

Jason Upchurch - Ephesians 4:32 - Put Off, Renew, Put On - Forgiveness Part 4

I mentioned last week that I wanted to spend some time this morning on the issue of forgiveness. Here in Ephesians 4, this put off, renew your mind and put on has dominated the chapter and I've intentionally slowed down to work through this section. This is a huge part of the Christian gospel for how we overcome sin in our lives.

By the way, we're not done. Paul is going to spend a lot of chapter 5 on this exact same principle. It really is hard to overstate how huge this concept of put off, renew, put on is in every area of our lives.

But I wanted to stop and spend some time on forgiveness. This is such a huge component of the Christian life that we need to soak this in.

Big picture: Forgiven people will forgive people.

If you have been forgiven of your sins through faith in Jesus, the most obvious way that you show that is through forgiving other people who sin against you.

I want to look at this in 3 sections.

1) Christians are forgiven sinners. Read 32

Let's unpack this little section here. I don't think it's an understatement to say that the greatest need of any human is God's forgiveness.

Rom 3:23: For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Rom 6:23: The wages of sin is death. Not just physical death but eternal damnation.

I don't know if you've seen but Kirk Cameron recently came out saying that he denies that hell is an eternal conscious torment. He believes in what is called annihilationism. That at some point after judgment we are just blinked out of existence. This is an old heresy that is most often believed by Seventh Day Adventists. And usually the argument is that God is too loving to torment people forever in hell. That's cruel and unusual punishment.

The problem is that that's what the Bible clearly teaches. The lake of fire never ends, the worm of hell does not die, the Rich man is forever in flame in Luke 16. **Rev 14:9-11** says the smoke of the torment of those in hell goes up forever and ever. An infinitely holy God requires infinite punishment from rebellious sinners. The threat of eternal punishment is given in contrast to the promise of eternal life. Forever life.

That's what we all face.

Acts 17:30-31: The times of ignorance God has overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man who he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance by raising him from the dead.

What's Paul saying? He's saying you better repent and beg God for mercy because one day all your deeds, your entire life will be evaluated by the righteous God. Every thought, every action, every careless word, every secret thing you've ever done in darkness will be judged by a man whom God appointed. Who's the man? Jesus.

How do we know that's true? How does Paul say God made it clear? Because God raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus's resurrection is proof that Jesus will judge.

Jesus himself says that all authority to judge has been handed over to him by the Father. That's a pretty amazing statement. Imagine someone coming to you and saying "I'm going to be the one to judge everyone

who has ever lived." Good luck. How does one man judge billions? The only way is that that man is also divine. So the Father has entrusted all judgment to the divine Son of God.

And it's not going to be pretty because we all know what lurks in our heart.

James adds to that that if you fail at one point in the Law then you fail the whole thing. You ever seen those videos where people set up tens of thousands of dominos? They've got these elaborate layouts, with domino buildings and pictures and little tricks and stuff? Sometimes they set it off and it takes minutes to fall. But eventually it all goes down. That's like the Law. You violate a command here, you might as well just knock them all down because it was God who set them all up.

But we haven't just failed once, have we? We've failed tens of thousands of times. Imagine there was a tally of all the sins we committed.

Have you ever seen Thomas Massie? He's a representative from Kentucky and he wears this little digital debt meter thing on his suits. He made it to match to the current US debt. So while he's standing there talking to you this little number just keeps climbing for all to see.

Imagine we had one of those pinned to us, but instead of the national debt it was our sins being counted. Like every time we sin the little counter just keeps going up and up and up. Well, there's a sense in which that is real for all people.

Turn to Colossians 2 for a moment. Watch this. **Read 13-15**

We had so many sins we were dead. That's how bad it was. How did God make us alive? **Read 13**

He made us alive through forgiveness. That little meter counting up all of our sins is cleared the moment we're saved. The meter was reset back to zero. And now every time we sin there's just this little blip where's it's like it's almost going to start counting, but it turns back zero every time.

Paul actually gives us a graphic way of thinking about it. **Read 14**

Every sin we've ever committed has been recorded. It's a sin debt. Logged by God, recorded for all time. What it is, how we committed it, the fallout. And when someone comes to faith in Jesus what happens is that God proverbially nails that entire record of debt to Jesus's cross. It's as though God is saying, I'm going to put that debt onto Jesus. And so our debt to God for the sins we've committed is cancelled.

