Christian Forgiveness

Founded, Fundamental, and Fully Christlike



Pastor Baltazar A. Niangar

Pastor Emeritus, Th.B., A.B., D.D.

CHRISTIAN

FORGIVENESS

Founded, Fundamental, and Fully Christlike

A Theological Monograph

Pastor Baltazar A. Niangar

Pastor Emeritus, Th.B., A.B., D.D.

Christian Forgiveness

Copyright © 2026 Pastor Baltazar A. Niangar

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other) without the prior written permission of the author, except for brief quotations in printed reviews.

Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

DEDICATION

To all who have been wronged and still chosen to forgive,
and to all who are still learning to do so:
may the grace that forgave you empower you to forgive.

"Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."
— Colossians 3:13

Soli Deo gloria.

Contents

Preface 6
Introduction 8
Chapter 1: Founded: Forgiveness Grounded in the Triune God 10
Chapter 2: Fundamental: Forgiveness as Moral Imperative 15
Chapter 3: Fully Christlike: Forgiveness as Conformity to Christ 20
Conclusion 25
Personal Questions and Challenges 27
Glossary 29
Scripture Index 31
About the Author 33

Preface

The lectures gathered in this volume were not born in the quiet of a study. They were born in the life of a community, in the conversations of people who had been hurt, who had hurt others, and who were trying, with varying degrees of success, to understand what the Gospel of Jesus Christ actually requires of them in the most difficult territory of the Christian life: the territory of forgiveness. Over many decades of pastoral ministry I have listened to the full range of human responses to injury and offence. I have heard the protests of the deeply wronged, who feel that forgiveness asks too much. I have heard the self-justifications of those who have wronged others and seek absolution without repentance. And I have heard, most movingly, the quiet testimonies of those who have forgiven the unforgivable and found, in that act, a freedom they had not known they were seeking.

This book is an attempt to set the theology of Christian forgiveness on a proper foundation. It proceeds in three movements, corresponding to the three sections of the lectures. The first establishes that Christian forgiveness is not a human achievement. It is a divine gift, grounded in the Trinitarian act of God: the Father who justifies, the Son who redeems, the Spirit who applies. The second examines what that divine gift requires of us in the domain of human behaviour, and how the forgiven person is called to live toward those who wrong them. The third considers the fullest expression of the forgiven-and-forgiving life: conformity to Christ Himself, who embodied perfect love, perfect holiness, and perfect freedom from offence.

I write not as a dispassionate theologian but as a pastor who has had to learn and relearn these things in my own life. The forgiveness of God, in my experience, is not a doctrine one masters and then moves beyond. It is a reality one enters more deeply year by year, finding in it, always, more grace than one had expected and more demand than one had anticipated. I offer it here, in print, in the hope that it will do for the reader what it has done for me: drive you deeper into the inexhaustible mercy of God, and from that mercy, outward toward the neighbour in need of forgiveness.

Pastor Baltazar A. Niangar
Pastor Emeritus, Th.B., A.B., D.D.

Introduction

> *"Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."*
> — Colossians 3:13

The old proverb that "to err is human; to forgive, divine" contains a half-truth that, unexamined, can do considerable theological damage. The truth it contains is genuine: forgiveness is, at its root, a divine act, and the human capacity to forgive is not a natural endowment but a supernatural gift. But the half-truth becomes dangerous when it is used as an alibi for continued moral failure. The logic runs: since everyone errs, and since forgiveness is the divine response to error, what does it matter if I continue in sin? Will not God forgive? The Apostle Paul anticipated precisely this reasoning in Romans 6:1 and repudiated it with equal precision: "By no means!" The person who uses the grace of forgiveness as a licence for moral carelessness has demonstrated, by that very move, that they have not yet understood what forgiveness is.

Christian forgiveness, rightly understood, is not a theological safety net that catches the believer who falls into comfortable, habitual sin. It is a transformative act of grace that changes the one who receives it. By the work of the Holy Spirit, it produces a new orientation toward God, a new sensitivity to sin, and a new capacity to extend toward others the mercy they themselves have received. The person who has truly encountered the forgiveness of God, who has stood before the cross and understood what their sin cost, does not go away saying, "Since I am forgiven, I may sin with impunity." They go away saying, with Paul, "the love of Christ controls us" (2 Cor. 5:14). We are, as Paul tells the Corinthians, new creations: "The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). New creations do not live like the old creation.

The structure of this volume reflects the structure of the argument. Chapter One grounds Christian forgiveness in the Trinitarian act of God: the Father who justifies the guilty, the Son who has purchased the Church with His own blood, and the Spirit who applies the redemption accomplished by Christ to the lives of those who believe. No doctrine of Christian forgiveness can stand if it is not grounded here. Chapter Two

moves from foundation to practice: what does a person who has been forgiven by God look like in their relationships? How does divine forgiveness shape human behaviour toward the sinful neighbour? Chapter Three asks the deepest question: what is the fullest expression of forgiven life? The answer is conformity to Christ: loving as He loved, living in holiness as He is holy, and dwelling in the freedom from offence that characterized His own life and ministry.

