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Forgive as Christ Forgave

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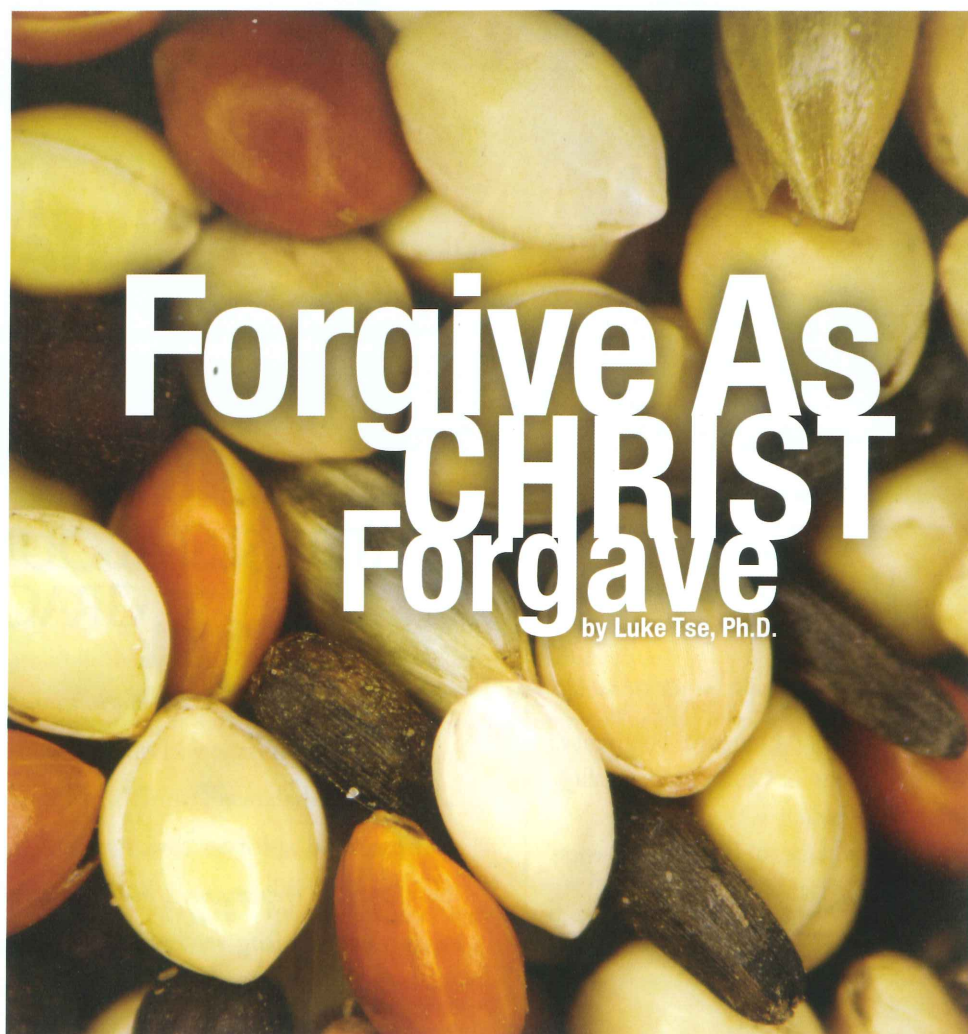
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Forgive As CHRIST Forgave

by Luke Tse, Ph.D.

Abstract

The article provided some understandings and applications of statements found in Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:13. Purposes are to show how forgiveness: (a) precedes the expectation of confession and repentance on the part of the offender, (b) might be a one-sided exercise, and (c) is a form of suffering that possesses heavenly blessings.

About midpoint in our session, she turned to me and, with tears streaming down her cheeks, bemoaned, "I know my husband said that he has forgiven me. But I don't want his forgiveness! I didn't ask for it; and I don't want it!" I vacillated between confusion and a search for a proper response.

