

## **FORGIVE AS YOU'VE BEEN FORGIVEN—AND PUT ON LOVE ABOVE ALL ELSE (COLOSSIANS 3:13b-14)**

Please take your Bibles and turn once again to Colossians 3. Preaching through a book—or letter—of the Bible has its “pros” and **challenges**. **Why** didn't I say “**cons**”? Because “cons” refers to the **negative** aspects—or **disadvantages**—of doing something—and there are no “negative” aspects (or disadvantages) of preaching verse by verse through God's Word!

But there are **challenges!** **One** challenge is, “**how do** the thoughts fit together and build upon one another?” **Why** is that important? Because God didn't have Paul just **randomly write** about things! There is a **reason** God had Paul write it—and there is a **logical, progression of thought** behind it! And that “progression of thought” isn't always to see!

**A second** challenge is this: “**How much time** should I spend on **each verse**—or in some cases, **a word?**” For example, last week I spent a little extra time on the word “**elect.**” **Why?** Because the word appears 23 times in the NT—and in 12 of the NT books! More importantly than that, however, is that the **concept of election** is a difficult—and often controversial—one, and part of my responsibility as your pastor is to help you **think through**—and **wrestle with**—things that are difficult and controversial! Thus, the reason for last week's detour!

One **more example** of how **much time** to spend on a verse. Notice what it says about wives and husbands in verses 18-19. Do I cover them **both** in one sermon—or spend **six Sundays** on wives being submissive—and **one Sunday** on husbands loving their wives? Be here in a few weeks and **you'll find out!**

Here are a few other things **I try to keep in mind** as I pray for God's direction regarding what **to say**—and **what not to say**. 1) I'm not writing a **commentary!** 2) The Bible doesn't **set a time-limit** on how long it should take to preach through a book! 3) The topics God had Paul write to the Colossians about **are important**—especially when you consider many of them are repeated in the book of Ephesians!

One last thought before I read the text: If sermon intros are like the **porch of a house**, you sure have your fair share of **funny looking porches!** Please follow along as I read Colossians 3:12-14. This morning—as you already know from your outline—we are going to be focusing on **forgiving one** another (vs 13b)—and “**putting on**” love above all else as stated in verse 14.

Last week, we noted from verse 12 that God's children are to have a new dress code. We are commanded—by God—to put on “**bowels of mercies**” (which means a heart of compassion) ...and “**kindness**” ...and “**humbleness of mind**” (humility)...and “**meekness**” (which means gentleness, not weakness) and “**long-suffering**” (which means patience, the quality of being “long-tempered”).

What will it look like if we are wearing those things? Verse 13 gives us **two** ways.

**First**, we will be “forbearing one another.” That means we will **bear long with...put up with...tolerate** one another—regardless of the differences that make us unique.

You heard it last week, but here it is again—get over the mindset that **the world** would be a better place if everyone was **just like you!** And on the spiritual side, be as forbearing **with one another** as God is with you!

**Second**, we are to be “forgiving one another.” **Why?** Because Christ forgave you! And—as stated last week—if a **perfect Being**—that you have sinned against **countless times** and in **countless ways**—can forgive **you**, shouldn't you be able to forgive a **fellow sinner?**

### **1. Forgive as you've been forgiven**

First, let's consider... A. The necessity of forgiveness

Why is it necessary to be “forgiving one another” as it says here in verse 13?

Because we *sin* against one another! We are *sinful beings* with a *sinful nature* that has *sinful desires* and when *we act upon* those sinful desires, we often *say things* that hurt others—or *do things* that hurt others—especially those we are closest to!

Simply put, forgiveness is necessary because the people around you *aren't perfect*—and *neither are you!*

### B. The meaning of forgiveness

**What** does it *mean* to forgive someone? Does it mean *forgetting* what they've done to hurt us?

Does it *require repentance* on the part of the person who has sinned against us—or are we supposed to forgive *whether they ask* for forgiveness or not? How *many times* do we forgive someone of the same thing? Are there sins that we don't *have to forgive*? And what happens if we are *unwilling* to forgive someone?