The three application questions with which the original lectures concluded bear stating at the outset, for they frame everything that follows. Are we really founded on Christ? Are we really living in Christlikeness? And are we, by God's grace, innocent of offence toward our neighbour? These are not easy questions. But they are the right ones.

CHAPTER 1

Founded: Forgiveness Grounded in the Triune God

"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."
— Romans 5:1

The most fundamental thing that can be said about Christian forgiveness is that it does not originate with us. It is not a moral achievement, a spiritual discipline, or a psychological strategy. It is a gift flowing from an act of God, an act in which all three Persons of the Holy Trinity are engaged, each in the manner proper to His Person, each in perfect concert with the others. To lose sight of this Trinitarian foundation is to reduce forgiveness to a moralism, a demand that one person extends to another without any resources adequate to the demand. To recover it is to discover that the forgiveness the Christian is called to practise is not a human performance at all, but a participation in what God Himself has already done.

The Colossian text that anchors this study makes the point with structural elegance: "forgive each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive" (Col. 3:13). The standard of Christian forgiveness is not some culturally negotiated norm of magnanimity. It is the forgiveness of God Himself. To understand what we are called to do, therefore, we must first understand what God has done, and who God is in doing it. The three sub-points of this chapter follow the Trinitarian logic of forgiveness: the Father who justifies, the Son who redeems, and the Spirit who applies.

A. Justified by God the Father: The Foundation of Peace

The Apostle Paul's declaration in Romans 5:1 is one of the most consequential sentences in the New Testament. The word "justified" (from the Greek *dikaioo*) is a legal term. It denotes the act by which a

judge declares a defendant righteous before the law. In the case of divine justification, the judgment is not based on the actual moral condition of the defendant, who is, by the verdict of Scripture, a sinner deserving condemnation, but on the righteousness of Another, imputed (that is, credited) to the sinner by the grace of God and received through faith.

> *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*
> — Romans 8:1

The consequence of this justification is peace. It is not the fragile peace of self-approval or the temporary peace of favourable circumstances, but the settled, covenantal peace of a soul that has been declared righteous before the tribunal of the eternal God. Romans 8:1 reinforces this with the great negative: no condemnation. Not reduced condemnation, not suspended condemnation, but none. The forgiveness of God, mediated through justification, is total and irreversible.

This has immediate implications for how the forgiven person relates to their own sinfulness and to the sinfulness of others. The one who has stood before God as a guilty defendant and has been declared righteous by grace cannot, in moral coherence, stand before their sinful neighbour as a righteous plaintiff demanding satisfaction. The grammar of justification (by grace, through faith, not of works) is also the grammar of interpersonal forgiveness. It is given freely, not earned; it is extended before repentance is fully complete; and it does not measure out its measure according to what the offender deserves.

B. Redeemed by God the Son: The Blood That Purchases

If the Father's role in forgiveness is that of the Judge who justifies, the Son's role is that of the Redeemer who provides the only ground on which that justification can stand. The Church of God, Paul tells the Ephesian elders, was obtained "with his own blood" (Acts 20:28), a statement of arresting theological density, affirming simultaneously the deity of Christ and the atoning efficacy of His death. It is the Son of God who shed that blood; it is His sacrifice that satisfies the justice of the Father and makes possible the declaration that guilty sinners are forgiven.

> *"Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood."*
> — Acts 20:28

The language of redemption (*apolutrōsis*, "buy back") carries the image of a slave market. Those who were in bondage to sin, under the dominion of the law's condemnation, have been purchased out of that bondage at the price of the Redeemer's life. This is not merely a legal fiction; it is a transfer of ownership. The forgiven person does not merely have their debt cancelled; they are brought under a new lordship, the lordship of the One who "loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). This changes everything about how they live, including how they relate to those who have wronged them.

The cross of Christ is, therefore, the centre and the inexhaustible resource of Christian forgiveness. When a believer struggles to forgive an injury that seems too deep or too recent or too costly, the proper response is not to summon greater reserves of personal willpower but to return to Calvary, to stand again at the foot of the cross and hear again the Son of God say, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). The one who has been redeemed by that blood cannot, with integrity, withhold from their neighbour what they themselves have received at such infinite cost.

C. Applied by God the Holy Spirit: The Life of Forgiveness Within

The forgiveness accomplished by the Father in justification and by the Son in redemption is made real in the life of the believer by the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul's extended treatment in Romans 8:4–26 traces the Spirit's work across the whole terrain of the Christian life: He enables the fulfilment of the law's righteous requirement (v. 4), He puts to death the deeds of the body (v. 13), He witnesses to our adoption (vv. 15–16), and He helps us in our weakness (v. 26). At every point, the Spirit's work is the work of applying what Christ has accomplished, making real in the inner life of the believer what has been secured in the redemptive act of the Son.

