

Christ-Like Love and Forgiveness: A Biblical Foundation
for Counseling Practice

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Although love and forgiveness are embraced as concepts that go hand-in-hand, seldom does the literature and research address the interconnectiveness from an in-depth scriptural explanation. This article develops a theocentric understanding of human forgiveness rooted in the supreme grace of divine love. Love and forgiveness have divine origins; therefore, a Christian counseling perspective of love must emerge from an understanding of God's character, redemptive work throughout history, and command to love. Because love cannot be experienced in a fallen world without forgiveness, a perspective of love should also include forgiveness. A biblical case is made that forgiveness can never be understood correctly apart from love and vice versa. A counseling example is provided to demonstrate how God worked in the lives of family members who chose to approach each other with Christ-like love and forgiveness. This thinking opens new vistas for the exploration of research and the development of practice theories for counselors.

Love is the very essence of life. Developing a correct perspective of love is paramount in knowing how to live life the way God intended, since God created the soul to love and to be loved. Receiving and sharing love during one's earthly journey also requires a deep grasp of forgiveness, since life cannot be lived without experiencing hurt and brokenness associated with relational offenses. Moreover, considering that God's love summarizes all of God's commands, a proper perspective of forgiveness is crucial for one to love in a way that pleases God and to help others in counseling situations. Therefore, the significant task of developing a Christ-like perspective of love must also consider the dynamics of forgiveness; likewise, a Christ-like perspective of forgiveness cannot be developed apart from an understanding of love. Given this inherent connection between love and forgiveness, where should one start? Beginning with the critical presupposition that both love and forgiveness originated with the Creator and Redeemer, a Christian perspective of love and forgiveness must start with God and be consistent with God's eternal relational paradigm of love (Cheong, 2005). Any counseling practice theory that is to be Christ-centered must have a strong theoretical structure and an intervention orientation based on biblical love and forgiveness.

Four objectives of this article are: (a) to establish a right understanding of God's two-fold commandment to love; (b) to show the inseparable link between love and forgiveness; (c) to understand forgiveness based on God's love; and (d) to set up a biblical foundation from which a Christian perspective of love and forgiveness can emerge to guide the practice theory of Christian counselors. A practice theory with biblical love and forgiveness is the hallmark that distinguishes secular and semi-secular approaches from a counseling approach that is Christ-centered. To help illustrate the approach, we will start with the first part of a case study and toward the end, show how God worked to help this family resolve offenses through love and forgiveness.

The Case Study: Part I

Judy, a 35-year-old mature believer in Christ, confessed to the counselor (the second author), "I hate my father!" The counselor noticed a problem with Judy's feelings about her father as it came up in marital and individual sessions. However, Judy's primary presenting problem was that she was chronically depressed and angry about difficulties with her husband and child to the point that she contemplated suicide. Often deep-rooted anger and unforgiveness issues from the family-of-origin arise when dealing with current family problems. Some of the unconscious attraction to a marital partner is an implicit role fit for a person to carry out unresolved issues and patterns from their original family (family-of-origin).

The counselor suggested that a session involving her father, brother, and sister might help in resolving the past and present conflict with her father and siblings. Since many intense issues between father and son (Judy's 33-year-old brother) dominated the session, most of the meeting focused on resolving the brother's issues with his father. The counselor was aware that Judy vicariously experienced her own anger and bitterness toward her father as she observed her brother express similar thoughts and emotions toward their father, but time ran out prior to processing her unforgiveness toward her dad. Judy and her brother had been at odds and angry at each other for as long as both could remember, but during a break in this meeting, they embraced and exchanged mutual requests for forgiveness and later described their relationship as "healed" from this 15-minute interaction. In a 6-year follow-up, this healing was still evident in their lives.

Since this case, the counselor has become convinced, from a biblical perspective, that offenses need immediate attention, and encourages those involved to consider reconvening the session later in the day, should the first session expire be-

fore each person has the opportunity to process their unforgiveness. However, in this case, the counselor suggested that the father and Judy have a follow-up meeting in the near future. In the interim week, the counselor had an individual meeting with Judy to help prepare her for the joint meeting with her father. Judy expressed her intense hatred toward her dad in her time alone with the counselor, and started to view the upcoming joint session as an opportunity to get her "claws" into her father. Somehow Judy implicitly adopted a modern psychological viewpoint that angry feelings are to be experienced and ventilated and authentic love and forgiveness takes time (in her case she was going on 30 years of anger and hatred). At one point during this individual meeting, the counselor gently asked Judy to examine the love God demonstrates to her and compare it to the hatred she held against her father. Prompted by this direct question and through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, Judy realized that her hatred and unforgiveness was counter to the nature of God and His ways. In that very moment, she chose to follow Christ in love and forgiveness.