We don't have time to look at all of these, but we do need to understand what forgiveness *means* in order for us to *do it!* Not surprisingly, Jesus—the greatest Forgiver—taught *much* about forgiveness—and largely through *parables*. We are going to look at one of the *more familiar ones* and I want to share with you some truths CCEF executive director Timothy S. Lane points out in a booklet entitled *Forgiving Others*.

Please take your Bibles and turn to Matthew 18, beginning with verses 21-22.

**1) How many times do we forgive?** Easy answer, right? **490!** So in order to accurately keep track, we need to buy a bunch of those “click counters”—and put people's names on them—and carry them around with us so we can “click it” every time someone sins against us, right? **Of course not!** The point is obvious—we are **not to keep track** of how many times we forgive someone!

**2) What does forgiveness mean?** We have the answer to that question here in this passage as well. Notice what it says in verses 23-27. **What** is forgiveness? It is an **act of compassion** whereby we **willfully choose** to cancel—to release someone—from the debt they owe us.

**Dr. Timothy Lane** puts it like this: “When there is a debt, *someone* must pay. Either **the one who owes** must pay it back, or **the one who is owed** must absorb the loss. Forgiveness requires something similar: either the one **who has sinned** must make amends or the one who **has been sinned against** must bear the pain and loss himself. The offense can't be minimized or ignored.” (*Forgiving Others*, pg 6; emphasis mine)

**Dr. Lane** then goes on to say that when you forgive someone—and cancel their debt by absorbing the cost of the sin committed against you—you make a **three-fold promise**:

- a) “I will not bring up this offense again or use it against you.”
- b) “I will not bring it up to others in gossip, or malign you because of it.”
- c) “I will not bring it up to myself and dwell on this offense.”

And this “not bringing it up to ourselves”—and not “dwelling upon it”—brings us to another truth:

**3) Forgiveness is both an event and a process.** What do I mean by that? When we say to someone, “I forgive you,” that is an **event**. But we are sinful—and sometimes **hang onto** the hurt! And because of our hurt, we sometimes want to **put back on** the offender the debt we previously cancelled! So we have to **work on** maintaining a forgiving spirit (**a process**)—even after we have forgiven someone (**an event**).

**4) Does forgiving mean forgetting?** We often hear that, don't we? But is that a **Biblical** concept?

--**Jeremiah 31:34b** “...and I will **remember** their sin no more.”

--**Hebrews 10:17** “And their sins and iniquities will I **remember** no more.”

Does “remembering no more” mean to **forget**? In other words, do these verses mean that God is **unable to recall** something? Not sure about you, but it seems to me if God was **unable to recall** something, He wouldn't be perfect! The word **remember** here means to **actively—and purposely**—“be mindful of something.” It means to **intentionally recall** in our minds.

So the idea is not that God has **lost it** in His memory—He simply **chooses not to bring it up or dwell on** it. And the same is true for us! We cannot “hit a switch” to **delete things** from our mind like we can from a computer! But...we can **choose not to purposely recall to our minds** what someone has done to us!

Much more could obviously be said, but let's consider now... C. The model of forgiveness

Who is the **model** of forgiveness? Jesus is, right? Colossians 3:13 says, “even as Christ forgave you...” So if we are going to forgive as Christ forgave, we need to think about what that **means**. We actually have in this parable a couple of truths about Jesus’ forgiveness.

**1) Forgiveness is undeserved. Why** did the master in this parable forgive the man? Notice again verse 27 “Then the lord of that servant was **moved with compassion...**” The king forgave because he **was merciful**—not because the person who owed him **deserved** to be forgiven!