He cancelled our record of debt. Beloved, that's forgiveness. If you're in Christ that's what God has done for you. All your sins placed on Jesus and Jesus suffered for them all. God treated Jesus as though he committed our sins, and he treats us as though we are his perfectly righteous son.

Peter says in **Acts 3:19** that through faith in Jesus our sins have been blotted out. You know what it means to blot out? In ancient times they had pens but the ink they used didn't penetrate into the parchment. Our ink soaks into paper - theirs didn't. It just sort of dried on the surface. So you could either take a small knife scratch off the ink or you could take a wet sponge and wipe it off. And if you did the sponge technique there was actually no way to tell that there was ever anything written.

So when a debt was paid back to the bank it was blotted out - it was wiped away never to be recorded again.

That's our sins through faith in Jesus. Wiped away. Gone forever. Hallelujah, what a Savior.

And not only is our sin debt at zero, God has imputed to us all the righteousness - the goodness of Jesus - to our account. Christians are forgiven sinners.

2) Forgiveness isn't simple.

This forgiveness that God has given to us is the model for how we are to forgive other people. But because sin is so severe in the world, we have to understand that forgiveness is more than just saying "I forgive you."

3 Common Misconceptions:

A) Forgiveness equals no consequences. A lot of people think that if someone is forgiven then there are no consequences at all for the sin. Not true. It's not true with God and it's not true with us when we forgive.

Turn to 2 Samuel 12. This is the aftermath of David and Bathsheba. Remember David slept with Bathsheba, killed her husband. Nathan the prophet confronted him with a dam isn't sort of parable. And David confessed and repented. I just want to get to the confession and repentance.

Sin often has earthly consequences. You destroy your brother's Lego creation, you need to help build it again. You cause your family to be late for that important meeting again, you should take ownership of that and change. You commit adultery with someone, your spouse is going to want to know where you are more often.

We see this with David. **Read 7-15**

Holy moly. David's sin is forgiven, but there are real devastating consequences for his actions aren't there? The first consequence is that the sword will never depart from David's house. And if you've read 2 Samuel recently you know that his reign was a bloodbath in his own household.

And second, the child dies. And the child specifically because of David's sin.

Just because we repent, does not mean God takes away consequences.

Sexual sin can carry a lot of earthly consequences. Deep seated bitterness in a marriage can take a long time to unravel. Financial sins we commit against others can effect us for a long time. If you lie to someone and they catch you in the lie, don't be shocked if that person has a hard time believing you in the future.

If you're the one forgiving others, you should be working against bitterness, but there's often reasonable expectations of conduct in light of forgiveness.

If you're the one receiving forgiveness, **2 Cor 7** says you should be zealous to clear your name which means you're going to go above and beyond what is needed to show you're not sinning in the same way.

Misconception B) We can forgive without the other person asking for forgiveness. No; forgiveness is by definition a transaction - meaning they have to ask for it to get it.

I remember when we were first married I forgot to deposit my paycheck and I got hit with a bunch of NSF charges. Unfortunately I wrote like 10 checks so I got hit with 10 \$32 charges. Now, I had signed a contract that if I didn't have the money they would clear the check but fine me for it. But I thought I'd go in, show them the mistake and see if they'd cancel the fees. I was asking for forgiveness. I had my check, and I had been a loyal customer.

But I actually had to go in, hat in hand, and ask the branch manager if he would forgive the charges. I was newly married and poor. I was at his mercy. And he forgave the charges. There was a transaction that occurred.

True forgiveness is transactional. It is an acknowledgement that we sinned and we owe the other person a debt.

Remember the Lord's Prayer? Forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors. There's a relational debt that sin creates. And you have to go ask for forgiveness. Not just say "I'm sorry" - that's not enough. If I go to the bank and say "I'm sorry" you know what they're going to say? That's okay, please pay the additional \$320.

What do I have to choke out? Will you forgive me? Now, the decision rests entirely on the person offended. And now their decision is between them and God. I've done all I can do.

And when they say “I forgive you” then our ledger is clear. We’re done here.

But this is why I’m very suspect of high profile situations - we see it with almost every mass shooting or high profile shooting - where someone pronounces that they forgive the murderer. And I think there’s a sense in which it’s right that we long to forgive. But I don’t think this is technical forgiveness.

