

Stirring Up Love Through Forgiveness Colossians 3:12-15 (ESV)

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It's rather remarkable that the eternal God ties His glory in this world to His church; a group of flawed and feeble people. God particularly ties His glory to the manner in which His people relate to one another; the manner in which we love one another. Specifically, love one another in the context of the local church. Jesus told His disciples this is how the world is going to know that you're My disciples. It's that you have love for one another. (John 13:35) The Apostle Paul, in summing up the whole goal of all of his instruction to the church would write, "But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." (1 Timothy 1:5 NAS95) You see, if the local church is weak in love for one another, God will be seen as weak and small by the world. On the other hand, if the local church is strong in love for one another, God's greatness will be on full display as He designed.

Let's think about this more personally. What happens when children grow up in Christian families where their little ears hear their parents speak gossip, criticism, slander and bitterness against fellow church members? Here is what often happens. Those children hear that the Gospel is not true. Despite all the verbal claims of parents that it is true, the children get the message that the Gospel is not true. God is not great and Jesus does not really offer the power of reconciliation.

You see, if the Gospel doesn't work in Christian marriages and homes and inside the church of Jesus, then how can we communicate that God is greater than our sin? That God has delivered us from this domain of darkness that is filled with brokenness and conflict and anger and wrath and clamor, and He's transferred us into the kingdom of the Son whom He loves; a kingdom filled with peace and righteousness and harmony.

A lack of love in the church is a much greater loss than two people who make each other miserable. It's a loss of the whole church in communicating God to one another and to a world that doesn't know who He is. So, it's for the sake of God's glory in this world that we are right to care about how we love one another; to stir one another up to love and to good deeds. We're right to care about the quality of relationships in our own local church. We talked about this last week in Hebrews 10. God says

Hebrews 10:24-25 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

We're supposed to consider each person in our own local church. And as we consider people, we consider how we can stir one another up, stimulate, motivate one another, spur one another on to love and to good deeds. To loving relationship and then Gospel ministry together.

As I look at you, I see my spiritual family. It's a joy to live life with you, to stir you up to love and to good deeds, and likewise, to be stirred up by you. This morning, there are several of you

who have stirred me up to love and to good deeds just by your warmth and by your love. What a privilege to assemble together to give praise to God and to care for one another! It's a privilege that is common to us, and yet it is so rich and we're so blessed to have this spiritual family that God Himself has created and set us in. The reciprocal relationship of encouraging and being encouraged is really the way God designed His local church to be. And we do this "all the more as we see the Day drawing near." Our time to advance God's glory together in this present age is drawing to a close. It's so very short. The certainty of that future day when we will stand before God to give an account of our lives together is absolutely certain. And it's going to happen before we could even know it.

Jonathan Edwards preached a great sermon on 2 Corinthians 1:14 that stirred up my mind and my heart, and brought me to a clear understanding of what that Day is going to be like for us as a local church. Let me read 2 Corinthians 1:14 for you. Paul says

2 Corinthians 1:14 on the day of our Lord Jesus you will boast of us as we will boast of you.

This is the day of the Judgment Seat of Christ, when God's people are gathered together on that great day to give an account to God and also then to receive rewards for faithfulness. Paul says, "you will boast of us." He's talking about his apostolic team, the spiritual leaders in the church. Paul anticipates that he will be present on that day with Jesus, and with that particular local church of which he was united by virtue of his planting that church and being an apostle for that church. And he anticipates that the members of this local church will also be standing together. So it's not just all mankind generally, but he's anticipating specifically that this local church will be together with Jesus Christ, giving account together with him as a local church, and with him as a spiritual leader. That's the picture that Paul is drawing for us.

In other words, Paul is saying don't think of the day of Jesus Christ as you opening up the door and entering a private room with Jesus, and Jesus talking to you about what you did and didn't do. Don't think of it that way because that's not really what's going to happen. You're going to come into this great assembly, and it's specifically the assembly of your own local church together. You're going to look around. You're going to be concerned for one another. You're going to be concerned that one another receives great joy on that day, and you're going to be interested because you're interested in their lives now. You're going to be interested. What's going to happen on that day for this person? As a local church, we together will be bound around Jesus to meet Him as He exercises judgment among His people on that future Day. That's the picture!

