

The Glory of Forgiveness
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A new buzzword in recent years is *offended*. Everybody seems to be getting offended; I would even say some want to be offended. Getting offended is like a ticket that wins you prizes. The prizes you win when you're offended are excuses to be outraged, it grants you permission to find someone to blame (possibly sue if they are lucky). Getting offended wins you moral superiority; you feel good about yourself because you can say, "Well, I'm not like *those* people." If you're like me, you're not too fond or encouraged by this new victimhood culture.

But getting offended (rather easily, mind you) is not actually new at all. What might be new is what we are offended by, but what's not new is taking offense and then feeling justified in doing something about it. Honor cultures have been around for centuries all around the world. In honor cultures, you demand that others respect and honor you and if someone doesn't, if someone offends you, you can justify just about anything. If we're honest, we're all much more easily offended than we'd like to admit. Let me test you: have you ever been offended by a teacher telling you your precious child isn't so precious in 6th hour? Have you ever been offended by someone cutting you off in traffic? Maybe you've been offended by your neighbor who just can't seem to keep her dog in her own yard. And when we feel offended, what might we do? We might be tempted to gossip about the teacher and tell others how terrible she is. We might curse at the motorist who cut us off. Maybe we return the favor to our neighbor and leave something unpleasant in her yard. It sounds all quite embarrassing now; but in the moment we felt justified, didn't we? They deserved it for what they've done.

And then, of course, we have the biggies. *Real* offenses. Rape. Abuse. Harassment. We don't even use the word offended in these cases anymore. That word feels too small since we've started using it for every little *faux pas*; we don't even know what to call these horrific crimes.

But in light of so many perceived wrongs and despicable wrongs is the word of God that gives us the completely opposite direction and instruction than our own natural inclinations and the spirit of this age. Rather than taking offense, rather than seeking vigilante justice, instead of getting morally outraged and angry, God sends us down a different path. He tells us to walk the road Jesus walked. Do you want to be like Jesus, my good brothers and sisters? Do you want to be like Jesus when people harm you, when people offend you? God's word has something important for us to consider; a radical, but good path to walk. To show you that, I want to read just one verse to get things going - Prov. 19:11 (READ).

Two related virtues are highlighted in this verse. The first virtue is being slow to anger. That's what a wise person is like; that's what this passage means when it says, "*Good sense* makes one slow to anger." The one with good sense is the one who is wise, the one who is prudent and thoughtful. A wise person is slow to anger. This, of course, is the exact opposite of

how Proverbs describes a foolish person. There are multiple verses in Proverbs that say a fool is quick to anger; a fool encounters a problem, is sinned against, and just blows up. My favorite Proverb on that is probably Prov. 29:11, "A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back." That's true, right? Nobody admires the man who hits his golf ball into the water, curses up a storm and then breaks his club in half. Nobody respects the woman who unleashes a verbal attack on the checkout girl who isn't going fast enough. It's foolish and embarrassing. Wise people restrain their anger when somebody offends them; they hold it back.

The second virtue is overlooking an offense. Being slow to anger and overlooking an offense are related, but I want to speak more about this idea of overlooking offenses. What does that mean? Overlooking an offense might include bearing with others; it includes forgiving others. And that, my friends, is what Jesus is like. So, let's spend more time on this.

This word *overlook* gives this idea of *passing over* or even *covering* a sin. A wise person will look past a wrong, he will cover it. What's really interesting to me is that those are the images we see in the Bible describing God's forgiveness of our sins. For example, remember in the Exodus how the Angel of Death went through the land of Egypt claiming the life of the firstborn of every family? The Bible calls that an act of God's judgment. What's often missed about that story was this was an act of God judging the sin of all people in the land, not just the Egyptians. All had sinned; his people, too. But what did the Angel of Death do with everyone who faithfully put the blood of the lamb on his or her doorpost? He passed over the house. He overlooked their sins. Same words and ideas.

Or another fancy Bible word we use when we talk about forgiveness is the word *atone*. When Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for your sins and my sins, everyone who puts their faith and trust in him, Jesus atoned for those sins. Do you know what *atone* means? It means he covered them. The death and darkness of sin that pollutes everything it touches won't touch us because Jesus lovingly covered them for us. Jesus' atoning work on the cross was like a wet blanket that perfectly smothered the smoldering embers of sin scorching your soul. That's the idea that's being conveyed in Prov. 19:11.

So let's make something clear: it seems to me this little proverb is getting at a whole lot more than just looking past the minor offenses and annoyances of others. No, it's about embodying the character of God and offering forgiveness, mercy, and grace. I mentioned it earlier: do you want to be like Jesus? Do you want to handle sins and offenses against you like our Master? Overlook them. Cover them with grace. Give forgiveness to those who do wrong. That's what God has done for you. Isn't that what we praise God for?

That gets to the motivation behind this kind of life; why would you want to live like this? Listen to that second phrase again; it is his glory to overlook an offense. What does that mean? *It's his glory to overlook an offense*. We don't really talk that way today, but it is used a couple of other times in the Bible. Oddly enough, on multiple occasions it's used in reference to hair. Yeah, hair? Like this.

For example, in Prov. 20:29 we read, “The glory of young men is their strength, but the splendor of old men is their gray hair.” This proverb is contrasting young and old men. The wisdom writer is contrasting one big difference between the two. On the one hand, young men are fit and athletic, or at least that is when he could be his fittest (if it wasn't for Culvers). We Wipfs enjoy soccer; that's one of our favorite sports. It's a young man's game. In professional soccer, even more so than baseball and basketball, players in their late 20s are often considered past their prime. There are a few players who play in their 30s but not many. Most of the players who are considered to have the best quality are in their early to mid 20s. Their strength and speed is their glory, meaning, it's what warrants them praise from others.