Does God forgive **you** because you **deserve to be** forgiven? No; **none of us deserves** forgiveness from God! And since we are given **undeserved forgiveness** from God, we need to **be like God** and forgive people who sin against us—even **when they don’t deserve it!**

It is an **act of compassion** from the **forgiver**—**not a reward** that is deserved **by the offender!**

**2) Forgiveness is free to the forgiven—but not to the forgiver!**

What did this man **owe** the king? Verse 24 says “ten thousand talents”—which would be in the millions of dollars in today’s money! What did it **cost him** to be forgiven? **Nothing!**

What did it cost **the king**? He had to “eat”—he had to “take on the chin”—the loss of millions of dollars that would never be recovered!

But for **us to be forgiven**, it cost Jesus **His very life!** God Himself—in the person of Jesus—**paid the debt we owed by dying the death we deserved!** And it was no **ordinary death!** We must not forget that God’s **anger** and **hatred** and **wrath against sin** was poured out on Jesus! **Why** did God do that? Because He hates sin—but loves sinners—and that was the way He could **justly forgive** them. No wonder **Charles Wesley** wrote: “Amazing love! How can it be that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?”

Although not found in this passage, here’s one more we need to remember:

**3) Jesus had a forgiving spirit—before there was repentance!**

How do we know that? **Luke 23:34a** “Then said Jesus, Father, **forgive them**; for they know not what they do...” Does that mean everyone involved in the **literal, physical act** of nailing Jesus to the cross will **be in heaven? Obviously not!** But it does mean this: **His death** paid for **their sin**—and He was **ready and willing** to forgive—**if they repented.**

What about us? Do we have a spirit that **longs to forgive?** God has that **kind of heart**—and we need to as well! **Neh 9:17b** “...but thou art a God **ready to pardon**, gracious and **merciful**, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not.”

**Ps 86:5** “For thou, Lord, art good, and **ready to forgive**; and **plenteous in mercy** unto all them that call upon thee.” **Isaiah 55:7** “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will **have mercy** upon him; and to our God, for He will **abundantly pardon.**”

**Micah 7:18** “Who is a God like unto thee, **that pardoneth iniquity**, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because **He delighteth in mercy.**”

Aren’t you glad God is ready to **pardon...**and ready to **forgive...**and **delights in mercy?**

Are you like that? That is what it means to **forgive others** as Christ forgave you!

Let’s turn back now to where we started in Colossians 3; notice what it says in verse 14.

Here we see that we are to... **2. Put on love above all these things**

**A. The priority of love**

**Vs 14.** “And **above all these things** put on charity...” Above **what** things? All the other virtues listed in verses 12 and 13! If we stick with the **clothing** metaphor, it would be the one **on the outside** that covers all the rest. If we go with **a list**, it would be at **the top!** Another verse that speaks of the **priority** of love is at the end of I Corinthians 13—a chapter we often call “the love chapter.” **I Corinthians 13:13** “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but **the greatest of these is charity.**”

**Charity**, of course, is the old English word for **love**. It comes from the Greek word “ah-GAH-pay” which—as mentioned last week—is the **highest form** of love in the Greek language. It is used of **God’s love for us** which is a voluntary, “covenant-loyal love that seeks the true good of another regardless of merit or cost.” (Topical Lexicon in Biblehub.com).

**Steven Cole** defined it like this: “Love is a self-sacrificing, caring commitment which shows itself in seeking the highest good of the one loved.” We’ll talk about what that **looks like** in a little bit, but next let’s consider...

### B. The power of love

Notice what Paul writes about love in the end of vs 14 “which is the bond of perfectness.” What does it mean that love is “the bond of perfectness”? The word “bond” in this verse refers to something that **binds things together**. It comes from the Greek word that is translated “bands” in Colossians 2:19. What holds the **joints** of a body together? **Ligaments**, right?

So love is the band—the bond—that holds things together. **What** is held together with love? Some suggest love is what holds all **the other virtues** together. I lean toward it referring to the **body of Christ**—meaning believers in the family of God! Love **for God**—and love **for one another**—is what binds God’s children together!