First of all, has the murderer even asked for forgiveness? Has he even confessed to the crime and pled guilty? Has he expressed any sorrow or remorse? Has he done anything to make it right? You can’t forgive someone who doesn’t want it or ask for it.

When someone offends us, we can want reconciliation, we can want them to repent and even show them grace. But true Christian forgiveness is a 2 party transaction.

Turn to Luke 17:1-4 for a minute. This concept of transactional forgiveness is found in Scripture in many places. This is really the chief of them. And it’s simple and the condition here is so obvious it’s easy to miss.

Read 1-4

Why do we rebuke our brothers when they sin? Because we want them to repent and we want the relationship restored. If they don’t repent, that’s when we begin the process of church discipline. But if they repent then we forgive them. It’s an if-then transaction. And by the way, the point here is that we should continually forgive repentant sinners.

There may come a time when we realize the person isn’t actually repentant. That maybe they’re saying they’re repentant but they aren’t really. We might need to take different actions.

I mean, imagine 2 scenarios. Person 1 comes to your home and steals \$200 off your table. You caught, confront them, you have 100% proof and they don’t admit it. They deny it, or blame someone else - but you saw it. How are you going to treat that person? You say “I forgive you” and they say “for what? I didn’t do anything wrong.”

There can’t be actual forgiveness there - even if you want it - because there’s no confession and no repentance. There’s going to be a broken relationship. In fact it’s probably worse if they deny it.

Same scenario but Person 2 admits it. “You’re right, I did steal the money. I’m so sorry I’ll pay you back right now. Will you please forgive me?” Absolutely.

Now, I think we all know instinctively that we’ll treat these 2 people differently. The second person you might let back into your home, maybe even be generous to them.

But the first person? Probably not. As Christians we should want them to repent, we should want to be reconciled, and have restored fellowship and truth.

The language we should use is that we “stand ready to forgive and ready to have a relationship restored.” But until that time they confess and repent, it’s broken.

In **Matthew 18** if the sinner doesn’t repent we eventually treat them as a gentile and tax collector. What does that mean? It means we treat them as someone outside the faith. We are using their unrepentance as evidence that they’re not Christian.

In the Law - **Num 5:6-7** - the person guilty of sin has to confess their sin, make restitution for their sin and then offer a sacrifice for atonement. **Lev. 6:2-7** says the same thing.

There’s no possibility of being reconciled and restored if there’s no confession, apology, repentance and restitution.

This can feel wild because we've been told to just unconditionally forgive people for all kinds of things for all our lives.

There are some sins that we just cover over - love covers a multitude of sins. Sometimes there's no clear way to make something right between people and we just take it on the chin. Or the cheek. But for most part if there's to be true forgiveness and reconciliation it has to be transactional by both parties.

And we know this because this is how salvation works.

Salvation is a transaction. If you want God's forgiveness you need to ask him for it. We saw this last week with the Pharisee and the tax collector. The tax collector says "Forgive me, a sinner." And he goes home justified.

Romans 10:9-10: Because if you confess - if - that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart God raised him from the dead, [then] you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with mouth one confesses and is saved.

If you don't have faith, you are not saved. If you refuse to confess Jesus you are not saved.

1 John 1:8-10 If - again, this is a condition - if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins - if - he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanses from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned we make him a liar and his word is not in us.

This sounds so elementary but let me not overlook it: all you have to do for God to forgive you, is just ask.

Romans 10:13: Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Lord, forgive me. Forgive me through Jesus. Forgive me not because I deserve it, but because you said if I believe the risen Jesus is Lord you will forgive me.

And he does, fully and freely.

Misconception C) Forgiving should be simple.

When our kids sin against each other, we we make them apologize. I'm sorry for specific sin, that was wrong, will you forgive me? It acknowledges the action, it acknowledges the wrongness and then seeks reconciliation. And then we make them try to fix whatever went wrong.

That doesn't always work out in life. You might disagree with a sister that they sinned against you. You confront, they don't accept that what they did was sin. "They were just telling the truth."

Or maybe they do confess, but the apology is weak. Or they don't phrase the situation exactly as you'd want. Or they fail again and again. Jesus said if they fail 7 times in a day. When I was in high school trying to quit swearing 7 times in a day was good day when I started out. I only dropped 7 f-bombs, awesome. Did you see what I was saying last month?