And so the writer of Hebrews is saying, "So, in view of that future day that we're going to be together, and we're going to be interested and we're going to be participating on this Day together as a local church, stir up one another to love and to good deeds. Do it now so that on that day, your joy will be greater and more full because of what you see happening in the lives of your brothers and sisters as a result of you stirring them up to love and good deeds. And don't forsake the assembling of yourselves together. If you neglect that, you're not doing anything to prepare for that future certain day together. And then encourage one another all the more. The day is drawing near. The time for this activity is going to be short. And after that Day, there's not going to be any more opportunity. This is the time! This is the day!"

For God's glory and the joy of that future day, we commit ourselves to love one another and to work for one another to help make that future day a glorious one for one another. We want to say to one another, "You will boast of us and we will boast of you." We want to be able to say that. We don't want to say, "You will be ashamed of us and we will be ashamed of you." So he says, "Here's my vision, church," to the church at Corinth. And that's the vision I believe of every shepherd to the local church for which God has granted them service. You will boast of us and we will boast of you.

To be sure, as a local church, we here at Bethany have room to grow in the area of love and good works. We have more abundance from God to pursue. And that's true of every church. It's not just us. But it's true of every church, because here's the truth. We are a people in the process of progress. That's who we are. That's what the Christian life is all about. It's a process of progress. We're pursuing greater Christlikeness. We haven't crossed the finish line yet. We're still running a race. And we're running it not aimlessly, but we're running it with purpose and with meaning and with this goal in mind that we recognize is going to take place on this future day, a day that is drawing near.

So we open up our Bibles this morning to Colossians 3:12-15. God calls us to stir up love in our own church family by forgiving one another when we are wronged. Without forgiveness, love dies. Let's read the text together and be reminded of God's call upon our lives to stir up love in our own local church with a view of that future day. So here's what God says to us.

12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

The main idea we're going to track through those verses is that forgiveness enables us to bring glory to God in our own local church. All glory to God is lost when forgiveness is fumbled. We're going to look at four aspects of forgiveness this morning.

I. The Foundation of Forgiveness: Our New Life in Christ Jesus

What is the root? What is the ground of forgiving one another? We're going to discover that the foundation of forgiveness is our new life in Christ. If we didn't have new life in Christ, there would be no basis upon which we could hope to have forgiveness for one another. So we ask the question: Who is this command "forgive one another" given to? The answer is it's given to God's people who have been given new life in Jesus. This new life changes everything. Notice how this audience is described in the first verse of chapter 3.

Colossians 3:1 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

It describes us as a people who have been raised up to new life with Jesus Christ. And notice again in verses 3 and 4.

Colossians 3:3-4 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Your old life that you used to live that was self-focused and that would have been enslaved to bitterness and resentment and clamor and all those things that anger produces in relationships, now you've been set free. You no longer have that old life that you're living. You've died to those sins and those passions. Your life is now hidden with Christ in God. So your new life is now with Christ. It's hidden. It's glory is not able to be seen quite yet. It will be on that future Day. That life that God has given will be seen for the glorious life that it is.

This command for us to forgive one another is given to a people who have been transformed by God through Jesus Christ. We no longer live life to our own self, chasing after self-glory, self-will, self-direction, self-focus. For us, we say, "For me to live is Christ. That's the whole purpose of my living." And if we capture that, our identity, this new identity that God has given us, then this command to forgive one another makes sense. It's only reasonable because this new life that Christ gives to us is not a life filled with resentment and bitterness. It's a life filled with harmony, unity, peace, love, and joy. That old self-life has died. Our new life is in Christ.

I want you to notice there are three descriptions that Paul gives to this new life in Christ in verse 12.

12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,

Description #1: Chosen Ones

The first description he gives about this new life that we have in Christ is that this new life is marked by being a chosen one. We are a people chosen by God for His blessing. When did He choose us? The answer that Ephesians 1 gives is, before the foundation of this world God chose us. We were chosen to be saints, chosen to be transformed, chosen to be instruments of worship. We were chosen while we were still sinners, while we were still enemies. In other words, God didn't choose us because we had done something kind to God. We were still acting in hostility against God, living our own lives our own way when God said, "I am choosing this one to be part of My family, My chosen race, My holy nation." You are chosen!