"For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death."
— Romans 8:2

This means that the capacity to forgive is not a natural human capacity that some people happen to have in greater measure than others; it is a supernatural capacity, the fruit of the Spirit's transforming work within. Galatians 5:22–23 names love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control as the fruit of the Spirit, every one of which is required in the act of forgiving a real wrong done by a real person. The person who finds forgiveness impossible (and all of us find it impossible in our own strength) is being directed, by that very impossibility, to the Spirit who alone can work in them what God requires of them.

Christian forgiveness, then, is a Trinitarian act. It is founded upon the Father's justifying decree, purchased by the Son's atoning blood, and worked out in the believer's life by the indwelling Spirit. To receive this forgiveness and to extend it to others is not merely to follow a moral rule; it is to participate, by grace, in the very life of God.

Reflection Questions: Chapter 1

1. Romans 5:1 teaches that justification produces "peace with God." How does the doctrine of justification (being declared righteous by grace through faith, apart from works) reshape the way we think about extending forgiveness to those who have wronged us? In what specific ways does the grammar of justification (by grace, freely, not earned) become the grammar of interpersonal forgiveness?

2. The Church was purchased "with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). In a congregation, this shared identity as blood-bought people carries profound implications for how members relate to one another through conflict and injury. What practices, disciplines, or structures might a local church put in place to help its members draw upon the cross as the primary resource for interpersonal forgiveness, rather than defaulting to human strategies of conflict management?

3. Romans 8 teaches that the Spirit helps us "in our weakness" (v. 26). Most Christians know, in theory, that forgiveness is a work of the Spirit. But how does that theological conviction actually change one's practice? When you next face the demand to forgive something genuinely costly, what would it look like to consciously depend on the Spirit's work rather than merely trying harder?

CHAPTER 2

Fundamental: Forgiveness as Moral Imperative

"Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good."
— Romans 12:9

If Chapter One established the divine foundation of forgiveness, Chapter Two addresses its human expression: the moral and behavioural shape that the forgiven life must take in its concrete relationships. The transition in the original outline is instructive: "Being founded in Christ for forgiveness, it is behaviourally fundamental." The connection between foundation and behaviour is not optional or aspirational; it is moral and necessary. The one who has been forgiven much is, by that very fact, obligated to forgive much, for "he who is forgiven little, loves little" (Luke 7:47). The pattern is as old as the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt. 18:21–35), in which the one who had been released from an unpayable debt refused to release his debtor from a trivial one, and was condemned precisely for that incongruity.

Romans 12 is the *locus classicus* (the classic passage) for the behavioural outworking of the Gospel. Having spent eleven chapters establishing the doctrinal ground (justification, election, the covenantal purposes of God), Paul turns in chapter 12 to the practical: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God" (v. 1). The "therefore" is decisive: the ethics of Romans 12 are rooted in the theology of Romans 1–11. What follows is not a moralism imposed from outside but a description of what love looks like when it is lived, the love that, as Paul says, "has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 5:5).

A. Not to Forget Our Own Sinfulness

The first and most fundamental requirement of a person who would forgive another is an honest and continuous memory of their own sinfulness. Paul's catalogue of love in Romans 12 begins with the inward:

"Let love be genuine" (v. 9). Genuine love cannot coexist with the self-righteousness that forgets one's own moral failure while fixating on another's. The same Paul who commands forgiveness also commands the believer not to "be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight" (Rom. 12:16).

> *"Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."*
> — 1 Corinthians 13:7

The connection to 1 Corinthians 13:7 is significant. Paul's famous exposition of love includes the phrase "love bears all things," a statement whose force is easily lost in abstraction. The Greek στέγει (*stegei*) means literally to cover, to protect, to hold under a roof. Love covers. It does not expose the failures of others for public scrutiny; it does not rehearse the catalogue of wrongs received; it does not weaponize another's vulnerability. This covering is not denial, for it does not pretend the wrong did not happen, but it is a deliberate choice not to use the wrong as a permanent definition of the one who committed it.

Practically, not forgetting one's own sinfulness does not mean perpetual self-condemnation; the justified person is not condemned (Rom. 8:1). It means maintaining epistemic humility, that is, the willingness to admit how much one has missed and how much one needs, which comes from an honest reckoning with one's own need for grace. The person who is acutely aware of how much they have been forgiven is unlikely to be a grudge-holder; the person who has lost sight of their own debt is precisely the one most likely to demand full payment from their neighbour.

B. To Forgive the Sinner

The second behavioural imperative is the most direct: to forgive. Colossians 3:13 is unambiguous, and the verse that opened this study bears repeating in full.

