

## **Multi-Color Grace, Part 10: Forgiveness and Reconciliation (Gen 45)**

I hope you know how much I love God's Word and I'm lately really loving Genesis! I love how alive this book is! I love its stories and how all point us to the old story of Jesus and His love. I've loved Joseph's story since I was a kid but I love seeing its greater depths I didn't grasp then (or a week before). It's one of the most colorful and memorable stories in the whole Bible, and it has something for everyone, young and old. It has its highs and lows, ups and downs, as Joseph goes from the privileged place in the family to the pit, then from the pit to Potiphar's house, then from Potiphar's house to prison, then from prison to the palace of Pharaoh. And at the same time his brother Judah goes downhill with pagan alliances, from a prodigal son to prostitutes for sex, till God saves Judah and transforms him to be a powerful servant leader. The one who once couldn't care less for his father now couldn't care more, once slave-trading his brother, he wants to be a slave *for his brother*.

Gen 44:33 "...*please let your servant remain instead ... [let me be] a slave to my lord, and let the lad go... <sup>34</sup> For how shall I go up to my father if the lad is not with me—for fear that I see the evil that would overtake my father?*"

Gen 37-50 isn't just a story of a boy's coat of many colors, it's about the life-changing multi-color grace of God for man's darkest sins. I've been blessed again and again to see how much more there is in what we've read so many times about Joseph and his brothers. What's so great about God's Word is its most familiar sections can be fuller and fresher as God helps us see more of His many layers of truth and multi-faceted grace. Last week in my study I started to weep as I read about Judah's transformation and the moving scene in Revelation 5 where the voice says "*weep no more, behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah.*" I've gotten goose-bumps several times since thinking about that emotional and moving scene, maybe the one that moves me most from the NT, and Gen 44-45 I find one of the most moving scenes in all the OT.

**45:1** *Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried, "Have everyone go out from me." So there was no man with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. <sup>2</sup> He wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard of it. <sup>3</sup> Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. <sup>4</sup> Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come closer to me." And they came closer. And he said, "I am your brother Joseph ..."*

This is an incredibly dramatic moment, and a traumatic moment at first for these men...a traumatic grace like Saul on the Damascus road ('I am Jesus'). Saul was traumatized to realize the one he'd been persecuting was the Lord. In Gen 44 it's traumatizing realizing the one they persecuted is Egypt's lord. Jesus knew Saul before Saul knew the Lord. Joseph knew these men before they knew who Egypt's lord was (foreknew='he loved me ere I knew him'<sup>1</sup>). Saul, a descendant of Benjamin from this chapter, meets Jesus a descendant of Judah from this chapter, and that revelation changes everything. Judah's and Benjamin's brothers here are also about to see everything in life change.

End of v. 4: *'I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt'* he says. The brothers had never used that name in his presence, they probably rarely used the name Joseph in the presence of each other 20+ years. How did this man know that name? How could Egypt's ruler possibly be their brother? If it's *him* what will he now do to *them*? He said they sold him a slave to Egypt

<sup>5</sup> *Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here ...* He sees their traumatized terrified faces and he tells them not to fear or be fighting with each other, don't grieve or beat yourselves up about the past. I think of another group of 11 who had abandoned Jesus and how He speaks to them after His resurrection and brings them close like v. 4 says. I think of Jesus with Peter in particular and how He restores him to full fellowship. I think of Aslan with Edmund who had betrayed his family. It's a great scene: Aslan talks with a repentant restored Edmund and then he tells his siblings "What's done is done. There is no reason to bring up the past with your brother." And then they hug and embrace and they ask him how he's doing.

[that's what we read in v. 15 as a restored family hugs and talks]

Judah had offered himself as a substitute for the one found guilty at the end of chapter 44. He rose up like a lion to defend him and then offered himself as a lamb. It's a wonderful picture of Jesus the Lion of Judah who's at work in this family, despite past betrayal, to bring them together, to restore them and remind them not to dwell on or drudge up what's forgiven; it is finished. It's a beautiful picture in v. 14. It says Joseph *'fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck.'*<sup>15</sup> *He [Joseph] kissed all his brothers and wept on them, and afterward his brothers talked with him.*

The high point of Joseph's story is not when he goes from prisoner to prime minister, and for Judah, it's not when he goes from sinner to servant leader. The high point for all the brothers is this celebration of their reconciliation. They go from bitterness to forgiveness, from resentment to restored family.