God's Two-Fold Commandment to Love

In the Gospels (Matt. 22:37-40; Mark 12:30-31), when the Jewish religious leaders ask Jesus which commandment is the greatest, He responds by quoting the Shema (Deut. 6:4-5) along with a commandment from Leviticus 19:18 to love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus adds that these two love commands are the sum of all the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 22:40). Augustine (397/1952c) contends that the double love of God and of neighbor is the hermeneutical key to understanding Scripture (Brady, 2003; O'Donovan, 1980). Despite the emphasis placed on God's command of double love throughout Scripture, the psychological literature up to this point has not utilized the two-fold commandment to love as the hermeneutical key to understanding forgiveness, let alone as a guiding factor of a Christian counseling practice theory.

Commanding Love of God and Others

The concept of commanding love is incomprehensible to many who are suffering from hurtful family and marital relationships. Often the focus is inward as people experience hurt from being wrongly treated, misunderstood and unloved. The goal in many current counseling situations is to resolve the problem so that each person will feel loved. However, by keeping the primary goal this self-focused, the counseling fails to sufficiently help set the stage for the transforming power that comes from unselfish love of God and love of others. God's command for creation to love God and others is fully justified, knowing that by grace, love originates with God, initiates the work of love in the human soul, flows toward others, and returns back to God (Bernard of Clairvaux, 1987). God commands love, for the human heart is enabled to love according to God's created design, as God's own Spirit of love works in and through the children. In addressing both love for God and others, Edwards (1852/2000) explains the unity of love:

Christian love, both to God and man, is wrought in the heart by the same work of the Spirit. There are not two works of the Spirit of God, one to infuse a spirit of love to God, and the other to infuse a spirit of love to men; but in producing one, the Spirit produces the other also. (p. 6)

The love for God and love for others is the same love, and both testify to the transforming power of God in this new era of the kingdom (Piper, 1979). The phrase "you shall" associated with God's command of double love is an eternal duty (Kierkegaard, 1847/1995) that will be carried out since God provides for what is demanded (Piper, 1979). Moreover, the command to love will never be relaxed or resigned since the imperative points to the being of God and God's incomparable love and grace. This gives us some understanding why the Scripture states: "There are three things that last; faith, hope and love, but the greatest of

these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13). While understanding the validity of loving God and others, we need to address the question of "what does it mean to love God?"

Loving God

The command to love God goes back to the Decalogue revealed to Moses as recorded in the Pentateuch (Ex. 20:1-7). God is the Supreme Good and is the only one worthy of worship. Moreover, God created humanity to be worshippers (Tripp, 2002); therefore, to love God with all of one's heart, soul, mind, and strength is rightfully the first great commandment and should be a primary focal point in family and marital Christian counseling. Unlike the rest of God's creation, we as human beings are specially designed to develop a heart of love for God and others as evident by the two-fold command to love and by the fact that we are created in the image of God. Therefore, counselors should attempt to explore and understand their counselees' relationship with God and others, in particular, with those who have been saved by God's redemptive grace and love (cf. Eph. 2:8; 1 Jn. 4:19).

A Responsive Disposition of the Heart

Before one is given new eyes to see and a new heart to believe, one in some measure rejects God, the Laws, and the people of God because of his/her associated righteousness (Manton, 1997). In fact, because of the Fall, we all are under sin and therefore we do not seek after God (Rom. 3:10-18). But after the Spirit of love enters the human soul, the love of God brings about a divine love for both God and others (Edwards, 1852/2000; Morris, 1981).

The sequence of love is critical-the Spirit of love enters into the human heart by grace (Rom. 5:5), and the love for God issues forth in direct response. To love

God is to love Love and cleave to Righteousness so that divine love is multiplied to self and others (Augustine, cited in Burnaby, 1938). The Psalmist (Ps. 73:28) describes his love for God as drawing near to Him, acknowledging that intimacy with God is his good (O'Donovan, 1980). Therefore, loving God is a response to God's indwelling love. As God initiates love, redeemed children dependently respond out of gratitude and divine enablement (Morris, 1981).

The responsive love for God is not merely a reaction to God's love, but is also a disposition of the heart (Edwards, 1852/2000; Piper, 1979). The creative and conforming love of God conditions, or disposes, the heart to righteousness. The affections, thoughts, and will are reoriented in a Godward direction, evidenced by the command that one should walk in love (Eph. 5:2; Edwards, 1852/2000). Divine love becomes the very foundation for one's virtue, given that everything is "rooted and grounded in love" (Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 3:17; Edwards, 1852/2000; Morris, 1981). Consequently, loving God is a responsive act of worship that flows from a heart rightfully disposed to God.

The regenerated soul is prompted and empowered to love God. This Godward dynamic of love provides the crucial foundation for the first half of God's command to love (loving God); however, in order to fully comprehend the second half of the command to love (loving others as oneself), a right understanding of self-love is warranted. Furthermore, a right understanding of self-love yields numerous implications for counseling theory and practice.

