

SOVEREIGN GRACE LIBERATES FOR LOVE

Genesis 50: 15-26

Please review this week's catechism question.

Were you able to meet anyone new in Sunday worship this past week?

INTRODUCTION

John Piper defines love in this way: "Love is the overflow of joy in God which gladly meets the needs of others." What are the things that most often keep you from loving others?

Two of the greatest barriers to loving God and people are fear and anger. We are afraid that if we love God or people our needs will not be met. Or we do not love others because we have been hurt by others and are angry so we withhold love or seek to actively harm others. Yet God says that the reason he made us was so that we will love him and our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22: 36-40). The only way to be eternally happy is to be a person who loves God and others. The only way we will consistently love God and others is if we can overcome our fear and anger. This passage at the end of the book of Genesis gives us three reasons as to why it is that only those who trust in the God of sovereign grace are able to love God and people.

STUDY

1. Review Genesis 45 which records the scene when Joseph finally revealed himself to his brothers. Genesis 50: 15 occurs over 17 years after Genesis 45. Based on what Joseph said back in Genesis 45 how has he treated his brothers for the past 17 years?

Joseph has cared for his family and protected them for the past 17 years. He has made sure they have had everything they needed and have not experienced any hardship while living as foreigners in the land of Egypt.

2. What is it that the brothers fear after the death of their father? Why would they have this fear?

The brothers are afraid that Joseph does not truly love them. They believe he hates them and has only been nice to them out of respect for Jacob, their father. They are sure that now that Jacob is dead that Joseph is going to seek his revenge on them for what they did to him. These men have this fear because of their own imagination, not because of anything that Joseph has said or done. They attribute to Joseph passions that they would possess. If they were in Joseph's place this is what they would do and so they figure that Joseph would act in the same fashion. They don't really believe in forgiveness.

3. Why do they send "messengers" to tell Joseph what Jacob said prior to his death rather than going themselves?

They are desperately afraid. They are sure that if they were to show up before Joseph that he would either kill them or lock them up and throw away the key. They don't trust Joseph, neither do they love him. They are terrified of him.

4. What effect are the brothers hoping this report of their father's wishes will have on Joseph?

The presume the only reason Joseph has been nice to them is out of respect for Jacob and so they appeal to that sentiment in Joseph. They request that Joseph continue to care for them out of love for Jacob. They do not believe there is any other basis upon which they can obtain Joseph's forgiveness and kindness.

NOTE: We do not know if Jacob actually said this or not. It would be hard to imagine Jacob not trying to arrange for the reconciliation of the brothers before his death if he knew the full extent of his son's sins against Joseph. It is quite possible the brothers are making up this statement.

5. How does Joseph respond to this message from his brothers? Why does he respond this way?

Joseph begins to weep. He couldn't believe his ears. His brothers did not believe that he loved them. They feared him and what he might do to them. They were convinced he hated them even after all he had done

for them. Joseph wept for their fear and he wept for the evil they had plotted against him. He wept over the lost years with his family and he wept that his family was still not reconciled. He wept over the guilt and unbelief of his brothers. It appeared that all his suffering had been for nothing, his brothers still did not understand the great love of God and power of God in fulfilling his purposes to save them. How could these brothers not see that all that had happened was according to God's good purposes? How could they not know that he loved them? What more could he do than he had already done to convince these men that God loved them, he loved them and that they should rejoice in this love rather than be afraid?

6. Joseph sends for his brothers and when they show up what do they do? Compare this to 42: 18-28 & 44: 14-17. What has not changed in the 17 years since Joseph revealed himself to them? Should the brothers feel this way?

They fall before Joseph and proclaim that they are his slaves. They feel guilty and do not trust Joseph. They are sure that God is going to make them pay for what they did to him. They cannot imagine that they could possibly escape the guilt of what they have done. The only way they can think to "atone" for their sins, apart from dying is to become Joseph's slaves. These brothers have no grounds for feeling like this. They have made this all up in their own heads not because of anything that Joseph has ever done. He has only been kind to them and shown them by his actions, as well as his words that they are forgiven. They cannot fathom that God or Joseph could simply pardon their sin. On one hand they are correct in their assessment of the situation. How is it right for Joseph to not make these men pay for what they have done? In fact, how is it right for Joseph not only to pardon them of their crimes but also to treat them so well? How is it right for God to consider these men his chosen, favorite people? These men understand that forgiveness is a huge problem. What can they do to make up for the evil they have done? There is nothing they can do to escape the punishment that is due them. They are dependent upon Joseph to forgive them.

