Forgiveness in Marriage:

"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgive one another, as God in Christ forgave you."
Ephesians 4:32

Focusing on fundamentals always strengthens the foundation of any important relationship or activity. The fundamentals of Christian marriage are love, service, and forgiveness. Let's examine forgiveness.

Every marriage consists of two sinners. No matter how wonderful your spouse is – they are a sinner and so are you. An enduring and happy marriage is not about the magical meeting of two people that are "perfect" for each other. There are people that share more in common and those that have less in common, but both are still sinners that will have to forgive each other to endure in happiness. However, the primary reason that a husband and wife forgive one another is not to preserve the happiness of marriage. As Ephesians 4:32 states plainly, we are to forgive others because we have been forgiven all our sins by God in Christ Jesus. When we put our faith in Jesus Christ and ask for the forgiveness of sins, by the grace of God extended to us, our sins are forgiven (1 John 1:9). This is unconditional grace! This is what it means that our salvation is by grace alone through faith alone. It is a strong New Testament theme that we ***must*** forgive others because we have been forgiven by God. We cannot have grace extended to us and not extend grace to others. Jesus taught this clearly by the parable of the unforgiving servant – Matthew 18:21-35.

In this Christian mandate to show grace and forgive because we have been forgiven, surely the first person that we should forgive should be that person that we have the nearest relationship to – our spouse. However, the old proverb is often true that familiarity breeds contempt. We spend the most time with our spouse and so have cause to find fault with them. We know more about them than any other person, so we have the most visibility to spotlight their sin.

It's important to ask the question, "What is forgiveness?" Forgiveness has specific language and goes through a specific process. Forgiveness is much more than just telling another person, "I'm sorry." True forgiveness results in relational reconciliation. True forgiveness brings two people that were separated by relational distance back together in happy fellowship. For this to happen, the offending person must go – with an earnest heart – to the person they wronged and say, "I'm sorry for (*what I said or did*). Will you please forgive me?" It's essential that no excuses or blame-shifting be attached to this. This statement is a statement of personal culpability. This is a statement that you were in the wrong, and through confession are seeking reconciliation on your part. This then gives the spouse the opportunity to show grace and extend forgiveness. This process allows for true reconciliation instead of stuffing hurtful grievances into an emotional closet that will eventually burst open and can shatter a relationship.

Christian forgiveness is an interesting and theologically rooted concept. When you confess your sins and God forgives you, does God forget your sins? The answer is, no! God is all-knowing. For the sake of Jesus Christ, and because of him bearing the penalty of your guilt on the cross, your sin is accounted to Jesus and not to you. You are forgiven for Jesus' sake and that

sin is not counted against you. The process is similar in marriage. When we forgive our spouse, we don't forget the sins. We know who they are and we know what they have done, but because of the grace shown to us *we choose not to count those things against them anymore*. 1 Corinthians 13: 5 declares that love in not "resentful." In other translations this word is rendered more fully as "keeps no record of wrongs." A resentful person is a grudge-bearing person that keeps a tight list of all the ways they have been wronged. This is the opposite of grace and forgiveness. This is a person that will never let you forget all the wrong things you have done and will weaponize those wrongs against you when needed to get the upper hand.

Resentful unforgiveness will destroy a marriage every time. If you choose to not forgive your spouse from the heart and continue to count their sins against them, a wedge will grow between you that will become harder and harder to reconcile. However, if you keep short accounts and quickly ask for and grant forgiveness – grace, love, and peace will thrive in your marriage.

Coming full circle, you must see that the forgiveness extended to you by Jesus comes from the root of God's love for you (John 3:16). God's forgiveness of your sins is not a thing of dry judicial duty. God's forgiveness of your sins flows from His unconditional love for you. And so it will be with your spouse! You will truly forgive them because you love them. *"Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins"* 1 Peter 4:8. Because of God's love expressed to us in the grace of Jesus, we also express grace and forgiveness to our spouse because we earnestly love them.

Forgiveness is a fundamental of every happy marriage, and the ability to forgive flows from our salvation in Jesus.

Let us be tenderhearted and forgive one another,
Pastor Vic