

Grace and our Call to Forgive  
 Gen 50:15-21  
 Tampa Covenant Church  
 09 June 2024

Proposition: Because God is gracious in forgiving our sin debt against him, we are called to be gracious in forgiving the sin debt of others against us.

FCF: The Christian's inability to forgive from the heart.

RHF: Jesus Christ is the grace of God who canceled our sin debt through his sacrificial death on the cross.

### **(#1) Introduction:**

As we continue our discussion on these habits of grace, we don't want to see them as daunting tasks, based on sheer effort but as habits fueled by the grace of God in Christ. And if there ever was a habit requiring grace-based fuel in the Christian life; it's the habit of forgiveness. We know it's the grace of God lavished on us that calls us to forgive others. Sounds great on paper but not always the case in practice. Because in our fallen humanity... "payback" and "unforgiveness" always stand ready to be crowned as the defacto rulers of our heart when we're wronged.

Today, we'll look at the exchange between Joseph and his brothers in Genesis 50. We already know Joseph's life was not one of "running downhill with the wind at your back." Rather, in his early years he was victimized by his brothers and it led to suffering. But the LORD used all of it in working out his sovereign purposes for his people. And here in this final chapter of Genesis, we see a beautiful portrait of how the grace of forgiveness is played out in the life of a believer. And our prayer today is that God by his grace would form us into a people who forgive much because we've been forgiven much.

**Joseph's Brothers Request Forgiveness:** *Riddled with guilt, fear and shame*

**(#2) V.15:** "When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." Now that Jacob is dead, Joseph's brothers are straight up paranoid that Joseph hated them and was bent on pay back for the evil they committed against him as a teenager. What they did to Joseph wasn't good: We pick up his story in Genesis 37, he's the beloved Son of his father Jacob and it wasn't a family secret; therefore, his brothers hated him (Gen 37:4). The Lord gave him dreams (*his brothers would one day bow down to him*) and when he disclosed the dreams to them, they hated him even more. So much so that they wanted to kill him and get rid of his body (Gen 37:20). But instead, they spared his life: Stripped him of the multi-colored coat given to him by his father and threw him into an empty pit. Later, they decided to sell him into slavery for a mere 20 shekels. And Joseph goes from the pit, to being in charge of Potiphar's house where he's falsely accused by Potiphar's wife and thrown in prison. But through the providential hand of God, he makes it to the court of Pharaoh.

Now here he is, all these years later, the prime minister of Egypt...2<sup>nd</sup> only to Pharaoh. And here they are, still struggling with guilt, fear and shame for their evil against Joseph. To the point that they can't even look him in the face. So, they send **(#3) him a message** in vv.16-18 "Your father gave this command before he died, say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin because they did evil to you." And now please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him." And then we're told they came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are

*your servants.*” The brothers may have played the “father card” to put Joseph on the hook in forgiving them. But we can’t deny the sincerity of their hearts: They don’t cite what they did to him as a mistake or lapse in judgment but as sin, transgression and evil they committed against Joseph. They allude to the fact they too were servants of YHWH and humbled themselves by falling down before Joseph. (#4) Joseph just wails! But why? He’d already forgiven them when they all reunited years earlier (Chap 45). But maybe seeing the heaviness of their guilt, fear and shame as they came bowing before him; moved him to compassion over anger. That’s the right thing to do but admittedly it’s also very hard.

**Joseph Forgives His Brothers:** *Releases them from guilt, fear and shame*

(#5) Keller, in his book “forgive” says, *showing compassion to those who’ve wronged you is not natural because your heart wants to concentrate on how bad the wrongdoer is and how much they deserve to suffer. In that moment, it’s extremely hard to see them as God’s sees them...as another human being subject to fear and grief.*<sup>1</sup> This is what we see in Joseph’s brothers. They’re literally being crushed under the weight of guilt, fear and shame because they’ve placed themselves in his debt due their evil against him. We understand how this works in the natural world. I borrow a large sum of money from a friend with a promise to repay and when it’s time to repay my debt; I can’t for a myriad of reasons. But my friend doesn’t get angry and demand payment; rather he shows compassion and releases me from the burden of the guilt, fear and shame by absorbing the loss in canceling the debt.