Loving Self

Inherent in God's created order is the desire to look after one's own welfare. There are many practical ways in which one loves oneself. At the most basic level, a God-given desire to eat when hungry, to drink when thirsty, and to sleep when

tired keeps the body alive. When faced with danger, one takes the proper precautions to stay alive and safe. Relationally, a God-given desire for love leads one to seek relationships. When a loved one dies, one grieves the loss. When sadness abounds, one seeks something that might bring happiness. Ethically, a God-given conscience knows right from wrong. When faced with an ethical decision, one might choose the option that avoids violating a law and its consequential punishment. Spiritually, a God-given desire for purpose, meaning, and transcendent hope drives life. One is likely to spend time doing what one feels called to do, to place value on things that have meaning, and to hope in someone or something beyond oneself. From another perspective, to love oneself is to avoid pain and to seek pleasure (Piper, 1996). All of these examples of self-love can be accomplished naturally, without acknowledging or participating in the divine dynamic of love. The self-love referenced in the second great commandment involves the overflow of a heart divinely disposed to supernatural love (Edwards, 1852/2000). A true self-love is consistent with the command to love, whereas a false self-love deceives both self and neighbor (Augustine, cited in Burnaby, 1938).

False Self-love

The law of double love (love for God and love for others) confronts and obliterates any false notion of self-love (Kierkegaard, 1847/1995). Examining its object, subject, and fruit can root out false self-love. Humanity's created propensity to love, corrupted by sin, naturally fails to be directed at the right object, tends to be driven by selfish desires, and readily produces unlovely fruit. This misdirected love falls short, not only in the intended target, but also in essence. Therefore, such selflove remains restless, and relentlessly pursues temporal objects incapable of satisfying the deep longings of the soul (Burnaby, 1938).

The objects of self-love tend to be preferentially selected, based on perceived

worth, value, or benefit to the lover, and ultimately, merely a means to the subject's self-esteem. The subject of perverted self-love is motivated by self-gain, self-fulfillment and is fundamentally selfish. False selflove desires to rule that which only God should rule-one's own self and others; such love is more appropriately defined as "hatred" toward God and others (Augustine, cited in O'Donovan, 1980, p. 54). False self-love is the source of quarrels and conflicts and bears a multitude of unlovely fruit. James 4:1-12 provides a sample basket of produce readily harvested from perverted self-love: anger, lust, envy, adultery, jealousy, pride, and a spirit of judgment. False self-love clearly does not align with the command to love; therefore a perspective of love needs to differentiate between a true and false self-love.

True Self-love

Defining what constitutes true self-love is imperative in understanding God's two-fold commandment to love. A proper starting point for understanding true self-love should begin with God, who is love Himself. The essence of any God-glorifying love is divine love. A self-love pleasing to God is never separated from the love of God (de Jong, 1950). Moreover, any Christian definition of self-love needs to contend with the tension found in the relationship between loving self and loving God, knowing that loving God wholly is the first great commandment.

True self-love and loving God. What is the only object worthy of whole-hearted love? What is the relationship between a true love of self and loving God? What is the object of true self-love? Even though "the self" tends to be the immediate answer to the latter question, the supreme object for any self-love has to be transcendent and infinitely superior to the self: God, who is love. False self-love aspires to be God (Burnaby, 1938) while true self-love not only recognizes the incomparable worth of God, but admits the infinite distance separating God from

self (Edwards, 1852/2000).

God-designed, God-glorifying self-love is to love God with all of one's heart, soul, mind, and strength (Augustine, 400/1952a; Edwards, 1852/2000; Kierkegaard, 1847/1995; Piper, 1979, 1996). In other words, the best way to love oneself is to love God the most, more than self and others (Augustine, cited in Burnaby, 1938). Therefore, the first great commandment defines true self-love. The ultimate in true self-love is to totally love God; in so doing, humans fulfill what is best for their own well-being. Conversely, whoever loves himself and not God does not sufficiently love himself as God intended (Augustine, cited in Burnaby, 1938). Such counter-intuitive logic echoes in Jesus' teaching, "Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it" (Luke 17:33; cf. Matt. 10:39; 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; emphasis added). The concept of denying self to preserve self is contrary to the humanistic understanding of self-love found in most clinical theories and practice and leads us to another significant characteristic of true selflove: self-denial.

