

FORGIVENESS

Healing Without Waiting for an Apology

Opening Scripture - Ephesians 4:31-32

"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice:

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

Before we go any further this morning, I want us to notice something about those words.

Paul doesn't begin by talking about the person who hurt us.

He talks about what can happen **inside of us** after we've been hurt.

Bitterness.

Wrath.

Anger.

And then he points us toward something entirely different:

Tenderheartedness.

Forgiveness.

And finally, he tells us why:

"Even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

Forgiveness sounds beautiful when we're talking about it in church.

But forgiveness becomes much more difficult when somebody has actually wounded us.

And it becomes harder still when the person who hurt us never comes back and says two simple words:

"I'm sorry."

So let me begin with a question.

WHAT IF THE APOLOGY NEVER COMES?

What happens when somebody wounds you deeply and never apologizes?

What happens when they don't believe they did anything wrong?

What happens when they know what they did - and simply don't care?

Maybe the relationship ended.

Maybe that person is no longer part of your life.

Maybe they've even passed away.

Do you have to spend the rest of your life waiting for an apology before you can finally be free?

I don't believe you do.

Because I have come to understand something about forgiveness:

FORGIVENESS IS YOUR HEALING WITHOUT WAITING FOR AN APOLOGY.

That doesn't mean the offense wasn't real.

It doesn't mean what happened was acceptable.

And it doesn't mean there shouldn't be consequences.

Forgiveness means I am no longer going to allow what somebody did yesterday to control what happens inside of me today.

FORGIVENESS IS NOT THE SAME AS RECONCILIATION

Somebody may already be asking:

"If I forgive them, does that mean I have to let them back into my life?"

No.

Forgiveness and reconciliation are connected, but they are not the same thing.

**FORGIVENESS CAN BEGIN WITH ONE PERSON.
RECONCILIATION REQUIRES TWO.**

I can make the decision before God to release bitterness toward someone whether that person participates or not.

But reconciliation requires truth, willingness, and - where there has been wrongdoing - repentance.

Jesus said in Luke 17:3:

"If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him."

Jesus doesn't tell us to pretend sin isn't sin.

Truth matters.

Repentance matters.

And when we're talking about restoring a broken relationship, trust matters.

FORGIVENESS IS GIVEN. TRUST IS REBUILT.

You may forgive somebody today while rebuilding trust takes months or even years.

And sometimes the relationship may never return to what it once was.

That doesn't necessarily mean you failed to forgive.

You can forgive someone and still have boundaries.

You can forgive without pretending nothing happened.

You can forgive without placing yourself back into a destructive or dangerous situation.

Forgiveness does not eliminate wisdom.

WHAT DOES FORGIVENESS DO?

Romans 12:19 says:

"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves... for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

God never asks me to say:

"It didn't matter."

He asks me to say:

"God, I'm putting this into Your hands."

There's a tremendous difference.

Forgiveness isn't declaring the other person innocent.

It is surrendering my personal demand for vengeance.

It is saying:

"Lord, You know what happened.

You know what was said.

You know what was taken from me.

You know what was broken.

And I trust You with it."

That's why forgiveness can begin even when reconciliation cannot.

CAN I FORGIVE SOMEONE WHO ISN'T SORRY?

This is where the question gets harder.

Because repentance matters.

Jesus said:

"If he repent, forgive him."

But then we come to the cross.

Jesus has been betrayed.

Falsely accused.

Mocked.

Beaten.

Crucified.

And Luke 23:34 records Him praying:

"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

The soldiers aren't apologizing.

The crowd isn't asking for mercy.

The people responsible aren't admitting they were wrong.

Yet Jesus prays for mercy **while the offense is still taking place.**

That shows us something about the heart God desires in us.

I may not be able to restore a relationship without repentance.

I may not be able to restore trust without change.

But I don't have to wait for another person's repentance before I surrender **my bitterness, hatred, and desire for revenge** to God.

**I CAN RELEASE MY REVENGE BEFORE THEY RELEASE
THEIR PRIDE.**

I can pray:

"Father, I don't want to hate them anymore.

I don't want revenge.

I don't want this wound controlling my life.

I'm putting what happened into Your hands."

And if that person eventually comes to me genuinely repentant, my heart is already prepared to forgive.

REMEMBER YOUR OWN DEBT

In Matthew 18, Peter asked Jesus:

"Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?"

Jesus answered:

"Until seventy times seven."

Peter wanted a number.

Jesus gave him a way of life.

Then Jesus told the story of a servant who owed his king an enormous debt.

The servant could never repay it. He begged for mercy. And the king forgave him.

But that servant went out and found another man who owed him far less - and demanded payment.

Suddenly the story isn't only about what somebody owes us.

It's about remembering **what we have been forgiven.**

Colossians 3:13 says:

"Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."

Christian forgiveness isn't simply:

"Let it go so you'll feel better."

It's much deeper than that.

We forgive because **we have been forgiven.**

At the cross, I stop seeing myself only as the person who has been wounded.

I also remember:

I AM A SINNER WHO HAS RECEIVED MERCY.

THE PRISON DOOR

When somebody hurts us, something inside says:

"You owe me."