7. The first thing that Joseph says in response to their guilt and fear is: "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God?" What does he mean by this statement?

He does not want to punish them because God does not want to punish them. He knows that God has freely, contrary to what these men deserve, for no reason in them, chosen to forgive them, to make them his very own people. How can he not treat well those whom God has forgiven? How can he hold a grudge against those whom God does not hold a grudge against? If God's forgiveness depends upon human response, in other words if his forgiveness is not a sovereign forgiveness, then how will anyone ever be forgiven? How can you ever pay back an infinite penalty? Joseph knows that God is pleased in himself to forgive these men, not because they have done anything to be forgiven. They don't deserve to be forgiven. However, God, as the only sovereign king has out of his own mercy and by his own free choice forgiven these men their many sins. Therefore, Joseph cannot act towards these men any differently than God does.

8. Read Ephesians 4: 32 and 5:1. What is it that Christians are supposed to do and why should they do it?

The fact that all of us who belong to Christ have been forgiven not because of anything any of us have ever done ought to enable us to forgive and love one another. We are to be like God in the way we forgive and love each other. Christ didn't die for us after we shaped up, after we repented, after we trusted him. God didn't send his Holy Spirit to give us new hearts after we believed. He saved us when we were still sinners, just like he saved these brothers while they were still sinners. We don't wait for others to merit our love or to earn our love. We love regardless of how people have treated us or how they might treat us because we know that this is how God loves, freely with no preconditions. We delight to exhibit the love of God for sinners, loving in spite of how we've been treated, not because of how we've been treated.

Only those who trust the God of sovereign grace will love God and each other because only the God of Sovereign Grace can pardon your sins.

9. What is the next thing the Joseph says to his brothers? What does he mean by this? Whose will was it that Joseph be sold into slavery?

Joseph tells his brothers that when they sold him into slavery that they meant to harm him, to do evil to him. However, God meant this very same action for good. Joseph says first of all that they on purpose planned and they acted in a way that was designed to do evil to him. That is exactly what he says, “you intended evil for me.” These men hated Joseph, they plotted to kill him, and then when they saw an opportunity to make a profit and get rid of him they sold him into slavery. No one made them do this. This is what they wanted to do and it was evil. Joseph does not say that what they did was not evil. He does not say that what they did was good. He says that what they did was evil. It was wrong. It deserves punishment.

However, then he says that what they intended for evil God intended for good. Joseph uses the exact same verb for what they intended and for what God intended. They intended his sale to do evil to Joseph while God intended the sale of Joseph and all that happened to him afterwards for good. Notice the little pronoun “it”. In Hebrew, unlike English, you can tell what noun every pronoun refers to by its gender. The first clause literally says, “you intended evil for me.” “Evil” is a feminine noun and the “it” is a feminine “it”, which means that God and the brothers both intended the evil that happened to Joseph. Joseph is not saying that the brothers did evil and then God came along and made a bad situation good. It says that God planned and acted to make sure that they did evil and that the evil they did served his good purposes. However, neither does Joseph say that God did evil. The brothers did the evil but in doing the evil they did exactly what God wanted them to do so that his good purposes were accomplished. As John Calvin says in his commentary on this passage, “The selling of Joseph was a crime detestable for its cruelty and treachery; yet he was not sold except by the decree of heaven.”