Self-denying love. A foundational aspect of love is that it "does not seek its own" (1 Cor. 13:5). Paradoxically, the best way to love self is to deny self of any "individual, personal, private will," that opposes the will of God (Burnaby, 1938, p. 123). Denying all self-will is not the issue at stake, rather the issue is denying the self of an autonomous, self-aggrandizing reign that is neither good for the soul nor helpful with regard to love. Self-denial in this sense is fundamental to a Christian perspective of love and forgiveness. Such self-denying self-love roots out vestiges of self-centered, preferential love and any other attributes of false love (Kierkegaard, 1847/1995). However, self-denial can also be problematic in some situations when Christians are not assertive when God's will (as revealed in the Scriptures) is to be assertive. Consider the case of the Christian who has been sinned against by another Christian. The offended should not passively deny the

occurrence of the offense or fail to address the offender, but rather is called to confront the other in love (cf. Matt. 18:15-16; Gal. 6:1; Eph. 4:15, 29).

In spite of the seemingly contrary nature of self-denying love, it comes with some significant assurances. The God of all comfort cares for those who deny self to love Him and others for Christ's sake (Edwards, 1952/2000; Kierkegaard, 1847/1995; cf. 2 Cor. 1:3-5). Moreover, self-denying lovers not only build up treasures in heaven and will receive an "unfading crown of glory" (1 Pet. 5:4), but also experience a foretaste of full joy and eternal pleasures (Ps. 16:11). Lastly, self-denial for the glory of God leads to a more intimate knowledge of Christ and His suffering (Phil. 3:10). Consequently, a perspective of love must incorporate true self-love, despite how it confounds all human reason and abilities, knowing that "the things that are impossible with people are possible with God" (Luke 18:27).

Loving Neighbor as Self

The second great commandment is "love your neighbor as yourself." Before discussing the second of God's double love command, the relationship between true self-love and love for neighbor should be understood. Augustine clearly explains that even though self-love and neighbor love have the same end, "to cleave to God," an important distinction exists:

...the love which this man bears his neighbor is not the same love that he bears himself, for the end of action is cleaving to the supreme good, and that is something one can do only on one's own behalf. There is an imbalance between the "cleaving" which he does for himself and the "commending" which he does for the neighbor. Loving his neighbor "as himself" can mean only that he seeks to instill in the neighbor a self-love similar to his own. (De civ. Dei, X.3.2, cited in O'Donovan, 1980, p. 116).

In other words, both self-love and neighbor love should have the same end (Edwards, 1960; O'Donovan, 1994) of loving God, or as Augustine describes, "to cleave to" God (cf. Ps. 73:28); however, one can only exhort one's neighbor to love God in like manner as oneself. Ultimately, the neighbor is responsible for his own relationship with God.

The Essence of Neighbor Love

The neighbor love involved in God's command to love, like true self-love, begins and ends with, and flows from the love of God (Burnaby, 1938; Calvin, 1539/1996; O'Donovan, 1980, 1994). By God's grace, both believers and unbelievers are able to love their neighbors in a way that images God; however, the love issuing from a Christian most fully emulates the love of Christ and brings glory to Christ, since God is recognized as the source and the ultimate object of such love. Christian love of neighbor is driven by the concern for the eternal welfare of others, desiring that they experience and cleave to God's perfect love (Augustine, 400/1952a). Christian neighbor love desires that other people encounter God's creative, conforming, and communing love so that they might become righteous in Christ and, in turn, "love evil men 'that they may grasp righteousness'" (Augustine, cited in O'Donovan, 1980, p. 34). To love others any less would be hatred (Augustine, 397/1952c). Therefore, loving one's neighbors so that they come to enjoy and be satisfied in God is true neighbor love (O'Donovan, 1980).

The second half of God's two-fold commandment to love is stringent; neighbor love calls one to love others as one loves oneself. However, under the new covenant, the command to love neighbor is radically altered by Jesus Christ.

The New Commandment

Eliminating any chance to misunderstand or misapply neighbor love, Jesus modified the second aspect of the command to love so that the command might have an objectively known and superior referent: Himself. If the old Mosaic command to love neighbor as self was not challenging enough, Jesus raised the bar of loving others to absolute holiness when he said, "love one another just as I have loved you" (John 13:34; 15:12; cf. Eph. 5:2; 1 John 4:11). God's supreme love displayed on the cross of Christ is now the unparalleled standard for loving others. "To love others as self" was the expectation under the old covenant; however, the new covenant of Jesus Christ ushered in the eternal standard of loving others just as he has loved (Edwards, 1852/2000). The relational standard of Christ-like love, established for all of eternity, is to be followed in the present and must be included in a Christian perspective of love, and is to serve as an overarching paradigm for counseling practice.

Enemy Love

God's law of double love calls for a radical theocentric way of life. By striving to fulfill the command to love, not only will one love self in the best possible way by cleaving to God wholly, but relationships with others will be redemptive so that others might enjoy and be satisfied in supreme Love. In God's infinite wisdom and knowledge, God's commands take into consideration the realities of life in a fallen world. Evil abounds. Enemies emerge in every relational context and are part of living the Christian life. So, does God's two-fold commandment to love include the call to love enemies? Jesus leaves no room for misinterpretation. Instead of leaving it up to believers to make the connection, Jesus specifically commands followers to love their enemies (Matt. 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-36). The sinful self recoils when asked to understand this concept, let alone submit to the command through obedience from the heart. Selfishness that is rooted deep in the heart, along with an innate sense of a wrong done, reverberates in rebellion to

such a command (Carson, 2002; Piper, 1979).