For years she could not understand how "something inside had died." Yet, for the sake of her marriage covenant, children, and family, she accepted her lot in life and endeavored to live contently with her husband. That was, until another man entered their lives. She wrestled with wanting to feel remorse over her affair, but could not seem to find within herself that aptitude.

Her period of dying in the early years of marriage coincided with her husband's

emotional affair with another, which had usurped his attention and affection for her. When this fact was revealed, she became incensed. While his affair did not justify hers, it gave her explanation for her own loss and suffering.

Realizations of his responsibility for causing her "death" gripped the husband, and he sought for her forgiveness. But, even so, he could not overcome the undercurrents of dismay he had toward her for her affair. Indeed, she sensed his anger that clouded his offerings of forgiveness and did not believe him completely sincere. More accurately, she deemed that he did not have the right to offer her forgiveness in light of his long failings in the past and the loss of joy he had caused.

Applying Forgiveness

Applications of the verse, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32), are often relevant when counseling couples or families. On occasion, I am challenged to consider how forgiveness should (or could) take root for those who are like this couple: so mired in the injury of mutually-induced wounds and infuriated by what the other has done that forgiveness sounds like a mockery.

In the statement, "... just as in Christ God forgave," forgiveness seemed to have been completed, yet salvation obviously has not been conferred to all. The scope of this proclamation can be brought into greater light by another, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). In this context, there is clearly a forgiveness that is received only upon pending action—if we confess.

For God, forgiveness does not wait for confession or repentance to precede its offering, but they are required for its reception. Hanging on the cross, our Lord accepted the injustice and afflictions of the offender without vengeance or a demand for justice (Isaiah 53:5-7). In His final breaths, Jesus could have made any number of requests. Instead, He appealed to Abba that forgiveness be made completely available on His account, and with such a quality of forgiveness that cleansing and renewal could be infused for all offenders who genuinely confess to fault.

The superiority and astonishment of Jesus' approach was that the one whose world has been undone was the one who set in place a context of forgiveness without any regard to the offender's response. This is what is meant by the phrase, "to forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Colossians 3:13). The call to forgive as Christ is a call to participate even in a one-sided effort.

Forgiving As Jesus

To forgive as Christ forgave is to apply the truth of this great achievement, "... while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). That is, our perfect Lord became our sin offering (2 Corinthians 5:21) and, instead of justice, He provided a framework for forgiveness.

In the same way, when others offend and wound us, we also are to set in place a context of "forgiven-ness." In light

of the fact that none of us is completely free from guilt for contributing to fractures in life and relationships, a shared exercise of forgiveness can set healing in motion.

When the penalty of sin drew near their punishing end, Jesus made His final appeal to the Father, "Abba, forgive them, for they know not what they do." When Abba agreed to His beloved's request, He slipped on the robe of the Judge and issued His sentence. At that explosive moment in eternity, God tore Himself away from Himself. God had never been so abandoned and alone, "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?"

It was nearly unbearable for Jesus to accept that *suffering of forgiveness*. Similarly, for the wounded to accept that same suffering of forgiveness, the agony can be no less intense. A powerful reminder for all is that Jesus "entrusted himself to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23, read vv. 19-25); those who have suffered at the hand of another should entrust themselves likewise (Romans 12:17-21). And all who can enter into the same suffering as Christ will also share in His joy (Philippians 2:5-11, Hebrews 12:2-3, Matthew 5:1-11).

Conclusion: Abba's Wishes

To forgive is to fulfill Abba's wishes. And to forgive as Christ is to put forward such a quality of forgiveness that it could lead to reconciliation and renewal. It is an offering unencumbered with expectations of pre-action or response.

In our becoming like Christ, forgiveness

becomes not as a matter of choice, but as a standard to which we must rise. Can any amount of hurt, injury, suffering, brokenness, or betrayal justify a claim not to forgive as Christ forgave? The answer, gently, is no.

Neither arrogance nor self-defense, even justice, can take us to that exercise of forgiveness, but humility and Christ-mindedness can soften us to that level of holiness. "All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time" (1 Peter 5:5b-6; also, Proverbs 3:34).

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