It applies to us daily. This week you'll all have temptations to be resentful. Families and marriages get destroyed when past resentments aren't forgiven. Resentment is a deadly cancer in the body of Christ. Even a physical body can be affected by lack of forgiveness and bitterness. David in the Psalms talks about that, and I don't think it's all metaphorical. Some of what secular psychology and psychiatry classifies as a "disease" or "disorder" may have selfish bitterness as a core issue. James 3 warns "*if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart ... where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder ...*" (v. 14, 16 ESV). Selfishness and bitterness can cause disorders even in our thinking and then evil practices, James says.

Proverbs 14:30 says "*envy makes the bones rot.*" In other words, it destroys our health from the inside out and it can have effects on our physical bodies. It's been said that resentment is a poison you drink hoping it will kill others. In the NIV Job 5:2 says '*Resentment kills a fool, and envy slays the simple.*' Job 36:13 "*The godless in heart harbor resentment...*" 2 Timothy 2:24 says "*the Lord's servant must ... be kind to everyone ... not resentful.*" The ESV of 1 Corinthians 13 says love "*is not irritable or resentful*" (v. 5, others 'it keeps no record of wrongs' or 'does not take into account a wrong suffered')

This morning as we prepare for the Lord's Table, I want us to see the love of the Lord at work in Joseph's family, and at work in your family and church family afterwards by way of application. Gen 45 isn't just a heart-warming story; it's to be *our life-changing story* as Christians in the family of Christ. It's one of the most powerful real-life pictures of what the NT teaches about forgiveness and reconciliation. How did Joseph forgive after all he'd gone through? How did he overcome resentment and bitterness? How can you?

### 1. Trusting the Providence of God

<sup>5</sup> "*Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for **God sent me** ... [he says it again in v. 7] **God sent me before you** ... <sup>8</sup> Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, **but God** ... "*

Joseph doesn't find comfort in free will or fate, the providence of God is his ultimate determining reality. He affirms man's responsibility (*you sold me here*) but above and beyond that He sees God's sovereignty over all (*God sent me*). God was much bigger to Joseph than anything anyone had done. God is bigger than your past as well. God is bigger than what others have done to you as Joseph will say again in Gen 50:20 "*you meant it for evil **but God** meant it for good.*" The big point of Joseph's story is how big God is.

Theologians and some wannabe theologians ask 'how do we reconcile God's sovereignty and man's responsibility'? I can't resolve that question in a few minutes (years?), but I want to point out in this context Joseph doesn't see those as truths to reconcile intellectually, he sees them as truths to help *him reconcile with his family relationally*. To say it another way, we don't need to reconcile in our little minds how God works His big sovereign will, we need to trust He does so and we need *that* to reconcile little family disputes. And in big disputes, too, reconciliation with others requires a very big God.

[the doctrine of providence can change your life...it has mine]

I'm trying a new note sheet in your bulletin as a discipleship aid for further study as families/individuals. If you find it useful, let us know. It's made so adults who learn or listen better with blanks or a basic framework can see a flow and also children who can write just a little can take notes. Nehemiah 8 calls for children who can listen with understanding to hear preaching, and if this can help some, great. For younger ones who can't write as well, we don't want to keep them from teaching as Jesus didn't. At the bottom are key words they can listen for and when they hear them, make a mark there or on another page to help listen for words they know that you can talk about later

On the back of the note sheet is providence defined (*Heidelberg Catechism*)

**Question 27. What is the providence of God?** Answer: The almighty and everywhere present power of God (a); whereby, as it were by his hand, he upholds and governs (b) heaven, earth, and all creatures; so that herbs and grass, rain and drought (c), fruitful and barren years [all of those in Gen 41-44, famine, etc] meat and drink, health and sickness (d), riches and poverty (e), and all things come, not by chance, but be his fatherly hand (f)

(a) Acts 17:25-28, Jeremiah 23:23-24, Isaiah 29:15-16, Ezekiel 8:12; (b) Hebrews 1:3; (c) Jeremiah 5:24, Acts 14:17; (d) John 9:3; (e) Proverbs 22:2; (f) Matthew 10:20, Prov 16:33