In the same way, Joseph will have to do what is hard and unnatural in this situation. And he won’t spew out years of pent up anger on his brothers: *“How in the world could you all sell me into slavery?” “Do you have any idea how it feels to be shackled in a prison cell?” “Do you know what it’s like to be accused of a crime you didn’t commit?”* And neither will he glory in their shame....yeah, how you like me now? What we see in Joseph’s life is the internal heart work of forgiving his wrongdoers had already taken place.

(#6) Recall in Gen 41:51-52, before his brothers arrive in Egypt looking for food, he has two sons. He named the first son Manasseh, *“for God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father’s house.”* The second, he named Ephraim, *“For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.”* As justified as we may feel in turning the tables on the wrongdoer; we’re actually letting our negative emotions move us further away from forgiveness. And in so doing, confirm the fact that we’re not ready or willing to absorb the loss in canceling the debt!

And now the rubber meets the road as Joseph responds with grace to his (#7) brothers. Here in v.19a, he begins with words of assurance. *“Do not fear”*; although he doesn’t say the words, “I forgive you.” His response clearly shows revenge is not in his heart, he doesn’t hate his brothers nor is he nursing a silent grudge. In v.21, he says it again but goes a step further. *“I will provide for you and your little ones. And we’re told he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.”* **Why is Joseph able to speak and act with such grace in calming the guilt, fear and shame of his wrongdoers.** Verses 19-20, give us good answers:

(#8) First, Joseph is clear he’s not God: *“fear not for am I in the place of God?”* Think of this as shorthand for asking, “Am I God?” When we think of Joseph’s position, he certainly could’ve believed his “press clippings” and acted as if he was God but he knew who he was in light of who God is. Joseph was saying, there’s no need to fear me brothers, vengeance is not mine to repay. That’s God’s job, he’s the one who’s completely just and true in all of his ways. The one who completely searches and knows the heart of mankind.

**(#9 Blank) We all respond** the same way to the “Am I God?” question ...of course not! Yet, how often do we give ear to the lie of Gen 3: “*for the day you eat this, you will be like God; knowing good and evil.*” We see how things turned out for our first parents and the same rings true in our lives. In our fallen nature, we want justice when wronged but it’s not the justice rooted in God’s perfect love; it’s justice rooted in pay back: One good turn deserves another! Nah, I’m not gonna get mad; I’ll get even! God may forgive but I won’t! That’s the depravity lurking in our hearts, waiting to spring into action when we’re wronged. And it blinds us from seeing what’s truly pure. Therefore, we must remember who God is and who we are. He’s the creator and sustainer of the universe who is perfectly just, right and true in all of his ways and we are not. He’s truly independent in every sense of the word and we are dependent in every sense of the word...Therefore, the better option is to surrender to will in all things and not our own.

So, what’s the better option in forgiving others and rightfully pursuing Justice when wronged? Again, Keller is helpful here. It’s understanding we serve a God who’s both loving and just; he abounds in steadfast love and faithfulness and will by no means clear the guilty. You can’t appeal to his love at the expense of his justice; likewise, you can’t appeal to his justice at the expense of his love. It’s not “either/or,” it’s “both/ and.” In practice, you seek justice by pointing to the injustice that has taken place: It’s going to wrongdoer and pointing out what they’ve done. Next, you forgive them because if you refuse to do so, your unforgiveness will move beyond justice into the realm of revenge.<sup>2</sup> Now, it’s true all wrongs don’t carry the same weight and the road to forgiveness is not paved smooth in every situation. But in every situation, this is our call (pursuing love and justice in granting forgiveness) no matter how long it takes.

Ken Sande in his book, *The Peacemaker* cites four precious promises we can make to ourselves in granting forgiveness to a wrongdoer: **(#10) I will** not dwell on this incident. **(#11) I will** not bring up this incident again and use it against you. **(#12) I will** not talk to others about this incident. **(#13) I will** not let this incident stand between us or hinder our personal relationship.<sup>3</sup> **(#14) The last** one speaks of reconciliation. And what we have to remember is forgiveness is not something that’s earned; it’s given freely. But trust is earned as evidenced by the wrongdoer’s change of behavior. Therefore, when the door of reconciliation opens through forgiveness, reconciliation is largely dependent on the response of the one who’s been forgiven.<sup>4</sup> If the behavior remains the same, the relationship will continue to experience setbacks in rebuilding that bridge of trust, leading to true reconciliation.