Requires an Eternal Perspective. Enemy love is difficult in the flesh due to the costs associated with such sacrificial love in the face of injustice and injury. Is there a perspective that makes enemy love seem attainable, even desirable? The answer to this question is not found in temporality, only in eternity. What makes enemy love costly? Suffering abounds. Injustice looms everywhere. Consequential pain pulsates. Evil appears victorious. Good deeds and love may be reciprocated with more evil. Enemy love demands self-denial-of bitterness, judgment, envy, pride, and merely looking out for one's own welfare. From the natural, human perspective, God's command to love one's enemy just does not add up or make sense. The finite mind cannot comprehend such love in the face of adversity.

God's enemy love requires an eternal perspective, realizing that what is seen and experienced is only a portion of reality. That which is not seen is also reality, but requires supernatural eyes to see. To love, especially in the way God commands, requires faith. Considering the momentary suffering of this age as light compared to the eternal weight of glory requires faith (2 Cor. 4:17). Trusting in the righteous justice and vengeance of God requires faith (Rom. 12:19). Not losing heart in dealing with the consequences of evil, knowing that the soul is being renewed day by day through God's Spirit of love, requires faith (2 Cor. 4:16). Believing in the promises of God's eternal reward for loving one's enemies requires faith. Finding refuge in the truth that He who dwells in the soul is greater than he who is in the world requires faith (1 John 4:4). The writer of Hebrews captures the essence of the faith that is required for enemy love: "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). In order to love one's enemies, faith is required to believe that God is who He says He is and rewards those who seek Him, now and for all eternity. Ultimately, enemy love requires faith in the power

of God's love over evil.

Enemy love is radical in approach and divine in nature. Given the scriptural basis for and the ultimate manifestation of such love, as seen in the sacrificial and redemptive work of Christ on the cross, enemy love plays an integral part of a Christian perspective of love. Furthermore, the essence of enemy love provides a definitive connection with human forgiveness and serves as a key component in the development of a Christian perspective of forgiveness.

A Forgiveness that Flows from Love: Divine and Human Forgiveness

The theme of divine forgiveness echoes throughout redemptive history, where God is the primary subject and humanity is the object. God's forgiveness always deals with the sin that separates humanity from God's holiness. One significant question arises as one reflects upon divine forgiveness as a means of understanding human forgiveness: if only God can forgive sins, then what does God expect from believers when He commands them to forgive like Christ?

Only God Forgives Sin

During Jesus' earthly ministry, He was accused of blasphemy by the Jewish religious leaders for forgiving the sins of a paralytic (Mk. 2:1-12). The scribes correctly stated that God alone is able to forgive sins (v. 7) and thereby understood that Jesus was claiming His divine nature as God. Acknowledging that only God has the authority to forgive sins, what does it mean for humans to forgive another? This is a valid question, since God commands believers to forgive, just as Christ has forgiven them (Eph. 4:32). So the emerging questions are, "Can humans truly forgive, and what does God expect when God commands believers to forgive?"

Can humans truly forgive? Keeping to the immediate context of Mark 2:1-12, only God is capable of forgiving sins since all sin is ultimately against God. God willed the perfect sacrifice of Christ as the only means to satisfy God's wrath due to sin. Therefore, God is the only one who can truly forgive sins; however, God's people are responsible to proclaim the good news of the Gospel, which includes the forgiveness of sin (John 20:23). Addressing the issue of who can truly forgive sin leads to the next logical question, "What does God expect people to do in response to the commandment to forgive one another, just as Christ has forgiven them?"

What does God expect? Given that human forgiveness is but a mere shadow of the perfectly justifying forgiveness of a perfectly loving God (Volf, 1996), what does God expect from people as they strive to obey the command to forgive? Those who address this point offer several answers. What seems to be a classic evangelical response creates a distinction between vertical and horizontal forgiveness (Adams, 1989; MacArthur, 1998; Murray, 1982). Vertical forgiveness represents divine forgiveness, while horizontal forgiveness represents human forgiveness. Since Adams (1989) defines forgiveness as a promise to not bring up the offense to self, others, or to the offender, he holds that brotherly forgiveness fulfills the divine command to forgive. Enright takes a different approach than Adams. Acknowledging that only God can forgive sins, Enright posits a dual aspect of the command to forgive-God forgives the sin, while humanity imitates God by "drawing the other in love," referencing the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-31) as the model for human forgiveness (Enright et al., 1990, p. 17). Volf (2006) offers a perspective on the power to forgive: "Because God has forgiven, we also have the power to forgive. We don't forgive in our own right. We forgive by making God's forgiveness our own" (p. 196). Cheong (2005) and DiBlasio (1999) give additional thoughts on the question of God's expectations as they interpret Scripture on forgiveness.