[you could add Gen 45:5-8 to that list]

**Q28. What advantage is it to us to know that God has created, and by his providence does still uphold all things?** A: That we may be patient in adversity (a); thankful in prosperity (b); and that in all things, which may hereafter befall us, we place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father (c), that nothing shall separate us from his love (d); since all creatures are so in his hand, that without his will they cannot so much as move (e)

(a) Romans 5:3, James 1:3, Ps. 39:9, Job 1:21-22; (b) Deut. 8:10, 1 Thess. 5:18; (c) Psalm 55:22, Romans 5:4; (d) Romans 8:38-39; (e) Job 1:12, 2:6, Acts 17:25, 28, Prov 21:1

Doctrine is so practical and so powerful for all of life, and especially in hard times of life. Doctrine and theology matters. Some reject or resent doctrinal teaching, but they need to apply doctrine to overcome resentment in life.

You need to apply this and study this doctrine further, look up these verses. All doctrine is intended to change your life, but the doctrine of providence in particular, trusting it proved key for Joseph and God's people to forgive.

#1. Trusting the providence of God ... #2. **Trusting the purposes of God**

<sup>5</sup>Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you **to preserve life**. <sup>6</sup> For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. <sup>7</sup> God sent me before you **to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance**.

God isn't the author of sin, but even what He allows He *purposefully* allows. This is important to balance with God's providential control, His *purpose* in our suffering and even sin we endure. Without #1 you may become bitter at others, but if you only know #1 without #2 you may become bitter at God. If we believe God is sovereign but not good and not for us, we'll resent God. God doesn't just work in all things, He works them all together *for good* for those who love God and are called according to His purpose, "*His purpose*." But that's not even the whole verse of Romans 8:28. Most people who quote it leave off the first 3 words. What are the first 3 words? "*And we know ...*"

This is a doctrine we as Christians *know*, and in biblical language to *know* is not just an intellectual assent or knowing the right box to check on the quiz. It's truth that affects our life, we deeply intimately trust God has a purpose in all things and has our good in it (which the next verse defines as us being conformed to Christ). Human trafficking and slave-trading is not good, but God worked what was not good *together for good* for Joseph and his family

[Cowper said even 'behind a frowning providence, God has a smiling face'<sup>2</sup>]

Joseph didn't see God's purpose to save His family till 22 years later. It may take time and we often can't see what His purpose is, but we must trust He's always working His purpose (Eph 1:11). We trust God purposefully allows who you're in relationship with and what happens in those relationships. It may be their intent was evil in what they did or said, but God intends good in you, specifically to make you more like Christ, Rom 8:29 says. God fore-knew and predestined you, it says He knew intimately everything about you and what you'd go through, and His predetermined love upon you has a pre-planned purpose in it all to make you Christ-like, v. 29. God is for us, v. 31 says. v. 35 says nothing separate us from that love (even famine, Gen 45:6). Don't resent the list of things at the end of Rom 8, rejoice in God's purposes in all those things to make you like Christ. Knowing His love enables yours.

Which leads to the 3rd key in this passage: **Trusting the Power of God**

<sup>8</sup> “Now, therefore, it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt. [it was God's power that gave Joseph power he had]

Joseph was in a position of power where he could have punished them for their sin against him, but he trusted God's power was given to preserve them as he explains so powerfully in v. 10: *"You shall live in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children and your flocks and your herds and all that you have. <sup>11</sup> There I will also provide for you, for there are still five years of famine to come, and you and your household and all that you have would be impoverished."*

The power of God is at work to preserve them and provide for them and in v. 15 the power of God Joseph trusted brings all together in reconciliation. In v. 9 and v. 12-13 and the rest of the chapter Joseph talks about his father and I want to come back to the father-son dynamic next time but for the rest of our time today I want to focus on overcoming resentment and reconciling because this may be the Bible's most beautiful picture of it and forgiveness. So under this final point will be several sub-points to help apply this further.

**1st application: to forgive is to not use your power to make a sinner pay**

Because Joseph was trusting in God's providence, purpose, and power in his situation, he didn't use his power to make his brothers pay. His position had power for payback, but there's no payback in these verses. One definition of forgiveness is this: not holding a debt against or making him/her pay for sin.