### **Joseph’s Trust in the providence of God:** *In Bringing Salvation to His People*

The second reason why Joseph was able to calm the guilt fear and shame of his brothers and respond with grace was because he trusted in the providence of God. **(#15) He tells them** in v.20, “*As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.*” The shorter catechism defines God’s providence as his powerful preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions.<sup>5</sup> What’s beautiful about God’s providence is that it affirms his sovereignty over all of his creation. If this is true; he has the absolute right to foreordain whatsoever comes to pass, according to his sovereign plan and purposes for his creation.<sup>6</sup> **(#16) Sproul** wrote, *if there is one single molecule in this universe running around loose, totally free of God’s sovereignty, then we have no guarantee that a single promise of God will be ever fulfilled.* If something were to come to

pass apart from his sovereign decree that would mean God is not sovereign. And it follows if God is not sovereign then God is not God.

**(#17 Blank)** Now, if we agree that God rules over every square inch of his creation then it has to include the evil we witness in the world and the evil that may befall us at the hands of another; it all passes through his sovereign hand. Look at Joseph's words again, he describes his brother's actions against him were meant for evil but God meant those very actions for his good. It's not that God was caught flatfooted and had to put plan B in motion in reaction to the evil perpetrated against Joseph. No, their evil against Joseph in some mysterious way was already part of God's plan and purpose for the good that resulted in Joseph's life in preserving his family. We don't have the mind of God so we'll never come up with an air tight answer when asked about these things. But we can trust that he does have good reasons why he allows evil to befall us and believe it serves to bring about a greater good for his glory. Admittedly, this is not something we want to hear when we're coming to grips with evil committed against us but it's something we need to know and be reminded of beforehand and live by all the days of our lives. It's living with the big picture in view at all times in all situations and all circumstances.

Joseph clearly saw the big picture that everything that occurred in his life, beginning with the evil of his brothers was all part of God's plan in fulfilling his covenant promises to his people.<sup>7</sup> **(#18) In v.24**, he says to his brothers, *"I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."* Simply put, Joseph looked to the salvation of God's people in the promised seed of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and he trusted in the promises of God. He saw Christ afar off, and believed God was working all things to the good of those who love him and called according to his purpose.

**(#19 Blank) Conclusion:**

Church, this is why we're called to calm the fear, guilt and shame of wrongdoers and extend the grace of forgiveness because we are children of the promises of God. The Apostle Paul tells us that all the promises of God find their yes in Jesus Christ and that's why we utter our amen to God for his glory because he has established us in Christ. Therefore, we don't stop at Joseph as a good example on the grace of forgiveness, rather we keep our eyes fixed on the one to whom Joseph points; Jesus Christ our Lord.

He's the greater Joseph: The truly beloved Son of the father who left his glorious throne to experience betrayal by those closest to him. And what followed was suffering of epic proportions. He was wrongly accused, stripped of his garments and condemned to die a gruesome death on a cross. And it's on that bloodstained cross where we witness the justice and love of God come together. As God's righteous anger (against evil we witness in this world) was poured out on Christ in canceling a debt of sin that we could never repay. But it's also there the love of God's forgiving grace was poured out on all who trust in him. And through his glorious resurrection and ascension to the father's righthand; he reigns as the savior of the world.

This is grace amazing and grace unspeakable that has been lavished upon us as children of God. And when we get this, we will continue to cultivate this grace as it forms us into a people who pursue justice

and love in granting forgiveness when wronged. Because Christ has covered all of our sin with his precious blood. And church, let us do this not for our sake but for the sake of the grace of God at work in our lives. All for his glory and for his glory alone.

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Keller, *Forgive, Why should I and How Can I?* (New York, NY; Viking, 2022), 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 91.

<sup>3</sup> Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker, A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 209.

<sup>4</sup> Keller, 9.

<sup>5</sup> WSC #11, See also WCF, Chap 5.

<sup>6</sup> See Westminster Confession of Faith, Chap 3, (God's Eternal Decrees), Shorter Catechism #7 (What are the Decrees of God?)

<sup>7</sup> Allen Ross and John N. Oswalt, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Genesis, Exodus*, vol. 1 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2008), 253.