> *"Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."*
> — Colossians 3:13

The verb here, *charizomenoi* (χαριζόμενοι), comes from *charis* (χάρις), grace. To forgive is to grace someone: to extend to them a gift they have not earned and cannot repay. This is precisely what distinguishes Christian forgiveness from every merely human form of reconciliation. It is not contingent upon the offender's perfect remorse, full restitution, or adequate explanation. It is given freely, as grace, because grace is what the forgiver has received.

This does not mean that forgiveness collapses into the absence of accountability, or that the forgiven person escapes all consequences of their actions. Scripture is clear that sin has consequences, and that love for the sinner sometimes requires the kind of confrontation described in Matthew 18:15–17. But the confrontation of Matthew 18 is itself an act of love and an expression of forgiveness. Its goal is restoration ("you have gained your brother," v. 15), not condemnation. Forgiveness and accountability are not opposites; they are partners in the service of genuine love.

Paul's instruction in Romans 12:17–21 traces the outward expression of this forgiving orientation with remarkable concreteness: "Repay no one evil for evil" (v. 17); "never avenge yourselves" (v. 19); "overcome evil with good" (v. 21). The person who has been founded in Christ's forgiveness does not reach for retaliation; they reach, however imperfectly and with whatever Spirit-assisted effort, for the good of the one who wronged them.

C. To Forgo Bitterness: Releasing the Grudge

The third behavioural imperative is perhaps the most psychologically demanding: to forgo the bad and ill feelings that the experience of sin evokes, and to resist the settling into bitterness and grudge. The Apostle Paul addresses this in Ephesians 4:26–27 with a precision that pastoral experience confirms.

> *"Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil."*
> — Ephesians 4:26–27

Note carefully what Paul does not say. He does not say, "Do not be angry." Anger at genuine wrong is a morally appropriate response. It is,

in fact, a sign of moral seriousness, of caring that injustice has been done. What Paul prohibits is the retention of anger beyond its proper season: the slow transformation of righteous indignation into festering resentment.

The phrase "give no opportunity to the devil" (Eph. 4:27) is theologically significant. Paul is not merely issuing a psychological warning against the corrosive effects of long-held resentment; he is naming the spiritual dimension of the issue. Unresolved anger, held past its proper time, becomes a foothold, a place of occupation (*topos*, τόπος), for the enemy of souls. The person who nurses a grievance, rehearses their injury, and refuses to release it from the economy of their inner life is not merely engaging in a personally destructive habit; they are, without knowing it, providing the adversary with a point of entry. This is why the forgiveness of interpersonal wrongs is not merely a matter of personal virtue; it is a matter of spiritual warfare.

To forgo the grudge is not to deny that the injury was real or that the anger was justified. It is to make a deliberate, Spirit-assisted decision to release the claim one holds against the offender: to stop keeping the account (love "is not irritable or resentful," 1 Cor. 13:5) and to entrust the matter of ultimate justice to God, who alone judges rightly (Rom. 12:19; Rev. 19:2, "his judgments are true and just"). This is an act of profound theological confidence: the decision not to avenge oneself is grounded in the conviction that God's justice is more reliable and more complete than anything human vengeance can produce.

Reflection Questions: Chapter 2

1. Romans 12:16 commands believers not to be "wise in your own sight," a form of humility that has direct implications for the capacity to forgive. How does pride, specifically the pride of the person who has forgotten their own sinfulness, function as one of the primary obstacles to forgiveness? What spiritual disciplines (confession, the Lord's Supper, regular examination of conscience) might help cultivate the remembrance of one's own need for grace?

2. Paul commands the church to "overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21) and describes forgiveness as gracing the offender (Col. 3:13,

charizomenoi). How does a local congregation practically embody this standard in its conflict-resolution processes? What would need to change in your community's culture for forgiveness to be understood not as weakness but as the strongest expression of the Gospel?

3. Ephesians 4:26–27 warns that anger held past its proper season gives an "opportunity" to the devil. Think of an injury you may be carrying: perhaps an old wound, a slow-burning resentment, a grievance you have not yet released. What would it take, concretely, to bring that specific matter before God this week and ask the Spirit to work in you the release that you cannot produce by an act of will alone?

CHAPTER 3

Fully Christlike: Forgiveness as Conformity to Christ

"You shall be holy, for I am holy."
— 1 Peter 1:16

Christian forgiveness, in its fullest expression, is not merely a duty to be discharged or a virtue to be cultivated; it is a conformity to the character of Christ. This is the deepest level of the argument: having established the divine foundation of forgiveness (Chapter One) and its behavioural requirements (Chapter Two), we now ask what the fullest expression of forgiving, forgiven life actually looks like. The answer is not a standard of human moral achievement. It is a Person, Jesus Christ Himself, who in His earthly life embodied perfectly the love, holiness, and freedom from offence to which He calls His people.