**What kind** of bond is love? “The bond of perfectness.” “Perfectness” here does **not mean** sinlessness. It means “completeness; maturity.” In Ephesians 4, Paul talks about **the growth** of the members in the body, **the goal** being that **every member** of the body becomes **more and more like Christ!**

--Ephesians 4:15 “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:” We need to speak the truth—in love—so that each of us “grows up” and becomes more like Christ.

--Ephesians 4:16b “...maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.” The body of Christ—the family of believers—**grows in Christ-likeness** as we grow in love for one another.

--And let’s not forget what **Jesus Himself says** about this very thing in **John 13:35** “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye **have love one to another.**”

So love is the bond that binds us perfectly—and love is bond that leads us to maturity!

Lastly, let’s consider... C. The practice of love

**What will love** toward fellow believers **look like?** There are undoubtedly more, but here are **ten** ways we can demonstrate love to one another.

**1) Help with physical needs.** John 3:17 “But whoso hath this world's good, and **seeth his brother have need**, and **shutteth up his bowels of compassion** from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” (Also, Ja 2:15-16)

**2) Do “good” when we have the opportunity.** Galatians 6:10 “As we have therefore opportunity, let us **do good unto all men**, especially unto them who are of the **household of faith.**”

**3) Bear one another’s burdens.** Galatians 6:3 “**Bear ye one another's burdens**, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”  
--I Corinthians 12:26 “And whether one member suffer, all the members **suffer with it**; or one member be honoured, all the members **rejoice with it.**” (Also, Romans 12:15; 15:1)

**4) Warn one another about sin!** Hebrews 3:12-13 “Take heed, **brethren**, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But **exhort one another daily**, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”

**5) “Stir up” one another to love and to good works.** Hebrews 10:24 “And let us **consider one another** to provoke [stir up] unto love and to good works:”

**6) Speak that which is edifying.** Ephesians 4:29 “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is **good to the use of edifying**, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.” (Also, Rom 14:19)

**7) Esteem others better than ourselves.** Philippians 2:3 “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let **each esteem other better than themselves.**” (Also, Romans 12:10)

**8) Restore those overtaken in sin.** Galatians 6:1 “Brethren, if a man be **overtaken in a fault**, ye which are spiritual, **restore such an one** in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” (Also, James 5:19-20).

**9) Don’t put a stumbling block in your brother’s way!** Romans 14:13 “Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that **no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall** in his brother's way.” (Also, I Corinthians 8:13; I Corinthians 10:32-33)

**What** does that mean? That means if a fellow believer has an area of their life that they are especially tempted to sin, **don’t you be the one** that puts the temptation in front of them!

**10) Pray for one another.** Ephesians 6:18 “**Praying always with all prayer** and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication **for all saints**; (Also, James 5:16)

Anybody find anything they need to be working on? We **all did**, right?

--But let's do more than **just agree** with God that we need to be more forgiving and more loving!

--Let's be **doers** of the word and **not hearers** only!

So what would God have us do in light of what we've heard this morning?

1. First, have you been forgiven **by God**? David captures well the blessing of forgiveness in Psalm 32:1-2  
“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity...”

How is it that an absolutely holy God can release us from the penalty of our sins?

--By taking the penalty that we deserved and dying in our place!

--**Why** did He do that? Because we **deserve** it?

--No; because **He loves us** and was moved with compassion!

--Forgiveness is a gift—paid for by Jesus—that must be personally received by us.

So the first thing God wants us to do is receive Jesus as our Savior so we can be forgiven!

2. Second, how forgiving are you? If you are a child of God, you have been forgiven **much!** Do you extend that same forgiveness to others? God forgave you and you didn't deserve it! We need to forgive others in the same way!

3. Third, do you love fellow believers? Love is to be our badge—our trademark—the thing that identifies us as a true child of God.

Once again, I would encourage you to go through this list...and look up the verses...and ask God to search you and show you what you should be working on.