Now, God didn't choose us because of our moral character, or because of our personal talents, or because of our influential position, or because of our helpful resources. God chose us freely on the basis of His grace. The cause of His choice of us has nothing to do with us and everything to do with Him and His wisdom and His sovereign freedom. When we have a difficult time forgiving a brother or sister in Christ, we are right to remember that God chose us while we were still enemies so that we might have life. In other words, we didn't deserve forgiveness. And God chose us to be part of His family. He drew us near while we were still hostile, while we were still acting in ways that were totally in rebellion against Him. God chose us in Him. And furthermore,

it's right for us when we think about this topic of forgiveness, to remember that God chose our brother and sister who has offended us. He chose them to be part of the same family.

Description #2: Holy

When God calls us "holy," God doesn't mean that we no longer sin. No, we still do sin. We need to confess our sins daily. But God communicates that we are holy in the sense that He has set us apart for His praise. He has committed us to live our lives wholly devoted to Him. To be bent upward in the direction of our attentions, of our passions, of our affections, and not inward toward ourselves. God chose us in Christ so that we might be instruments of worship. That we might be set apart, devoted to Him. This means that the way we live individually and the way we relate to one another as a church has one goal. That goal is that God would be praised. That applause would rise up to God's name as a result of how we live our lives, how we relate to one another. And as God makes us holy ones, He gives us all the resources that we need in order to fulfill a life of holiness. God always supplies what He commands. God always says, "My grace is sufficient for you, My holy ones, to live a holy, set apart, worshiping, devoted life unto Me."

So we're chosen ones, we're holy, but notice also He says that we are beloved. I like the New International Version. It says you're dearly loved.

Description #3: Dearly Loved

Do you know how precious you are as ones who have been chosen by God, as ones adopted into His family through faith in Jesus? We are now His dearly loved sons and daughters. His affection for us is infinite, unending and unbreakable. We do not forgive one another out of fear of being kicked out of God's family. We forgive one another out of the context of being secure in God's love for us. Out of this great reserve of God's love flowing into us, then we have sufficient means to be able to allow His love to flow outward from us to one another. And that love is a forgiving love. It flowed into us with forgiveness and it flows out of us with forgiveness.

Let me use a feeble human example to share how I think this works in relationship to God saying "You're dearly beloved, so therefore forgive one another." I love my three sons dearly. They are so very precious to me. I would gladly give my life for them. And yet, for as strong as my love is, I recognize that it's not infinite. It's not all-powerful like God's love is. Only God has that kind of strong love. So when God says we're dearly loved, it's much more strong, it's much more zealous, it's much more permanent than any love a father could have for his own children.

In my love for my sons, I care that they would love each other. I really do! It's really important to me! I care that they are in right relationship with each other. I care that they forgive each other when they wrong one another. And they have wronged one another over the course of their lives. Most days, one of my key prayers for them...I pray over them every day. And part of that prayer over each one is, "Lord, please help them to initiate a loving relationship with their brother." They all live in such different places. One is in New Jersey, one is in Texas, one is in Missouri. They all have their own lives. They're all really busy. There are a lot of things happening. And it's easy, out of sight, out of mind, not to connect. So I pray, "Lord, allow them to have the kind

of intentionality in their love relationship where they call one another.” So when I talk to them on the phone, I’ll often say, “Hey! Have you talked to Alexander? Have you talked to Daniel lately? Have you talked to Jackson?” I ask them that question just to spur them on to love and to good deeds inside that family. They’ve known from childhood that their love for one another is important to me. They were taught that from the time they were little.