The question still remains, "What does God require when God commands forgiveness, knowing that sins can only be forgiven by God?" To address this critical quandary, the connection between love and forgiveness needs to be examined.

Love and Forgiveness

Two major questions demand answers at this point in the discussion—first, the same question as before, "What does God expect when commanding forgiveness?" knowing that only God can forgive sins, and second, "What is the relationship between forgiveness and divine love?" These theological questions must be addressed in a perspective of love and forgiveness, as they most certainly have profound implications for counseling.

Scriptural Connection

The connection between divine love and forgiveness appears throughout redemptive history. The most dramatic and incomparable climax of love and forgiveness is manifested in the cross of Christ; God demonstrated merciful love toward the enemies of God (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8), forgiving them by the blood shed through the substitutionary, atoning death of Christ (Eph. 1:7). Furthermore, the integral relationship of love and forgiveness can be seen most definitively through explicit and implicit Scriptural references (cf. Carson, 2002).

Explicit Scriptural connections. The close relationship between love and forgiveness is explicitly stated in several passages. In the Old Testament, many passages describe the sovereign and holy nature of God, including God's willingness to forgive iniquities because of the delight in everlasting lovingkindness (Ex. 34:6-7; Ps. 86:5; Mic. 7:18-19). With the advent of the new covenant of Jesus Christ, Paul provides some specific instruction on how to live the Christian life by putting off

the old self and putting on the new self. With little surprise, Paul teaches that followers of Christ should put on love and forgiveness, just like Christ has loved and forgiven them (Eph. 4:32-5:2; Col. 3:12-15). In a case of church discipline in Corinth, Paul exhorts believers to restore a fallen brother through love and forgiveness, or else the man would experience excessive sorrow (2 Cor. 2:5-11). In Luke 7, Jesus makes a direct connection between love and forgiveness as He tells the parable of the two debtors (7:41-43) in response to Simon's cutting remark about the "immoral" woman who was lavishing her tears, perfume, and gratitude onto her Savior (7:36-39; 44-50). Jesus makes the point that the one who has been forgiven much cannot help but love much. The fact that each believer is spared from an eternity of hell puts all Christians in the category of having been forgiven much. In the majority of passages where human forgiveness is juxtaposed with love, the verb *charizomai* is utilized for the concept of forgiveness (2 Cor. 2:7-11; Col. 3:12-15; Eph. 4:32; Luke 7:41-43). *Charizomai* conveys the essence of freely bestowing grace or favor (Conzelmann, 1985; Vines, 1966; Zerwick, 1993). Given this meaning for *charizomai*, forgiveness can be understood to resemble divine love: grace freely given for ultimately redemptive purposes (cf. Shults & Sandage, 2003), so that those involved might love God more deeply.

Implicit Scriptural connections. Numerous passages implicitly convey the essence of both love and forgiveness in five main themes: love of enemies, returning evil with good, the covering of sins, issues of unity, and the shedding of blood through self-sacrifice. First, the passages on enemy love (Matt. 5:38-48; Luke 6:27-36) imply forgiveness, since enemies cannot be loved and hated simultaneously. Second, related to enemy love are the exhortations to return good for evil. Forgiving love is required to override struggles with bitterness and vengeful feelings so that one can bless and pray for one's offenders (1 Cor. 4:12; Rom. 12:14; 1 Pet. 3:9) with a spirit of love (1 Cor. 4:21; Rom. 12:10; 1 Pet. 3:10), a love that does not keep account of a wrong suffered (1 Cor. 13:5). Third, the covering of sins implies

either love or the forgiveness of sins. On one hand, love covers sins (Prov. 10:12; 17:9; 1 Peter 4:8). On the other hand, a person is blessed when forgiven, when his or her sins are covered and not taken into account by God (Rom. 4:7-8; cf. 1 Cor. 13:5). James 5:19-20 describes how neighbor love strives to save the soul of another and by doing so, covers a multitude of sins. Hence, the concepts of love and forgiveness are interchangeable when discussing the covering of sins. Fourth, an intimate connection between love and forgiveness is implied in verses associated with maintaining the unity of the church (Eph. 4:1-6; 1 Pet. 3:8-12). The call for unity requires patience, tolerance, seeking and pursuing peace, preserving unity, and not returning evil for evil, all which can be described as aspects of love and forgiveness. Finally, the concepts of sacrificial love and forgiveness are inherent in verses describing the unbreakable link between the forgiveness of sins with the shedding of blood (Heb. 9:22; Rev. 1:5) and the self-sacrifice of Christ (Heb. 9:15; 26). Each of these five themes of implied love and forgiveness provide substantial evidence of an intentional link, and even interchange, between the two concepts.