The Apostle Peter's fundamental summons to holiness (1 Pet. 1:16, quoting Lev. 11:44) is not merely a moral demand; it is a Christological one, that is, a demand that finds its meaning in the Person of Christ. In the New Testament, holiness is inseparable from Christ, who is "the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24), the one in whom "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Col. 2:9), and the standard after whose image the believer is being conformed (Rom. 8:29). To become fully Christlike in the domain of forgiveness is to grow into the image of the One who, from the cross, prayed for the forgiveness of those who crucified Him.

A. Like Christ Fulfilling the Law of Love

Jesus, when asked to identify the greatest commandment, replied without hesitation (Matt. 22:37–40).

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."
— Matthew 22:37–40

This is not merely an ethical summary; it is a description of the life that Jesus Himself lived. He loved the Father with the totality of His being, and He loved His neighbour, including His enemies, with the same unconditional, self-giving love.

The vertical dimension of love, the love of God, is the foundation of the horizontal. It is because the Christian loves God with their whole being that they are capable, in principle, of loving their neighbour beyond the natural limits of human affection and tolerance. The love of God, as Berkhof observed, is not sentimental; it is holy. It does not condone sin, but it does not cease to seek the good of the sinner. It is this quality of love (holy, persistent, seeking the other's genuine good) that the forgiving Christian is called to embody.

The phrase "love your neighbor as yourself" establishes the standard of measure. What the Christian most deeply desires for themselves (to be treated with patience, to have their wrongs covered rather than exposed, to be given the benefit of the doubt, to be forgiven when they fail) is precisely what they are called to desire for their neighbour. This is not natural; it runs directly against the grain of fallen self-love. But it is what it means to be conformed to the image of the One who, when He had every right to treat His people according to what they deserved, chose instead to love them "to the end" (John 13:1).

B. Like Christ Fulfilling the Law of Holiness

The second dimension of Christlike forgiveness is holiness. Peter's citation of the Levitical command, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:15–16), comes in the context of an extended exhortation to live as those who have been redeemed from the futile ways of their ancestors (1 Pet. 1:18) and born again through the living and abiding word of God (1 Pet. 1:23). The holiness to which Peter calls his readers is not a detached, world-rejecting purity; it is the positive quality of a life shaped by the character of the Holy God who called them.

> *"As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct."*
> — 1 Peter 1:14–15

Holiness, in the context of forgiveness, means that the Christian's forgiving life is not a morally indifferent acceptance of all behaviour. Christ forgave, but He also called the forgiven to "go, and from now on sin no more" (John 8:11). Holy forgiveness loves the sinner enough to desire their transformation, not merely their comfort. It forgives the wrong committed while simultaneously longing for the wrongdoer to be conformed to the image of Christ in whom they will find their true life.

Peter's insistence on holiness "in all your conduct" (1 Pet. 1:15) is a reminder that there is no area of the Christian life, including the most intimate and personal domain of one's responses to injury, that is exempt from the demand of holiness. The anger that hardens into bitterness, the resentment that is harboured in the heart, the contempt that is masked by polite social behaviour: all of these are failures of holiness as much as any overt moral transgression. The Christlike person is holy in the way they feel as well as in the way they act.

C. Like Christ Who Gives Freedom: Released from Offence

The third and perhaps most liberating aspect of Christlike forgiveness is freedom: freedom from the power of offence to define, diminish, or dominate the life of the one who has been wronged. Psalm 119:165 expresses this with remarkable beauty.

> *"Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble."*
> — Psalm 119:165

The Hebrew phrase translated "make them stumble" carries the idea of being caused to fall, being tripped up, being made to lose one's footing. The person whose life is ordered by the love of God's Word walks in such security that the provocations of others (the insults, the injustices, the injuries) do not have the power to destabilize them.

This is freedom from being offended, not in the sense of indifference to wrong, but in the sense of a settled rootedness in God that cannot be uprooted by the actions of others. Jesus Himself demonstrated this quality throughout His ministry. He was misunderstood by His family, dismissed by His hometown, betrayed by

a disciple, abandoned by His closest friends, and executed by the authorities He had created, and at no point did He lose the settled peace that characterized His life. His security was not in the approval of those around Him but in the love of His Father ("he who sent me is with me," John 8:29).

The corresponding freedom, the freedom not to offend others, is equally fundamental. First Thessalonians 5:15 captures the outward-facing dimension of this freedom: "See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone." The person who is free from the power of offence received does not traffic in offence given. They do not retaliate, do not nurse a desire for their offender's humiliation, do not allow the injury done to them to become a reason to injure others. They absorb the wrong, as Christ absorbed the greatest wrong in history, and return good for evil, not because they are emotionally invulnerable but because they are spiritually free.

