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## *Living is Forgiving*

The Role of Forgiveness

### Various Passages

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**P**ETER WAS IMPRESSED WITH HIS OWN GENEROSITY ... but as the saying goes “Pride goes before a fall.”

*“Then Kefa came up and said to him, ‘‘Rabbi, how often can my brother sin against me and I have to forgive him? As many as seven times?’’ ‘‘No, not seven times,’’ answered Yeshua, ‘‘but seventy times seven! Because of this, the Kingdom of Heaven may be compared with a king who decided to settle accounts with his deputies. Right away they brought forward a man who owed him many millions, and since he couldn’t pay, his master ordered that he, his wife, his children and all his possessions be sold to pay the debt. But the servant fell down before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ So out of pity for him, the master let him go and forgave the debt.*

*‘‘But as that servant was leaving, he came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him some tiny sum. He grabbed him and began to choke him, crying, ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ His fellow servant fell before him and begged, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’ But he refused; instead, he had him thrown in jail until he should repay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were extremely distressed; and they went and told their master everything that had taken place. Then the master summoned his servant and said, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt just because you begged me to do it. Shouldn’t you have had pity on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’ And in anger his master turned him over to the jailers for punishment until he paid back everything he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat you, unless you each forgive your brother from your hearts.’’’ (Matthew 18:21–35 CJB)*

*So Peter, think about what it really means to be forgiven and to forgive.*

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**Introduction:** And just like Peter, we too need to consider what it means to be forgiven and to forgive. For us, forgiveness is tied to both justification and sanctification. But is also tied to the command to forgive. And we'll find there is confusion among believers in both areas.

Some teach that while we're forgiven for original sin, God requires that we work off the rest of our sins before we can enter His presence. Others teach that because all our sins are forgiven, if we ask God to forgive us then we are denying the reality of being forgiven. The former is heretical because it denies the efficacy of Christ's work on the cross. The latter is aberrant because it is destructive to our fellowship.

Misunderstanding the requirement to forgive is also problematical. It can lead to bitterness or anger, and it too can end up being destructive to our fellowship with God and our carrying out the commands to

*“... 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 ESV).*

The understanding of forgiveness is foundational to understanding what it means to be saved and what it means to walk faithfully. Accordingly, this morning I want to consider both aspects of forgiveness as they relate to sanctification and justification.

**A. Considering a Word: 1. What Forgiveness Isn't:** As we've noted, even among believers there is a certain amount of confusion over forgiveness. And in a moment we'll talk more about what it is. But it is important to understand what it isn't as it relates to forgiving others.

One of the classic works for individuals struggling with childhood abuse issues states that the abuser should never be forgiven. The authors seem to understand forgiving as saying what the abuser did doesn't matter. The victim should just forget about what happened and get on with life. And if this was what forgiveness means, then I'd have to agree. To “forgive” this way would be destructive, impossible, useless.

But God doesn't forgive this way, nor does He expect us to. When we are called to forgive, we are not called to ignore or forget. What we are to do is forgive, with full acknowledgment of what someone has done to us. In order to do so, we must understand what it is to be forgiven and what it means to forgive.

**2. What Forgiveness Is:** Forgiveness is complicated, in that God's forgiveness is different than the forgiveness we are to give to one another. The two, while having similarities, also have contrasts. Within scripture, we can see the differences and there are even distinctions between the Old and New Testaments.

The Hebrew word for forgiveness is defined as: *“Term used to indicate pardon for a fault or offense; to excuse from payment for a debt owed.”*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Brand, Chad, Charles Draper, Archie England, Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, TN, 2003.

The Greek is more complex due to the fact there a number of words used because there are a number different ways forgiveness is presented circumstantially and functionally. But the most common term used in different forms is defined as: “*Term used to indicate pardon for a fault or offense; to excuse from payment for a debt owed.*”<sup>2</sup>

One of the biggest differences is that God’s forgiveness always includes reconciliation. Our forgiveness ideally can include reconciliation, but it doesn’t require it. So if we are going to talk about truly forgiving others, we must begin with being forgiven.

**II We Are Forgiven (Salvation):** We are forgiven when we accept Christ’s payment for our sins. The problem begins with the fact that all humanity is at war with God. God wants peace with mankind, but our rebellious sinful nature prevents this.

*“... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”... consequently ...“God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”... and so remember that ... “The Lord ... is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”... nevertheless ... “the wages of sin is death, — but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 3:23; John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:9; Romans 6:23 ESV).*

So payment must be provided. And in the context of regeneration, of salvation, when we speak of God providing forgiveness, we mean that our punishment is paid, it is forgiven, by Christ’s payment. God has NOT ignored our sin, nor minimized it. He has exacted retribution for it and the debt is paid.