The reality of sin is that it's all messy. No one is getting out of life unscathed. I've had conversations with brothers where I confront them and they don't think they sinned. Now, we've got a choice. Do I just cover it? Or do I go through the discipline process? Are we really going to discipline someone out of our church for not fully agreeing with a charge of sin? Probably not. We have to weigh these things.

Asking for forgiveness is never going to be perfect. Seeking to forgive someone is never going to be perfect. I mean, even though we need to ask the Lord for forgiveness do we perfectly repent every time? Do we actually confess every single sin we commit? No. We trust he is merciful.

We need to be that too. We need to give room that although we should try our best, it's never going to be perfect.

Okay, so we've seen how God forgive us - that's our model.

We've seen 3 misconceptions about human forgiveness: forgiveness may include consequences. Second, forgiveness is transactional. Third, it's never perfect.

3) Let's talk about the 3rd point. We're commanded to forgive. Paul said in **Ephesians 4:32:** forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you.

What's that look like? **Turn to Matt. 18.** This is right after the church discipline process. If someone is in sin, you go to them 1 on 1. If they repent, great. If not get 1 or 2 others to establish the charges. If they repent, great. If not tell it to the church. If they still don't repent, treat them as a tax collector or gentile. You disfellowship them.

How often should we do that? How many chances do we give someone? **Read 21-22**

We give them 77 chances. That's all. No. The idea isn't that we're keeping a tally. Seven in Hebrew thought was perfect. We are commanded to forgive perfectly and repeatedly. Here's the parable. **Read**

So the king has a guy, the guy owes him 10,000 talents. A talent is 75lbs. We're not told of what, but let's assume gold. I asked AI how much this would be given today's gold prices. Grok said \$46 billion.

So imagine a guy borrowing \$46 billion from a king and wasting it all. It's gone. The guy and his family are going to get hauled off. And what does he do? He begs for mercy. What's he get? Mercy.

What is the parable talking about so far? It's us and God, isn't it? We sinned against God an incomprehensible amount. And God, in incredible mercy, has forgiven us all \$46 billion dollars. This is 15 dump trucks full of gold - forgiven.

Second part is the guy who was just forgiven comes across a man who owes him 100 denarii. What's that? It's important to know the conversion amounts here. A denarii was 1 day's wage. So for round numbers, it's a third of annual income: about \$20k.

If someone owed you \$20k, would be upset? I would. That's not nothing. That's a fair amount of money.

The debtor begs for forgiveness just like the other guy begged. "Forgive me, I'll pay it all back." He's repentant! Both are begging to have their debts forgiven. Both are willing to make it right. Both are asking for a chance.

What's the rub? The rub is that the man who was just forgiven billions throws that guy in prison. You would think a man who was forgiven all that would be able to find it in himself to forgive others, even if it's large.

See, the deal is people are going to really hurt in life. The damage we feel is often large. It's not chump change. And Jesus doesn't pretend that it is. What he does do is give perspective. The reason we can forgive, is because we have been forgiven an incomprehensible amount.

Let me give you some practical pointers on forgiveness if you're struggling.

1 - If you've committed to forgiving someone, don't bring the issue up ever again. There may be a few slight exceptions to this, but for the most part it has been blotted out make sure it stays blotted out.

2 - Don't bring it up to other people.

3 - Forgiveness is a choice. It's not a feeling. It's a choice you make when you first forgive someone. But it's also a commitment to a bunch of other choices.

If I forgive someone \$20k, then I'm going to have to tighten the belt in other places. We're eating a little slimmer, we're not getting the vacation this year. You get the idea. Relationally, it takes a toll as well. When you forgive you're accepting all downstream issues.

4) This also means if you need to ask for forgiveness, you need to be willing to make whatever you did as right as possible. It's not always possible. If you commit adultery, it's hard to make that right. If you destroyed someone's heirloom, it's not coming back together. You say something harsh to your spouse, it's hard to forget those words sometimes.

Your repentance should be on the same scale as your sin.

I truly think that when we forgive one another, it is one of the clearest testimony's of the grace of God in forgiving us. And it's also the way in which we act most like God, who has forgiven us all our sins.

Pray