This is the fullest picture of Christian forgiveness: a life so rooted in the Trinitarian act of God, so shaped by its behavioural requirements, and so conformed to the character of Christ that it becomes, in itself, a testimony to the Gospel. The world does not naturally produce people who love their enemies, bless those who curse them, and pray for those who persecute them (Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:28). When the Church does, it witnesses to something that natural human society cannot generate: the transforming power of the grace of God.

Reflection Questions: Chapter 3

1. Matthew 22:37–39 identifies the love of God and the love of neighbour as the two great commandments. How does the love of God "with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind," a total, wholehearted devotion, actually produce the capacity to love a neighbour who has wronged you? What is the relationship between vertical love (toward God) and horizontal love (toward neighbour), and why does the order matter?

2. Peter commands holiness "in all your conduct" (1 Pet. 1:15), which includes the interior domain of how we feel and what we think about

those who have injured us. As a community of faith, how do we hold one another accountable not merely to the outward behaviour of forgiveness but to the inward reality of it: the release of bitterness, the willingness to pray for the offender, the genuine desire for their good? What would honest, loving accountability in this area look like in your community?

3. Psalm 119:165 promises that those who love God's law will have "great peace" and that "nothing can make them stumble." Reflect on a situation, past or present, in which you allowed an offence to make you stumble: to destabilize your peace, distort your relationships, or diminish your witness. What would it look like, concretely, to surrender that situation to the God of Psalm 119:165 and receive in its place the freedom from offence that He promises?

Conclusion

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy."
— Matthew 5:7

We have travelled, in these three chapters, from the Trinitarian foundation of forgiveness to its practical expression to its fullest Christlike form. What has emerged is not a simple moral instruction ("forgive, because it is the right thing to do") but a comprehensive vision of what it means to live as one who has been forgiven by the living God.

The concluding summary of the original lectures is worth restating with theological precision. Christian forgiveness is basically founded: it rests not on human capacity or moral resolution but on the justifying act of the Father, the redeeming death of the Son, and the applying work of the Holy Spirit. To attempt forgiveness without this foundation is to attempt the impossible; to draw upon this foundation is to discover resources adequate to even the deepest human injury.

Christian forgiveness is behaviourally fundamental: it is not an occasional act of magnanimity toward those who have committed minor offences but a characteristic and consistent pattern of life that flows from the memory of one's own need for grace, the daily practice of extending grace to others, and the deliberate release of bitterness before it takes root. Romans 12 and Colossians 3 describe this not as an attainment of the spiritually elite but as the ordinary expectation of ordinary Christian life.

And Christian forgiveness is becoming fully Christlike: it is the progressive conformity of the believer's character to the character of the One who loved perfectly, lived in holiness, and walked in such settled freedom from offence that neither betrayal nor torture nor death could rob Him of His peace. This conformity is the work of a lifetime, never completed in the present age, always being deepened by the Spirit who is making the people of God ready for the day when they will see their Lord face to face.

The three application questions that close the original lectures are not rhetorical; they are real. Are we really founded on Christ, or do we attempt to live and forgive on the basis of our own resources? Are we really found having Christlikeness, or do we settle for a superficial

forgiveness that performs the outward motion while harbouring inward resentment? And are we innocent of any offence? Are we living in such freedom from the power of injury received that we are genuinely, not merely formally, at peace with those around us?

These questions do not condemn; they direct. They direct us back, always, to the cross, to the One who was "pierced for our transgressions" and "crushed for our iniquities" (Isa. 53:5), and who from that place of ultimate injury prayed, "Father, forgive them." It is His forgiveness that makes ours possible. It is His peace that we share. It is His freedom that we are being given. And it is to His glory alone that we are learning, however slowly and imperfectly, to forgive.

Soli Deo gloria.

Personal Questions and Challenges

The questions below are not examination questions; they are an invitation. Pray before you sit with them. The goal is not self-improvement but encounter with the God who has already forgiven everything, and who is forming you, by His Spirit, into a person who can forgive as He forgives.

On the Foundation of Forgiveness in the Triune God

1. If someone asked you to explain, in plain terms, why you are able to forgive at all, what would you say? Would your answer be rooted in your own moral strength, your emotional resilience, or the Trinitarian act of God described in Romans 5:1, Acts 20:28, and Romans 8? What would need to change in your self-understanding for your capacity to forgive to be grounded, consciously and consistently, in what God has done?

2. The Son of God shed His own blood to purchase the Church (Acts 20:28). Consider the specific person or persons toward whom you find forgiveness most difficult. Can you name, concretely, what it cost Christ to forgive them? Bring that cost before God in prayer this week, and ask Him to use it to break the power of your resistance.

3. Identify one area of your inner life where the Spirit's work of applying forgiveness has not yet fully penetrated: a habit of thought, a pattern of feeling, a reflexive response to a particular person or type of situation. Commit to bringing that specific area into the Spirit's care through prayer, confession, and, if appropriate, the counsel of a trusted Christian friend or pastor.

