveness that we ought to promise when others repent of their sin: 1. I will not dwell on this incident. 2. I will not bring this incident up and use it against you. 3. I will not talk to others about this incident. 4. I will not allow this incident to stand between us or hinder our personal relationship. (cf. Matthew 6:12; 1 Corinthians 13:5; Ephesians 4:32) Source: Ken Sande's *The Peacemakers*