[study the end of Matthew 18 for more on this and its gospel basis]

You don't hold it against them or bring it up against them in your mind. You can't say 'I forgive you the debt you owe' and then say 'I'll send you the bill ...with interest payments.' If you've forgiven them you don't make them pay, and that's not just true financially, it's true relationally (anger taking its toll).

There are times when authorities do need to make things right with certain crimes or offenses,<sup>3</sup> but I'm talking here about interpersonal relational sins. It's not a sibling's power, position or place to punish siblings, it's the father's role. Think of the teaching of the Lord on prayer: *"Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."* Forgiving trespasses is pardoning debts owed. It is assumed in the Lord's prayer, as much as we need our daily bread we also equally daily need forgiveness, as we daily forgive the sin-debts of others. It is not in our power or position to make brothers or sisters pay for sin debts.

Joseph had the power and position but didn't use it. In the family of Christ it may be your weapon is sinful speech to them or about them, silent treatment or 'de-friending' them online. But Christ has already paid for their debt and sin; you're saying Christ's payment isn't enough, they need to pay some, too!

Maybe you say 'well I believe in limited redemption so I can limit forgiving to saved forgiven folks, and I don't have to forgive unrepentant unbelievers.' First off, there's no limit in the sufficiency of the cross, though it's efficient only for those who believe but you don't know who will believe later. Even if a person you can't forgive never repents, it should horrify you that person will be paying for their sin for all eternity in hell. Are we saying 'God, hell may be payment enough for You, but not for me. They need to pay now in silent treatment a few weeks cuz you making them pay forever isn't enough'

Theology matters, understanding actual atonement, there was real payment for real Christians on the cross, not just a potential general *sort of* payment. It's a particular definite payment for specific sins that truly cancels the debt. Some think Jesus paid for the sins of those in hell and then they have to pay again for their own sins in hell. I don't see the Bible explaining redemption as Arminians do, I think the truly redeemed God truly forgives, but I think a greater error is thinking we have to make redeemed people pay again for the sins Jesus paid for them on the cross, to pay more as if Jesus didn't pay it all -- or we want to make *un-redeemed* people pay *on top of* eternal punishment

[let's let God do His job; He's not hiring debt collectors]

### **2nd application: Forgiving is not forgetting**

Look at the text, v. 4: "*I am your brother Joseph whom you sold to Egypt.*" Joseph hadn't forgotten their sin, and never could, but he forgave them for it

Voddie Baucham explains it more powerfully than I can in a great sermon on Gen 45: 'some say...I keep remembering it...that means I haven't forgiven because if forgive that means I forget, right? [he says he'll ask where they got that from in the Bible?] 2 Hesitations? That's not in my Bible anywhere! God...remembers [sins] no more, which literally means He chooses not to bring them into evidence anymore. The Bible never told you that you had to forget...human beings weren't created to forget. When human beings forget things, they are malfunctioning...When you start forgetting things, that's a sign that something's wrong...how ridiculous it is that there are people who beat themselves up because they can't do what God created them not to be able to do [forget]. That's ridiculous...to forgive someone is to cancel a debt ...you remove your right to make the other person pay for what they did.'<sup>4</sup>

### **3<sup>rd</sup> application: forgiveness is not only possible when a sinner asks for it**

Nowhere do we read the brothers asking Joseph to forgive them, but clearly he has, and it was long before they even knew who he was. He had forgiven them unconditionally and unilaterally and freely, much like Stephen's heart to forgive the men stoning him in Acts 7. Some people think it's unbiblical to forgive unrepentant sinners, but are Joseph and Stephen being unbiblical in these biblical stories? Actually they're being presented as great examples.

Turn to Mark 11 for a moment. Of course the greatest example is as Jesus is on the cross, He says of unrepentant sinners putting Him to death "*forgive them for they know not what they do.*" Christ isn't being unbiblical or un-Christlike there. They didn't even know the sin they were doing yet, but His heart to forgive is on display there, and we're to have the same heart also. Mark 11:25 "*Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive [no one there asking forgiveness, forgive in your heart] ...*

### **4<sup>th</sup> application: forgiveness is not reconciliation, but it pursues it**

Joseph forgave in his heart, but they didn't reconcile till Gen 45:15 as they embrace and talk together. Forgiveness isn't the same as reconciliation, it's the first step toward reconciliation, but it takes both parties to be reconciled. Forgiveness can take place in your heart before it's ever expressed verbally, in fact I think it must take place in the heart first, or at least normally should