On the Behavioural Practice of Forgiveness

1. Romans 12:9–21 describes the outward shape of a forgiving life. Read through that passage slowly this week. Which specific verse stops you? Which specific instruction reveals a gap between what Paul describes and what you actually do? What would it take to close that gap, in this specific relationship, this week?

2. Colossians 3:13 grounds the command to forgive in the memory of how Christ has forgiven us. Is there a specific wrong you are currently carrying (a grievance, a hurt, a sense of having been treated unjustly) that you have not yet released? Name it honestly before God. Ask Him to help you see it in the light of how much you yourself have been forgiven, and to give you the grace to extend forgiveness before that grievance has a chance to become a grudge.

3. Ephesians 4:26–27 warns against letting the sun go down on your anger. Is there a relationship in your life in which unresolved anger has been allowed to settle, to harden, and to give the enemy of your soul a point of entry? What practical step will you take this week to address it: a direct conversation, prayer, the mediation of a trusted third party, or all three?

On the Fullness of Christlike Forgiveness

1. Matthew 22:37–39 calls us to love God and neighbour with the totality of our being. In which specific relationships (family, church, workplace, neighbourhood) is your practice of love most obviously falling short of this totalizing standard? Choose one of those relationships and commit to one concrete act of love this week that goes beyond what you feel is deserved.

2. First Peter 1:14–16 calls for holiness "in all your conduct." Does your inner life (your thoughts about those who have wronged you, your emotional responses when you recall past injuries, the way you speak about difficult people when they are not present) reflect the holiness to which Peter calls you? What one change in your inner life would make your forgiveness more genuine and less performative?

3. Psalm 119:165 promises "great peace" to those who love God's law, a peace so deep that "nothing can make them stumble." On a scale of honesty, how close are you to that freedom? What specific offence, received or feared, still has the power to destabilize you? Bring it, by name, before the God of Psalm 119, and ask Him to exchange your vulnerability to offence for the freedom that only His peace can give.

Glossary

Apolutrōsis: The Greek word for redemption, meaning to buy someone back by paying a price, as when a slave is purchased out of slavery. In this book it describes what Christ did for sinners by giving His own life (Chapter 1).

Atonement: The work of Christ in dying on the cross to take away the guilt of sin and restore sinners to peace with God. To call His blood "atoning" is to say that it accomplishes this.

Charizomenoi: A Greek word, found in Colossians 3:13, meaning forgiving or showing grace. It comes from the word for grace, so to forgive is to give someone a gift they have not earned.

Christological: Having to do with the Person and work of Jesus Christ. A Christological claim is one that finds its meaning in who Christ is and what He has done.

Epistemic Humility: The willingness to admit how little one knows and how much one may have missed or misjudged, including about oneself.

Imputation: The act by which God credits the righteousness of Christ to a sinner's account, so that the sinner is counted righteous before God even though he has not earned it.

Justification: The act by which God, as Judge, declares a sinner righteous because of the righteousness of Christ, received by faith alone. It is a legal verdict, not a gradual process.

Locus Classicus: A Latin phrase meaning the classic place or passage. It names the text most often turned to for teaching on a given subject.

Moralism: The error of treating Christian faith as a list of rules to be kept by one's own effort, apart from the grace and power that God supplies.

Redemption: Deliverance from slavery to sin and its condemnation through the payment Christ made by His death. The one redeemed now belongs to Him.

Stegei: The Greek verb translated "bears" in 1 Corinthians 13:7. It means to cover or to protect, as a roof shelters those beneath it.

Topos: The Greek word for a place or a foothold, translated "opportunity" in Ephesians 4:27. It pictures unresolved anger becoming a place where the enemy can take hold.

Trinitarian: Having to do with the Trinity: one God in three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. A Trinitarian act is one in which all three Persons work together, each in His own way.

Scripture Index

Leviticus	*11:44*	*Chapter 3*
Psalms	*119:165*	*Chapter 3; Personal Questions*
Isaiah	*53:5*	*Conclusion*
Matthew	*5:7*	*Conclusion*
Matthew	*5:44*	*Chapter 3*
Matthew	*18:15–17*	*Chapter 2*
Matthew	*18:21–35*	*Chapter 2*
Matthew	*22:37–40*	*Chapter 3; Personal Questions*
Mark	*1:24*	*Chapter 3*
Luke	*6:28*	*Chapter 3*
Luke	*7:47*	*Chapter 2*
Luke	*23:34*	*Chapter 1*
John	*8:11*	*Chapter 3*
John	*8:29*	*Chapter 3*
John	*13:1*	*Chapter 3*
Acts	*20:28*	*Chapter 1; Personal Questions*
Romans	*5:1*	*Chapter 1; Personal Questions*
Romans	*5:5*	*Chapter 2*
Romans	*6:1*	*Introduction*
Romans	*8:1*	*Chapter 1; Chapter 2*
Romans	*8:2*	*Chapter 1*
Romans	*8:4–26*	*Chapter 1*
Romans	*8:29*	*Chapter 3*
Romans	*12:9–21*	*Chapter 2; Personal Questions*
1 Corinthians	*13:5*	*Chapter 2*
1 Corinthians	*13:7*	*Chapter 2*
2 Corinthians	*5:14*	*Introduction*
2 Corinthians	*5:17*	*Introduction*
Galatians	*2:20*	*Chapter 1*
Galatians	*5:22–23*	*Chapter 1*
Ephesians	*4:26–27*	*Chapter 2; Personal Questions*
Colossians	*2:9*	*Chapter 3*