*“ God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”... “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (Romans 5:8; 1 John 2:2 ESV).*

And because the debt has been paid, all our sins have been paid for. Consequently, we now are justified in Christ and when we die, we immediately go to be with the Lord. At the moment of salvation we receive eternal life and physical death is simply a transition from a fallen world to God’s presence.

*“... we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”...“And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life” (1 John 2:25; 2 Corinthians 5:8 ESV).*

**III We Are to Request Forgiveness: A. Of God (Sanctification):** The forgiveness of salvation is a gift. But in our being God’s children there is another kind of forgiveness that we must request. This is the forgiveness necessary to maintain fellowship with God.

*“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9 ESV).*

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Clearly John is not talking about the necessity of asking for forgiveness as it relates to Justification for all our sins are paid. Consequently, he is referring to the present tense of salvation, sanctification.

When we sin, we must ask for forgiveness in order to maintain our fellowship with God. John makes it clear here that when we keep short accounts on the sins we know we've committed, then God takes care of the stuff we're unaware of.

Also, the purpose of repentance is to cause us to truly grieve over and desire to put away the sin in our lives. I suspect it is the lack of actual repentance within the church in general that is responsible for the compromise of God's standards, the lack of power because of the grieving of the Holy Spirit, and the basic irrelevance of many churches within our culture.

*“... do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30 ESV).*

How can believers take a stand against homosexual “marriage” when accepting divorce without cause, believers shacking up, and when adultery and fornication are frequently more the norm than the exception?

*“Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye” (Matthew 7:3–5 ESV).*

**B. Of Others:** But it isn't enough to just ask God for forgiveness. If we are to receive that forgiveness and it is for sins against others, we must also ask them to forgive us. We are to keep short accounts with one another. This means asking for forgiveness from anyone we have sinned against.

*“... if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”... “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another” (Matthew 5:23–24; James 5:16 ESV).*

What is it that makes it hard for us to confess? Most of all I suspect it's pride. It's one thing for God to know we messed up, after all He knows whether we want Him to or not. But we certainly don't want to be embarrassed before others. Yet we are called to make right our sins against others, as much as it is possible. And like we try to teach our children, maybe we need to remember consequences before we act.

**IV. We Are to Give Forgiveness: A. The Command to Forgive:** So far we've seen that God has forgiven us as we have accepted Christ's payment for our sins. We are eternally forgiven, having put on Christ's righteousness.

Next we've see that as part of sanctification we need to keep short accounts, asking God and those we have sinned against for their forgiveness. And in this process we grow in our understanding of the seriousness of sin, no matter how "small." Consequently, we desire to pursue both holiness and godliness.

Now comes what is frequently a very difficult part of the Christian life, the call to forgive others – even if "they don't deserve it." This is where Satan's half truths can be most powerful. He says, "Look how they treated you! No one should be treated that way! Why should you forgive them? What they did was unforgiveable." The problem here is that maybe everything he said is essentially true. But there are answers to the only question here that must be answered, "Why should you forgive them?"

First and foremost, we are required to forgive because God commanded us to do so. If there was no other reason, that would have to be enough. And it is here I want to go back to where we started, Jesus' words to Peter.

***"Then Peter came up and said to him, 'Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.'" (Matthew 18:21–22 ESV).***

Here I want to quote the Archeological Study Bible:

*"The standard teaching within Judaism (based on Job 33:29–30; Am 1:3; 2:6) was that three instances of forgiveness reflected a forgiving spirit. Peter's offer to more than double that number was generous, probably reflecting his desire for the completeness the number seven usually represented. Jesus' response—in essence that Peter was to forgive countless times—was astonishing."<sup>3</sup>*

**In fact** the point of the parable of the kingdom we saw at the beginning is, since through Christ's shed blood all our sins have been forgiven, past, present, and future, how dare we be so arrogant as to refuse to forgive the sins of others against us?

This isn't to say that some haven't experienced severe sins against them, but nevertheless, in comparison to all God has forgiven us for, we are commanded to forgive others. In fact Christ reinforces the importance of forgiving when He stated ...

***"... if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14–15 ESV).***

As we noted earlier, what this means is to be unforgiving is sin. And while sin doesn't affect our salvation, it does hinder our fellowship with God and our empowerment by the Holy Spirit to carry out the work we are called to. So we are commanded to forgive, and experience negative consequences to the extent we fail to do so.