10. What is the good that God intended the sale of Joseph into slavery to accomplish? How does this point to Jesus?

The good he intended was the saving of many people, (not “lives” as the NIV has it). While Joseph’s sale into slavery resulted in many other people beyond the family of Jacob being saved the emphasis here is that God intended the evil done to Joseph by the brothers to result in the salvation of these brothers. Joseph tells these brothers that the evil they did to him God designed for their salvation. Here is the gospel of Jesus

Christ. There is a picture in my oldest son, Jared’s, room that was his favorite picture. It shows Jesus carrying a young man who is holding in his hands a wooden mallet and a large spike. The point is that each of us, by our own wickedness, nailed Christ to that cross. The evil we do resulted in evil being done to him and that evil which was done to him results in our salvation. He saves those by his cross who put him on the cross, just as Joseph saves by his slavery those who sold him into slavery.

11. What difference did knowing this make in Joseph’s life?

Joseph is free from anger and bitterness and is able to love these brothers who have treated him so bad because he knows that it was God’s will that he suffer as he did for good purposes. He is able to not only not harm them but to work for their good. He is able to provide for them and their children and to speak with them kindly and compassionately. Joseph’s ability to love and care for his brothers is due to his understanding of the nature and character of God. He lives right because he believes right.

12. How do you feel about verse 20? Describe how believing this would help you love a person who has offended you.

Only those who trust the God of sovereign grace will love God and each other because only the God of Sovereign Grace can protect you from harm.

13. There are 53 years between v. 21 and v. 22. What has been the long-term effect of Joseph’s forgiveness and love? What effect will it have on our church if we will believe what Joseph believes and live as Joseph lived?

Joseph and his brothers are completely reconciled as a result of Joseph’s mercy and kindness. His willingness to forgive as God forgives and to trust God’s good purposes in the evil they did has brought about family unity and harmony. What a picture of the church dwelling in the land of suffering and slavery enjoying the harmony that comes to those who know that a sovereign God rules over all the details of their lives and who forgives them not because of anything they have done but because of his own kindness. Here is a picture of the church

enjoying the fruitfulness that God gives to his people as seen in Joseph's knowing his great grandchildren. When God's people trust in the sovereign grace of God to pardon sins and to rule over evil, then the church lives in the harmony and unity of God. It is confidence in God's gracious sovereignty that is the foundation of our unity as Christ's people. The only way that sinners will live together in peace is if they are shocked by the forgiveness that they have received from God and if they know that all the evil that is done to them by other sinners is designed by God for their good.

14. What does Joseph tell his family as he prepares to die?

He tells them that God is going to come their aid at some point in the future and take them back to the land of Canaan, to the promised land. He tells them (twice) that God is going to keep the promises he made to their fathers and will bring them back to Canaan. He then makes them promise to take his bones with them when they leave Egypt and return to Canaan.

15. Why does he tell them this?

He has turned his back on the wealth and power of Egypt and thrown in his lot with the persecuted people of God. He affirms that the hope of God's people lies in a future deliverance out of the land of slavery and suffering, not in building a secure life in Egypt. He insists that the people of God, the nation Israel, keep looking to the promise of God for a future salvation and not seek a salvation in Egypt. Joseph knows that God's people will either lose hope or they will assimilate to the culture they live in or both unless they keep their hearts and minds fixed upon the salvation that is coming. God's people must wait for God's salvation rather than try to create their own salvation in the land of slavery and suffering.

16. How would hoping in a future salvation help you to overcome fear and anger in order to love God and others?

Hoping in the promise of God for a future salvation keeps us from demanding a present salvation. So much of the fear, anger, bitterness, sorrow and anxiety that grips our hearts and keeps us from loving God and others is due to a demand on our part to have heaven on earth. We

are impatient people. We want to be healed now. We want to be loved now. We want to be treated, as we deserve immediately. We live as if we have a right to be treated well, right now. However, God's salvation is not now. There is a day coming when God will surely come to our aid, just as he has promised. He will take us out of this land of slavery and suffering and bring us into the land of Promise where we will dwell with him and with one another in perfect safety and health and love. This is not our home. We are on a journey with one another to heaven and so we must stop requiring God and others to treat us as if we are already in heaven. We must seek to help each other hold on to the promises in order to make it to heaven.

Only those who trust the God of sovereign grace will love God and each other because only the God of Sovereign Grace can promise you a good future.