Connections Cited in the Field

The dynamic relationship between love and forgiveness is clearly seen throughout Scripture. The forgiveness literature draws a close connection between the two concepts as well. Many in the field allude to the connection between love and forgiveness in a variety of ways: utilizing the term "forgiving love" to describe the compassionate aspect of forgiveness (Allender & Longman, 1992; Augsburger, 1988); describing forgiveness as an act or manifestation of love (Adams, 1989; Augsburger, 1988; Brandsma, 1982; Enright et al., 1990; Smedes, 1984; Worthington, 2003); including love as an aspect of the forgiveness process (Augsburger, 1988; Enright, 1996; MacArthur, 1998; Worthington, 2001, 2003); positing that forgiveness leads to love (Allender & Longman, 1992) or that love, or some form of compassion, leads to forgiveness (Murphy, 2002; Norris, 1984;

Shults & Sandage, 2003; Worthington, 2001); including love in a definition of forgiveness (Allender & Longman, 1992; Hong, 1984; Jones, 1995; Worthington, 2001); and referring to a Scriptural understanding of love to describe an aspect of forgiveness (Augsburger, 1988; Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Shults & Sandage, 2003; Smedes, 1984; Worthington, 2003). Whereas godly love has been mentioned as a correlate of forgiveness in the literature, the intensity and depth of the profound connection between biblical love and forgiveness cannot be overemphasized.

Linking love and forgiveness permits the development of a psychology of love and forgiveness properly situated in relationship to God. The task now at hand is to demonstrate that forgiveness is a critical element in fulfilling God's command to love.

Human Forgiveness: A Fulfillment of God's Command to Love

Before developing a definition of forgiveness rooted in God's command to love, the inextricable connection between love and forgiveness in light of sin must be examined. After developing the definition of forgiveness, the definition must be compared with God's command to love to ensure its consistency with the relational mandate for the everlasting kingdom.

Love, Forgiveness, and Sin

From God's perspective, love and forgiveness are closely linked because of the sin of humanity (cf. Allender & Longman, 1992) and the love of God. A brief discussion of sin explains how forgiveness is rooted in, enabled by, and purposed for redemptive love.

Approaching love and forgiveness in reference to sin yields at least two inferences. First, because love existed before the emergence of sin and will continue to exist after sin's demise, a unique aspect of love is revealed within the reality of sin. Forgiveness is required when love and sin collide. Moreover, divine love is described in terms of Christ giving His life for the forgiveness of sin (John 15:13; 1 John 3:16). In other words, a unique aspect of love in the fallen world is seen through the costly forgiveness of sins (cf. Jones, 1995), which leads those who are forgiven to experience the joy of knowing God and finding ultimate satisfaction in God. Second, the relationship between love and forgiveness can be examined by starting with a definition of sin. If sin is defined as a failure to love-God and others (Augustine, cited in Burnaby, 1938; cf. Carson, 2002; Crabb, 1988; Geisler, 1973), then divine love is the most powerful weapon against sin. Furthermore, if love is equated with costly forgiveness, as displayed in the cross of Christ, then costly forgiveness is love's most powerful weapon against sin (cf. Smedes, 1984). In other words, forgiveness is the divine love of God at work in the redemptive battle against sin, a battle where love prevails, sin is overcome, and death is ultimately defeated through the cross of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:54-57).

An Understanding of Forgiveness Rooted in Divine Love

The intimate interaction between love and forgiveness cannot be ignored in a Christian perspective for a counseling practice. The keys to understanding forgiveness within the context of love involve the issues of sin and the costly nature of divine love. Consequently, a right understanding of forgiveness starts with a right understanding of biblical love. Defined and displayed most powerfully in the cross of Christ, an aspect of Christ-like love is understood as a work of God's love in the human soul that compels one to give oneself for another, regardless of the cost, so that the other might love God more deeply. Given the inextricable link between love and forgiveness, we can now construct a definition of human for-

giveness based on the love of God: forgiveness is a work of God's love in the human soul that compels one to give oneself for another, despite being sinned against, so that the other might love God more deeply. In comparing the definitions of Christ-like love and forgiveness, every aspect is identical except for one critical point: the issue of being sinned against. Striving to love another despite being sinned against is the most costly aspect of love and captures the essence of what God expects from His children when he commands Christ-like forgiveness.