But the glory of an older man is in his gray hair. In the Bible, gray hair represents a wise life lived well. 2 or 3 millennia ago, to even reach an age where you had gray hair meant you were doing something right; it meant you were wise. The young would look for you and ask you for advice on how they could live the good life that you lived. Gray hair was an older man's glory, meaning, it was the source of his praise and honor.

The Bible doesn't leave out the ladies. In 1 Cor. 11 there's this difficult passage to understand about head coverings and hair. And one of the things Paul says about women is that a woman's hair is her glory (he uses that phrase - her glory). How is a women's hair her glory? Well, think about prom night; think about a wedding day. What do these beautiful and excited ladies spend hours of effort on? Their hair. Why? Why does a woman spend so much time on her hair? It's her glory, meaning, a young woman's hair represents and accents her beauty. When the bride walks down the aisle we are all captivated by her beauty and her hair showcases or underscores her beauty. That's why her hair is her glory.

So, with these things in mind, consider Prov. 19:11. It is a person's glory to overlook an offense. Here's how I would say it: when a person offers forgiveness, when a person overlooks an offense, it displays the good and praiseworthy work of God in his or her life. It showcases the kind of person she has become. And do you know what that looks like? It looks glorious. It's worthy of praise. We admire it; more importantly, God commends it.

That's exactly why the Bible says God forgives us in Christ - for his glory.. Listen to this passage from Eph. 1 and see if you can pick it up (Eph. 1:4b-6a), “In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace.” What an awesome passage. God is so loving, so kind, that he predestined us to be adopted, included, brought into his family through Jesus Christ. He purposed it; he planned it. And the response that you and I should have and will have when we realize and experience this forgiveness is praising, glorying in his grace, the forgiveness that God has offered to us in this wonderful salvation. Why do you think so many of our worship songs sing about his grace? It's because that's why we praise him. It's to the praise of God's glorious grace that we are saved! When God overlooks our offenses against him it is his glory.

Friends, believe me, I know that there is a lot of hurt and anger and justice bumbling up inside some of you because of the offenses you've endured. I know that forgiving, overlooking such offenses seems so impossible. The harm done to you has changed your life for the worse. Sometimes, when people offend and hurt us, they do not care; they may even laugh about it. Some of you are afraid to sleep at night because of the nightmares that wait for you. I'm so sorry. But forgiveness is the path for you. It is what you've been called to do and saved to do. It's the path Jesus walked and has laid out for you to walk. And it will be for your glory.

So, let's talk about how to do this. It's one thing to know what to do, but it's another thing knowing how to do it.

The first thing to consider is right from Prov. 19:11 itself. Be motivated by wisdom; be motivated by glory. Do you want to be wise? Do you want to live a life that honors God and actually works for your best interests? Then be slow to anger; it's good sense. Do you want to live the glorious life? Do you want the God of the universe to smile down upon you? Then overlook offenses - it is your glory. Do you know what hearing these things does for me? It turns me towards the path of Jesus that forgives the offenses of others. Being wise, living a commendable life in the eyes of my Maker motivates me. There's more to do, but even just using this verse and the words of Prov. 19:11 help us get off to a good start.

The second piece of instruction I have for you might sound strange, but let me explain it to you: Don't work on forgiving; work to know God. Here's what I mean by that: Yes, you have to commit yourself to forgiving someone. You do have to do something, even work at it. But, forgiveness is more a work in you than a work by you (REPEAT). You can't forgive someone else unless God works forgiveness in you first. Do you know what I mean? I need God to do his good, saving work in me before I can offer forgiveness to other people. I can't just will myself to forgive someone. Oh, I might be able to pretend that I did. I may be able to say "I forgive you" or I may be able to say to someone else, "I've decided to forgive them," but those are just words. If my heart is still seething with bitterness, if I'm plotting and scheming of ways to hurt another person, even if it just stays in the realm of my fantasies, I really haven't forgiven them, have I?

I often tell people who come to me asking for help to forgive someone, "Stop trying to forgive them and get to know God better." Because that's where the grace and the strength to forgive someone comes from. It comes from knowing God. In Col. 3:13b Paul says, "as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive." Paul directs the Colossian church to God's forgiveness in his instruction on forgiving others. See, again, God's forgiveness of you. Remember how he gave you grace. Remind yourself how God has forgiven you. That's how you go and forgive others." Jesus said the same thing about forgiveness in Matthew. Jesus teaches his disciples about forgiveness and one of his key points is this: My mercy to you fuels and enables your mercy for others. When you know Jesus you can't help but overlook offenses.

So, with this in mind, here's what you should do to help you be a person who overlooks sin. Increase your understanding, your reading, your thinking about God's forgiveness of you.

Think how great it is. Remember how perfect it is. To do that, you kind of need to include thinking about how bad your sins really are. You have to be honest about how badly you've broken God's law and have offended his glory. And that's a real offense, not a fake one; not a trivial offense. The more you are aware of God's forgiveness of you, the more his Spirit will work grace in your life so you can offer forgiveness to others.

Towards the beginning of this message I asked you if you wanted to walk the path of Christ? Do you want to overlook offenses like Jesus overlooked your sins? I know you do, FBC. What's required for that to happen is for you to diligently, fervently, humbly seek to know God's forgiveness of you. When you do, you will be a person who overlooks offenses.