**B. The Blessings of Forgiveness:** But was with all of God's commands there are also blessings that come with being obedient. The call to forgive is a call to do so in full light of the sin

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<sup>3</sup> Walton, John H. ed., A rchaeological Study Bible, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 2005.

against us. Some have been betrayed by their family, the very people who are to be the most trust-worthy. Others have been horrendously hurt by the actions of others. And we are to forgive in full light of these actions. But remember - Jesus understands your pain. He was rejected by His people and betrayed by Judas and Peter. He was horrendously hurt by the actions of others as He suffered on the cross, suffered so we won't have to. What did He say?

***“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34 ESV).***

Two blessings immediately came from Jesus' suffering, our salvation and His glorification.

***“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:3 ESV).***

We too are blessed when we forgive others. First and foremost we are blessed knowing that we are being obedient to God's command and that our obedience pleases Him.

***“Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him” (John 14:21 ESV).***

There are secondary blessings which, while they aren't to be our motivation for forgiving, should not be ignored. But first, we must understand that our forgiveness isn't dependent on the other person requesting us to forgive them. Certainly when Jesus prayed from the cross no one was asking Him to forgive them.

Second, while God's forgiveness of us in salvation is synonymous with reconciliation, when we forgive this isn't always possible, although desirable. Some teach that if you've actually forgiven someone then reconciliation has to follow. This is false! If we are forgiving parents, they may have already died and so there is no reconciliation in this life. If we are forgiving an abuser, it is unwise and even unsafe to try to reconcile. So the blessing of reconciliation may or may not even occur.

And forgiving isn't synonymous with trust. We can forgive a person. They can make promises but trust is rebuilt over time. And remember God forgives us but He doesn't trust us in that He knows we continue to sin and fail Him. He loves us anyway.

Additionally, God doesn't call us to forgive and forget. Some people may do so, but this is impossible. We are though to forgive and no longer remember. By that I mean when the memory of someone's sin against us returns we are to not focus on it or give it free reign to cause anger and bitterness. Instead we can pray for the person or focus on something else not allowing memories to be used by Satan to cause us to sin.

***“... I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44 ESV).***

But in forgiving someone we are free from bitterness. We are even free from them. As long as we hold on to anger and bitterness, this person still has power over us, even if they are

dead. Just like sin, when we walk in obedience to the Father we are no longer slaves to sin, but are slaves to righteousness. So long as we do not forgive we remain slaves to the person we don't forgive.

***“ ... thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:17–18 ESV).***

Finally, the good news is we can't just choose to forgive. As part of sanctification it is process. And it is something we can't do on our own. It is only as we walk in dependency on the Spirit that we are capable of living as God calls us to. But if we humble ourselves and depend on the Spirit we can walk in obedience.

***“ Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us”... “according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,” (1 John 3:24; Ephesians 3:16 ESV).***

So because we are forgiven we can forgive and therefore Christ commands us to forgive. And with forgiveness comes freedom. Yes, we still give, we still have scars. Didn't Christ carry the scars of the cross? But at the same time we find His piece and comfort.

**Conclusion:** So where does this leave us? It leaves us looking around us, here in our family, in the community around us. It means praying the Lord will give us discernment. Then consider who do you need to ask forgiveness of and/or who do you need to forgive. Let us not allow a lack of forgiveness get between us and the Lord. For when we keep short accounts we will then be available to be used by Him to advance His work, bring Him glory, and to be able to experience the peace the Lord desires for us. And so ...

***“ The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:5–7 ESV).***

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The Role of Forgiveness

## Various Passages

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  - III We Are to Request Forgiveness
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### **Introduction:**

*(Matthew 18:21–35, 22:37–40)*

#### **A. Considering a Word: 1. What Forgiveness Isn't:**

#### **2. What Forgiveness Is:**

### **II We Are Forgiven (Salvation):**

*(Romans 3:23; John 3:16; 2 Peter 3:9; Romans 6:23; Romans 5:8; 1 John 2:2; 1 John 2:25; 2 Corinthians 5:8)*

### **III We Are to Request Forgiveness: A. Of God (Sanctification):**

*(1 John 1:9; Ephesians 4:30; Matthew 7:3–5)*



**B. Of Others:**

*(Matthew 5:23–24; James 5:16)*

**IV. We Are to Give Forgiveness: A. The Command to Forgive:**

*(Matthew 18:21–22; Matthew 6:14–15)*

**B. The Blessings of Forgiveness:**

*(Luke 23:34; Hebrews 1:3; John 14:21; Matthew 5:44; Romans 6:17–18; 1 John 3:24; Eph. 3:16)*

**Conclusion:**

*(Philippians 4:5–7)*

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Personal Application: This week, under the Lord's direction, begin the process of forgiving or ask forgiveness if you haven't yet done so.

**Prayer for the Week: Father, help me be willing to forgive as I am forgiven. In Jesus' name, amen.**