Forgiveness can be internal (or starts there) but reconciliation requires face-to-face interaction (or when that's impossible ideally at least on the phone first, and I should qualify 'on the phone' as *talking*, not texting or emailing). Where does the Bible distinguish reconciling from forgiveness? The Lord's Prayer says "as we forgive our debtors" (in prayer closet, others not there), but the same sermon says if you come to worship and remember a brother has something against you, *go and be reconciled to your brother* (Mt 5:24). Don't go online, don't go talk to others about your brother's sin, go to him. If you're not ready to go, close your mouth, open your Bible, go to prayer.

[forgiveness starts privately in a prayer closet then you go to reconcile]

Mt 5:24 is right after Jesus said sinful anger is murder in the heart and sinful speech to another is enough to make us guilty and deserving hell (v. 22-23). We need to pray for God to forgive us as we forgive those who sin against us, chapter 6 says, instead of being sinfully angry or sinning in our speech. And when *we sin in word or deed in our anger*, we not only need God's forgiveness, we need to go and be reconciled, seeking man's forgiveness. One of the tests of forgiveness to ask yourself is do you want to reconcile?



What about when you can't reconcile, does that mean you can't partake of communion? I had at least 4 different people I know of share with me at the last communion they let the plate and cup pass because they weren't sure if they had done what they could to reconcile with another. I was encouraged by that, and I encouraged them with Scriptures to obey before the next one.

Rom 12:17 *Never **pay back** evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men.*<sup>18</sup> ***If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.***<sup>19</sup> *Never take your own revenge...*[v. 20 calls for love to enemies]...<sup>21</sup> *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

[if you're not refusing to obey those principles, don't refuse the Table]

There's much more that could be said about this subject or that we could study in Gen 45, and we'll continue that rich chapter next week. But before we go further, there's plenty from what we've already seen today to apply as we come to the Lord's Table. This isn't for everybody. It's only for those who repent of their sins and are living for Jesus as the Lord of their life. If you're not sure if Jesus is your Lord and Master or if you're His disciple, if you haven't obeyed Him in baptism as a disciple and have no plan to, some of you men or women or young people may need to start there and pursue that. Others of you maybe need to pursue obedience to Jesus in something we talked about today or may need to pursue unity with someone after. If you have questions about where you are with those things and the Lord or if this is for you, better to let the trays pass today and we can talk afterwards.

1 Cor 11 says a man must first examine himself and discern the body rightly or he eats and drinks judgment to himself. This is not for little kids or those who aren't yet able to discern the body rightly or don't know what it means, or don't regularly examine themselves on their own and ask God to forgive them. It's not for those with unrepentant bitterness especially at their church

If while you're praying you realize you haven't forgiven someone and have been storing up resentment, Jesus in Mark 11:25 commands you to forgive in your heart as you pray. For heart issues like that, if you examine yourself and deal with your sin, you are welcome to the Lord's Table. It's not our table, it's the Lord's Table, and it's for the Lord's family who are pursuing unity with one another. If you're not in unity with the Lord and His family and haven't obeyed those verses or aren't trying to, this may not be for you today. Maybe some of you need to go and seek to be reconciled with your brother or sister in Christ, so you can worship rightly as Mt 5:24 says. May the Lord apply His Word in His family at His table, trusting His providence, purposes, and power of the cross. *As we pray, I'll ask the men to prepare.*

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<sup>1</sup> 'He loved me ere [before] I knew Him, and all my love is due Him - He plunged me to victory beneath the cleansing flood.' Eugene Bartlett, hymn *O Victory in Jesus*.

<sup>2</sup> William Cowper, "God Moves in a Mysterious Way."

<sup>3</sup> This would include not only parents (who are to punish lovingly) and police and other Romans 13 authorities (who are to bring consequences as they protect and serve), but also church leadership at times is to exercise authority and discipline in serious unrepentant sin that may require help of church authorities (Matthew 18).

<sup>4</sup> Voddie Baucham, "Forgiveness" ([www.sermonaudio.com](http://www.sermonaudio.com) on Genesis 45, 9/2013)