Now what would happen if one of my sons decided not to forgive some hurt that an offense created in their relationship? And they decided to personally and permanently separate themselves from that particular brother? A number of things would follow from that. I just want to name three of them. First, my heart would be grieved immeasurably. That decision to hold on to resentment would diminish me as a dad. Secondly, that decision to hold onto resentment would not just affect them, but it would destroy a present day community that is valuable. Our whole family would be different. We wouldn’t be able to enjoy the Christmas times and the birthday celebrations, all of the community that we now enjoy. We wouldn’t be able to share one another’s burdens the way we presently do if even just one of them said, “Okay! I’m done. I’m not going to forgive. I’m cutting off relationship.” And third, that decision to refuse to forgive would not affect just this present time, but would negatively impact generations to come. In healthy families, they don’t just impact the joy and the community that they have presently, but it impacts what happens below that as well. So cousins wouldn’t get together with cousins, for instance. And there wouldn’t be that kind of strength that God intended for even physical families to have.

Now, this is a weak human illustration because again, my father’s love is not powerful. It’s not unending. It’s not infinite like the Father’s love for us is. The physical family is not the essential means by which God is given glory. That’s the church. But when we apply those things over to the church, we understand what happens to the heart of the Father when His children refuse to forgive and begin to distance from one another and say, “I’m just not going to deal with this. I’m not going to forgive. We’ll just separate and walk our desperate ways.” What happens to the heart of the Father? The Father’s heart is immeasurable grieved. That action doesn’t just affect those two people. It destroys a present day community that is a valuable community, the whole church. It doesn’t just affect them, but it affects generations to come. There’s a ripple effect of that one action.

I think of the book of Philippians. It’s why the Apostle Paul was so passionate to plead with these two women, Euodia and Syntyche, to get along with each other (Philippians 4:2-3). All these things flow with just two women in the church. In this mighty church, two women decided they were not going to get along with each other. Jesus personally cares that we forgive one another. He says, “You’re My chosen ones, My holy ones, My dearly loved children. Forgive each other for the sake of My name and of all that is good. Forgive one another!” I love how Jesus personally pursues the forgiveness within His family. He does this! If you’ve decided not to forgive and you are a genuine child of God, one indwelt by the Holy Spirit, you won’t be able to do that without the Holy Spirit coming after you.

I’ve shared this story before, but it was such an impact upon me, that I’ll share it again. It happened about 15 years ago. There was a particular offense by a Christian friend that really made me so angry. I was hurt so bad. It was such an offense. And that night, after it happened, I

went home and was thinking, “I am not going to forgive that person. That’s it! It’s the last straw. I’m not going to forgive that person.” The Holy Spirit would knock on my heart before I went to bed. “Ritch, you need to forgive. You need to release this.” No! I am not going to do that! And I went to bed. I disobeyed what Scripture says. I went to bed angry. I’m not going to forgive that person! They did wrong. They don’t even acknowledge it. They’ll probably never acknowledge it, and I’m not going to forgive. I went to bed angry.

The next morning, I had an early morning appointment with a Christian friend here in our church for some discipleship and some Bible Study and prayer. It’s 6:00 in the morning. I get up about 5:15 and I’m showering. The Holy Spirit says, “You need to forgive that person.” No! I’m not going to. I get my clothes on and the Holy Spirit says, “You need to forgive this person.” No, I’m not going to forgive! I’m driving my car. It’s a cold morning. “Ritch, you need to forgive.” I am not going to forgive! No! Not right now, anyway. Maybe tonight, but not right now. I’m holding on to this. There is a pleasure associated with bitterness and I wanted to hold onto that pleasure.

I walked into this restaurant, and there was my friend. I had only sat down for 5 seconds and he says, “Ritch, I’ve been thinking about something. I need to ask you something.” Okay. What is it? Here’s the wise counselor. Ask me the question. He says, “How do you forgive someone when you really don’t want to?” (Congregational Laughter!) I just looked at him and I was silent for about 60 seconds. And my pride was just holding on. And then I answered him with a biblical answer. And the Holy Spirit just kept pouring back my words. I didn’t tell him until a day or two later what was really happening in my heart when he asked that question. But do you think that is a coincidence? Not at all! God cares about the harmony, the unity, the love within His church. The foundation is all this new life. It’s supernatural.