You owe me an apology.

You owe me an explanation.

You owe me for what you took from me.

And maybe they really do owe you.

But what happens if they never pay?

Do you carry their account for the rest of your life?

Unforgiveness can become like a prison.

We think we're keeping the person who hurt us locked inside.

We remember the offense. We keep the record. We hold onto the debt.

But eventually we discover something:

We've been sitting inside the cell too.

And we've been holding the key.

**FORGIVENESS DOESN'T NECESSARILY OPEN THE DOOR SO
THEY CAN WALK BACK INTO YOUR LIFE.**

FORGIVENESS OPENS THE DOOR SO YOU CAN WALK OUT.

You don't have to carry the bitterness with you.

You don't have to carry the revenge.

And you don't have to carry the demand for an apology.

You can leave the debt with God.

And walk out.

FORGIVENESS DOESN'T ERASE THE SCAR

Forgiving someone doesn't mean you'll forget what happened.

Some things we remember for the rest of our lives.

A scar is evidence that there was once a wound.

But a scar is also evidence that **healing took place.**

Maybe that's a better picture of forgiveness.

God doesn't always erase the memory.

Sometimes He heals the memory until it no longer controls us.

You can remember without reliving it.

You can remember without hating.

And sometimes you know healing is taking place when you can remember what happened without feeling the same need to make the other person pay.

A SCAR SAYS SOMETHING HAPPENED HERE.

BUT IT ALSO SAYS SOMETHING HEALED HERE.

AND WHAT IF THE PERSON YOU CAN'T RELEASE IS YOU?

We've talked about people who hurt us.

But sometimes the person whose failures keep replaying in our minds is ourselves.

Maybe you made decisions you regret.

Maybe you hurt somebody.

Maybe you failed.

You've asked God to forgive you.

You believe Jesus died for your sins.

But something inside still whispers:

"Yes, but remember what you did."

First John 1:9 says:

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins."

And Romans 8:1 says:

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."

Maybe the question isn't:

"Can I forgive myself?"

Maybe the better question is:

"CAN I BELIEVE THAT GOD REALLY HAS?"

If you have confessed your sin...
If you have turned to Christ...
And God says you are forgiven...

Don't spend the rest of your life trying to pay for something **Jesus already carried to the cross.**

There may still be consequences.
There may be lessons.
There may be scars.

But condemnation doesn't get the final word.

JESUS DOES.

LOOK AT THE CROSS

And this is where Christian forgiveness ultimately brings us.

Back to Jesus.

He was betrayed by someone close to Him.
Abandoned by His friends.
Falsely accused.
Mocked.
Beaten.
And crucified.

Yet from the cross He prayed:

"Father, forgive them."

But Jesus isn't only showing us forgiveness at the cross.

HE IS PURCHASING OURS.

The innocent One dies for the guilty.
The sinless One carries our sin.
The One who owes nothing pays a debt we could never pay.

That's the Gospel.

And when I understand how much I have been forgiven, it becomes difficult to spend my life clutching somebody else's debt in my hands.

That's why Paul said:

"Forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

WHAT IF THE APOLOGY NEVER COMES?

That's where we started.

And that's where I want us to finish.

What if they never apologize?

What if they never admit they were wrong?

What if reconciliation never happens?

Then hear me today:

YOUR HEALING DOES NOT HAVE TO WAIT FOR THEIR APOLOGY.

You can release the bitterness.

You can establish boundaries where boundaries are necessary.

You can leave justice with God.

You can stop carrying the debt.

And you can walk forward.

Maybe there is still a scar.

But remember:

A SCAR SAYS SOMETHING HAPPENED HERE.

BUT IT ALSO SAYS SOMETHING HEALED HERE.

Forgiveness doesn't change yesterday.

BUT FORGIVENESS CAN CHANGE WHAT YOU CARRY INTO TOMORROW.

So whatever name has come into your mind during this message, whatever hurt you have carried, whatever debt you have been waiting for somebody else to pay - don't carry it alone any longer.

Give God the hurt.
Give Him the anger.
Give Him the debt.
And trust Him with the justice.

**YOUR HEALING DOES NOT HAVE TO WAIT FOR THEIR
APOLOGY.**

Let us pray.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father,

You know every heart in this room.

You know every wound, every disappointment, every betrayal, and every memory that still hurts.

And You know the names that came into our minds today.

Lord, we cannot change yesterday.

We cannot force somebody to apologize.

We cannot make another person repent.

But we can place what happened into Your hands.

Where there is bitterness, bring healing.

Where there is anger, bring peace.

Where reconciliation is possible, bring repentance, humility, truth, and restoration.

And where reconciliation is not possible, give us wisdom, healthy boundaries, and grace to walk forward without hatred.

For those still condemning themselves for sins You have already forgiven, remind them that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

And above everything else, bring us back to the cross.

Remind us how much we have been forgiven.

Teach us to extend the mercy we ourselves have received.

Today we give You the hurt.

We give You the anger.

We give You the debt.

And we trust You with the justice.

Heal our hearts, Lord.

And help us walk out of the prison carrying nothing but Your grace.

In the name of Jesus Christ,

Amen.