Colossians	*3:13*	*Dedication; Introduction; Chapter 1; Chapter 2; Personal Questions*
1 Thessalonians	*5:15*	*Chapter 3*
1 Peter	*1:14–16*	*Chapter 3; Personal Questions*
1 Peter	*1:18*	*Chapter 3*
1 Peter	*1:23*	*Chapter 3*
Revelation	*19:2*	*Chapter 2*

About the Author

Pastor Baltazar A. Niangar is a Pastor Emeritus who holds the degrees of Th.B. (Bachelor of Theology), A.B. (Bachelor of Arts), and D.D. (Doctor of Divinity). He has devoted his life and ministry to the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the rigorous theological formation of God's people, and the equipping of pastoral leaders for faithful and effective ministry in church and society.

Pastor Bal served for many years as a pastor and theological educator, and has been a central figure in the work of Holistic Enhancement for Lay-leaders and Pastors (HELP, Inc.) — a parachurch ministry committed to equipping the whole people of God for faithful service across every sphere of life. His monthly theological lectures to the HELP, Inc. fellowship have addressed the most foundational questions of the Christian faith, and these studies — expanded, deepened, and formatted for print — have shaped the theological works he continues to write.

His theological formation reflects sustained engagement with the whole of the Reformed and evangelical tradition. Among those whose thought has most shaped his own are Augustine of Hippo, John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper, Louis Berkhof, Benjamin B. Warfield, Oscar Cullmann, Herman Dooyeweerd, Karl Barth, Paul Jewett, Francis Schaeffer, R.C. Sproul, and Ravi Zacharias. He reads every theological question through the lens of the whole counsel of God, and has spent a lifetime teaching others to do the same.

The present work, *Christian Forgiveness*, represents Pastor Bal's sustained theological and pastoral engagement with one of the most challenging and most liberating realities of the Christian life. Grounded in the Trinitarian act of God, worked out in the moral fabric of daily relationships, and aimed at nothing less than full conformity to Christ, this book is for every believer who has struggled to forgive and every community that longs to live in the freedom that genuine forgiveness alone can give.

Other theological works by the author:

The Athanasian Creed Understood by Faith
Biblical Christian Cosmoscope
Biblical Leadership Is Shepherding
Biblical Salvation: A Study in Soteriology
Christian Balanced Thinking and Life
Comparing and Contrasting Calvinism and Arminianism
Cosmological Arguments for the Origin of the Universe
Divine Election unto Salvation
Doctrines of Divine Grace, Part II
Eastern Western Thinking and World-and-Life Views
Eisegesis in the Bible Study
The Epistemological Thinking for Christians
The Five Illustrations of Divine Truths
The Five Solas
God Set Time and Eternity in the Heart of Man
His Eternal Fatherhood Is the Ground of Eternal Salvation and His Everlasting Sovereignty Is the Guarantee of Everlasting Salvation
The Holy Loving Triune Lord God
In Everything, Give Thanks to God
The Main Subjects of Luther's Ninety-Five Theses
Millennium in the Bible
Our Attitude Towards Wealth
Paul's Summary of His Message in the Ministry
The Progressive Parallelisms in the Book of Revelation
The Reformed Theological Paradigm
The Reformed Theological Summary of Life
The Seven Churches of Revelation
The Seven Loci of Christian Theology
The Seven Loci of Dogmatics
The Seventy Weeks of Daniel
Six Calvinistic Schools on Soteriology

Spiritual Unity and Personal Diversity in Christ
The Thinking Process of the Christian Mind
The Threefold Understanding of Salvation
The Truth of Divine Election
Vital Words Related to Salvation
What the Christian Church Should Be
Why God Did Decree and Allow Evil to Exist
The Work of the Holy Spirit

He lives with his beloved wife, Estrella. He is the father of Dr. Ellazar and Zarelle Grace. He continues to preach, teach, write, and intercede for the reformation and renewal of the Church of Jesus Christ, until the day when faith gives way to sight and the knowledge that is now partial becomes the knowledge that is full.

Soli Deo gloria.