II. The Meaning of Forgiveness: A Release from Guilt and Separation.

13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Bearing with one another means overlooking a lot of offenses. Don’t make a big deal of things if they don’t need to be. Notice that the complaint is not defined. It’s not limited. It’s just *a* complaint. What about big complaints? Yes. That’s included here. Really big complaints are included here. There’s no complaint that’s not included in this text. None! There are no loopholes. It’s not like the tax code. If there’s any complaint, here’s what you do. You forgive each other. And then he strikes the anvil hard against our soul. “...as the Lord has forgiven you.” It’s got velvet over it though, because it’s the Lord who has forgiven us.

What is my sin against the Lord compared to my brother’s sin against me? My sin is infinitely greater. I know this is true of every one of us because what makes our sin infinitely evil is who it’s committed against. We commit sins against the infinitely holy God. The most others can do against us is commit a sin against a person who is weak, unholy, frail and unworthy. That’s why whenever we think about God’s forgiveness to us, we realize God has forgiven us so much more than He’s asking us to forgive any other person, any other complaint. So in view of that, the

Christian life, so also He says you must forgive. It's a release from guilt and forgiveness is a release from separation.

Here's how I've defined forgiveness. Forgiveness means that we leave justice in God's hands. In other words, we say, "I'm not the means by which God is going to exercise justice. I leave justice in God's hands." And we don't hold the wrongdoer personally accountable to make his or her sin right with us. I'm not going to do that. It's probably impossible for them to do that. I'm not going to do that. That's not what forgiveness does. Forgiveness releases them from the guilt of their sin and seeks to repair the separation that their sin caused.

So we as Christians can no longer say things like, "I will never forget what you have done to me!" We can't say things like, "You are dead to me!" We can't say things like, "I hope you get what you deserve!" We can't say things like, "Have a good life. This is the last time we're going to talk." We can't say things like, "Talk to the hand because the face isn't listening!" We can't say those things. It might be cool sometimes to say it, but we can't say those things. We can't say those things and follow Christ at the same time. Forgiveness means that we move past our resentments; that we keep an open heart for reconciliation. Anything less is defiance against the God who chose us, who sanctifies us, who dearly loves us, and who forgave us all our sin.

13 ...forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

More than a dictionary definition, is a helpful example. And Jesus is that example. I want you to keep Jesus in view as you think about forgiveness. There are four words that describe Jesus' forgiveness that He gives to us.

1. Costly

Forgiveness is free to the offender. It doesn't cost the offender anything. But it's incredibly pricey, and in Jesus' case, infinitely costly in order to offer it freely to others. To offer forgiveness is to freely pay what the offender owes as the result of their sin against us. Our forgiveness does not mean that God releases them from the penalty due to His Law, but it does mean that we release them from the penalty due to us.

Jesus, before His tormenters said, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do." (Luke 23:34) Stephen did the same thing as he was being stoned. He prayed, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" (Acts 7:60) Forgiveness is costly. Often, the cost is unimaginably great. But the cost will always bring to us a sweet, precious reward. That's the issue. For the joy set before Him, Jesus endured the cross. Forgiveness is not just costly, but it's also

2. Complete

Jesus forgives not in part, but the whole. Every sin and every part of every sin is cancelled. When Jesus forgives us He says, "My blood covers everything! I will remember your sin no more! Not one single sin and not any part of a single sin!" Partial forgiveness is not forgiveness. Forgiveness never releases someone for most of the offenses that they have committed, but holds on to a few particularly difficult ones. Love keeps no record of wrongs (1 Corinthians 13:5). The

truth is that all sin is completely devoured by the blood of Jesus. Not one part of our sin escapes the blood's cleansing power. Jesus looks at us as people who are completely clean. He declares us free of any stain. This is the completeness of Jesus' forgiveness toward us.

3. Continual

Jesus does not forgive and then afterwards change His mind and then accuse us. One has said that God throws our sins into the depths of the sea and He plants a sign that says, "No fishing!" He will never bring anything back up. In our flesh, we are so prone to take the commitment of forgiveness back. We say, "Okay. I forgive you" and we genuinely mean it. But then the hurt of their sin launches against us the next day, the next week, the next month, perhaps even years afterwards. And it's so easy, we're so tempted to go back into resentment, to take back the forgiveness we've already granted. Forgiveness is a commitment of our future selves to daily release the offender from the guilt and separation his or her sins deserve.