Corrie ten Boom's testimony (1974) of how she was able to forgive a former Nazi guard contains essential aspects of Christ-like love and forgiveness:

Jesus. I cannot forgive him. Give me your forgiveness. As I took his hand, mechanically, woodenly, a most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me. And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives along with the command, the love itself. (pp. 53-55)

Forgiveness and the Command to Love

Where does forgiveness fit in with God's command to love and with Jesus' new commandment (John 13:34; 15:12)? Forgiveness is rooted in the command to love others as self (cf. MacArthur, 1998; Manton, 1997; Worthington, 2003). The developed definition of Christ-like forgiveness runs parallel to the notion of neighbor and enemy love and can be modified in a form similar to Jesus' new commandment: Forgiveness is to love another despite being sinned against, just as Christ has loved (cf. John 13:34; 15:12). This shortened definition is the same in content as the longer version; however, the issues of God's love at work in the

soul, the giving of oneself for another, and the redemptive purpose that the other might love God more deeply must all be assumed in the phrase, "just as Christ has loved."

Jesus' command to love one another is the overarching law of kingdom relationships; whereas, forgiveness is a subset of the global command to love. Christ-like love is required in every relationship, especially as believers are called to seek another's welfare before their own (Phil. 2:3-5; 1 Cor. 13:5). However, the love demanded by God becomes more costly when one is sinned against by another. God's command to love still applies. Love is required, but the cost for one to love increases. Given the reality of sinful offenses, the definition of forgiveness can be abbreviated even more. Jesus' command in the Gospels is an accurate summary of forgiveness: Love your enemies (Matt. 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-36). Enemy love encapsulates every aspect of forgiveness; it requires divine love working in and through the forgiver, necessitates moving toward the other, involves dealing with the costly nature of sin, entails a redemptive purpose, and follows the paradigm of Christ's love. Enemy love beautifully illustrates a significant aspect of how Christians are called to live in a fallen world according to the eternal relational paradigm modeled and commanded by Jesus Christ.

So, what does God require when God commands believers to forgive others like Christ? The most direct answer to this critical question is simple yet profound: love, love in spite of being sinned against so that the other might come to love God more deeply. Thus, forgiveness fulfills God's command to love.

The Case Study: Part II

Judy had a spiritual revelation during her individual session that the love of God and her hatred and unforgiveness toward her father were incompatible. She was

able to understand that it was hypocritical for her to accept God's love for her and at the same time to hate her father for his wrong-doings. She grasped the counselor's comments of how our relationship with God is hindered when we withhold forgiveness and love and that hatred in the Bible is equated to murder (Matt. 5:21-22). Relating to a specific moment in the individual session, Judy said: "It's like I am flying above the clouds and the clouds parted and I can now clearly see all the way down." She decided to forgive (and love) her father, even though he was not there to request such forgiveness.

The forgiveness session that ensued the following week was a beautiful moment in the lives of this father and daughter. Each was encouraged to take responsibility for his/her past offenses and develop a plan to stop the hurtful behavior (see DiBlasio 1998; 1999; 2000 for how to conduct forgiveness sessions). At the formal declaration of forgiveness for each other, they hugged and cried together. This was a very special hug, because father and daughter had no recollection of ever having hugged each other before.

This was the first of many hugs, as a 6-year follow up revealed. The follow-up was video-taped in front of a live audience at the "National Conference on the Clinical Use of Forgiveness" (DiBlasio, 1996). The family reported many times of interaction between father, his adult children and grandchildren (prior to the forgiveness session the grandchildren rarely saw their grandfather). The father bought a vacation home so that the extended family had a nice spot for sharing quality times together.

Interestingly, Judy was immediately different with her husband and daughter. She was less depressed, gave up the anger toward her husband and daughter, and after only a few additional sessions had resolved the presenting issues that brought them into counseling. Six years later Judy received another pleasant sur-

prise. Judy had a blood disorder that was diagnosed as terminal that would lead to her death within 10 years from the initial session, but after 6 years of being relatively symptom-free, the doctors have removed the former diagnosis and no longer was she considered as having a terminal condition. There may have been an association between improved health and the granting of love and forgiveness. Although we rejoice with Judy and her family over this news, we caution readers that following God's two-fold command to love and forgiving others is a journey all Christians should pursue regardless of benefits or costs.

Conclusion

The holy and sovereign triune God, characterized by loving kindness and forgiveness, plays a central role in a Christian perspective of love and forgiveness. God's command to love provides the necessary paradigm for understanding love and forgiveness, concepts that cannot be developed separately for two major reasons. First, from a psychological perspective, given the reality of sin in every human relationship, one cannot love another without forgiveness. Second, from a biblical and theological perspective, God's love and forgiveness are inextricably connected all throughout Scripture, and are seen with converging brilliance in the cross of Christ. Therefore, in the development and application of an explicitly God-centered practice theory, love and forgiveness are crucial in helping us to "love from a pure heart, and a good conscience, and a sincere faith" (1 Tim. 1:5), as well as counseling others to love according to God's command to love.

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