13 ...forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

4. Compassionate.

Jesus' forgiveness is always warm-hearted. It's never cold. It's the kind of forgiveness that longs for restored relationship. Jesus never comes to us and says, "Hey, I forgive you. Just keep your distance. You guys are not worth close, intimate fellowship. Just stay a bit of distance." No. Jesus tells the story of the prodigal son who grievously injured his father, and yet before the father heard a single word, he saw his son coming back home. And what did he do? With joy, with warmth, he ran out to greet his son. He threw his arms before the son could even make a single word of confession. He grabbed his son and he rejoiced at the return of his son to himself because his heart was so warm. That's the heart of the Father toward us. It's compassionate. The truth is that God loves cheerful forgivers. Not reluctant forgivers, but cheerful forgivers.

III. The Motivation of Forgiveness: The Glory of the God Who Forgave Us

We talked about this a bit earlier. I want to think of it some more. We ask the question: Why would I forgive this person who has hurt me so deeply? When they deserve justice, when they deserve everything but forgiveness, why would I forgive them? We can point to many biblical reasons. We can say that a lack of forgiveness will create misery to our own soul. That's true!. We can say a lack of forgiveness will corrupt other relationships. We can't put bitterness in a bottle and not have it seep out. That's true! We can say a lack of forgiveness will interrupt our fellowship with God. Our prayers will be hindered. That's true! We would say a lack of forgiveness will keep us from growing in Christlikeness. We won't be able to advance in our sanctification without forgiveness. That's true! But here's the reason Paul parks on. I believe a lack of forgiveness will rob God of His glory in His church. The gift of forgiveness will bring much glory to God in His church. Where does he do that? Let's look at verse 3.

Colossians 3:3-4 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

God has in view this future Day of us appearing with God in glory.

Colossians 3:17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Here's the summary of all that he's written up to this point. I think what he's saying is whatever you do in the realm of relationships... That's what he's been talking about; relationships in the local church. He says "However you act toward one another, in relationship with one another in your own local church, whether in word, how you talk to one another, or in deed, how you treat one another and serve together for My glory, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." So in whatever reference our relationship to brothers and sisters, let's do everything in the name of Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him so that Jesus' Name would be lifted up, Jesus' Name would be exalted. It's all about Jesus!

Our ability to glorify God is directly tied to our willingness to forgive our brothers or sisters in Christ after they have hurt us. We make Jesus appear small and insignificant to our world when we refuse to forgive one another. And that's why he says

14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

IV. The Resource of Forgiveness: Jesus Christ Who Strengthens Us

I know this is hard. This is real. This is not Seminary classroom stuff that is sort of philosophical or theological. This is where you live. This is where I live. And I know, for many of you, there are grievous offenses committed against you by brothers and sisters in Christ. And so our heart wells up sometimes and we protest, "But Lord, you don't know how badly that person hurt me! I just cannot forgive them."

Think of saying that to Jesus. "Lord, you don't know how badly they've hurt me. I can't forgive them." I think one of the first responses Jesus has is He's going to hold out His arms to you, reaching out to draw you near. And as He holds out His arms to you, you see scars from nails that were driven into His wrists as He took the punishment you and I deserved upon Himself. And I think He's going to say, "I don't understand the hurt that they brought to you? Seriously? I don't understand?" The infinite weight of our sin rested upon Him so that we could be free.

And you say, "But I don't know if I have the strength." And Jesus says, "Lo, I am with you always to the end of the age. I will never leave you. I will never forsake you. I will uphold you and I will strengthen you with My righteous right hand. I am your Shepherd."

"But Lord, if I forgive them, I'm just letting them off the hook. Aren't they just free to just go and do more damage to people?" "I am the righteous Judge and I am the Shepherd. You're safe in forgiveness. I lead you through the valley of the shadow of death. You don't need to fear any evil. For I am with you. My rod and My staff they comfort you. And do you know what I'll do? Let's say that person remains an enemy even when you forgive them. I'll set a table for you in

the presence of your enemies. Surely goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life. You're safe when you forgive.”

So the Apostle Paul has this heart for us as the church, as expressed from God the Father, by the Holy Spirit. And He says

13 ...if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.