

They betrayed Him. They lied about Him. They falsely accused Him. Then in a grotesque anger they scream, “Crucify Him!” They beat Him. They spit upon Him. They stripped Him. They humiliated Him. They drove large spikes through His wrists and feet. They crucified him. They mocked Him on the cross.

Then Jesus said, *Father forgive them, for they know not what they do* (Luke 23:34).

“Father forgive them.” How could Jesus say such a thing? What would motivate such a heart attitude?

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you (Matthew 6:12,14).

God expects me to forgive. How can he expect so much from me? Is He asking me to let the off without payment for the wrong?

What does “forgiveness” mean?

The life of Joseph gives us the first Bible truths about forgiveness.

List at least five offenses committed against Joseph. Read Genesis 37-40 to locate the offenses.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Late in Joseph’s life, Joseph’s brothers sent a messenger to Joseph. In Genesis 50:17 we read what they wanted the messenger to say. *So shall ye say unto Joseph, **Forgive**, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, **forgive the trespass** of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him.*

The Old Testament teaches the concept of forgiveness as “**lift up.**”

Do you see an interesting contrast in verses 17 and 18? What is it? Who was able to do the lifting?

The New Testament understanding of forgiveness is **to release, to send away** no longer to be viewed again.

How does releasing and sending away relate to the forgiveness God grants you?

Notice an interesting connection between Matthew 6:14 and the word “forgiveness” which means to release, and Matthew 18:15 and the word gain, which means to acquire.

When we **release** what is “rightfully” ours we actually **gain** a brother.

Who is a brother?

Nothing is more foreign to our human nature than the matter of forgiveness. We ask, how can God forgive when so much has been done wrong to Him? Why would He want to do that? What made it possible?

How can God expect us to forgive? Does He not understand how badly we’ve been hurt? Isn’t God unjust in letting them off so easy? Shouldn’t sin be judged?

Nearly all of us are either battling with guilt or battling blame. We are either needing forgiveness or we are needing to forgive. The truth of the matter is that we are needing both. Most emotional problems today can be traced to unbelief or disobedience regarding forgiveness.

Memorize the forgiveness principle:

“Forgiveness is not between you and the offender, but between you and God.”

“The letting go is not the letting go of a wrong, but rather a letting go of my “rights.”

Your ability to forgive has nothing to do with the extent of the offense; it has everything to do with the extent of your **knowledge of God**.

Read the following statements and verses. In the space provided, write what each verse tells you about God.

1. Forgiveness is a characteristic of God.

Psalm 86:5

2. Forgiveness incorporates a covenant of God.

Joshua 24:19,20

3. Forgiveness involves a command of God.

Matthew 18:21,22

490 times = unlimited.

4. Forgiveness effects our condition with God.

Matthew 6:15

Luke 6:37,38

Psalm 66:18

In the Old Testament forgiveness meant to lift up.
In the New Testament forgiveness means to release, to send away.

When we release what is rightfully ours we actually gain a brother.

Forgiveness is not between the offender and me, but rather between God and me.
The letting go is not the letting go of a wrong, but rather a letting go of my Rights.

My ability to forgive has nothing to do with the extent of the offense, but rather it has everything to do with the extent of my knowledge and obedience to God.

Lesson #2

1. Forgiveness is unnatural.

*Retaliation is our natural bent.
(Prov 20:22) (Mat 5:38,39) (Rom 12:17-21)

Retaliation has its place in the proper hands– God’s. By taking God’s job we violate the first commandment and actually commit idolatry.

*Recognize that forgiveness is a learned trait.
(Col 3:12,13) (Eph 4:32,33)

2. Forgiveness is demonstrated for us in the Bible.

(Mat 6:12,15)

Fact: God forgives!

That fact raises several questions.

Question #1: How can a Holy God who hates sin simply excuse a sinner? How can he let a sin go unpunished?

That question reveals a faulty view of God.

– God is holy in all his ways and his holiness demands that every sin be punished.
(Psa 5:5)(Rom 6:23)

– God promises that no sin will go unpunished.
(Exo 23:7b) (Nahum 1:3) (Rom 1:18)

How did God assure that every sin did have a punishment?

Question #2: How can sinful man appease God?

That question reveals a faulty view of man.

The Bible states that sinful man is the enemy of God.

Read Romans 5:10 Romans 8:7 and James 2:10.

God's justice must be satisfied by the punishment of every violation of His law. And the due penalty of our iniquity is infinitely severe: eternal damnation. Nothing we can offer God could possibly atone for our sin, because the price of sin is too high.¹

Question #3: If sinful men cannot appease a Holy God then what chance do we have for forgiveness?

God did not leave forgiveness up to chance. God made forgiveness AND reconciliation available by offering His only begotten Son in our place of punishment.

Look up the definition of the following words in a dictionary:

Forgive:

Reconcile:

Forgiveness and reconciliation are inextricably linked in II Corinthians 5:18-19.

¹John F. MacArthur, *The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness* (Wheaton, IL: Corssway Books, 1998), 13.

(2 Cor 5:18) And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, **and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;**

(2 Cor 5:19) To wit, that God was in Christ, **reconciling** the world unto himself, **not imputing their trespasses unto them;** and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

The truth is glorious: God has a plan by which He can accomplish the very thing that seemed so completely impossible. There *is* a way to satisfy His justice without damning the sinner. He can both fulfill His promise of vengeance against sin and reconcile sinners. He can remain just while justifying the ungodly (Romans 3:26). *Lovingkindness and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other* (Psalm 85:10)²

For reconciliation to be possible, the offended party (a Holy God) **initiated** the forgiveness process. That process was initiated in Christ's atonement. What is atonement? Look up the word in a dictionary. What is the definition?

The enmity between the offender (us) and the offended (God) was resolved by means of two acts of God through His Son.

1. Propitiation

God's wrath was satisfied (propitiated) by a suitable substitute.

Substitution is key to our learning forgiveness!!

2 Cor 5:21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

When Jesus was on the cross He cried, "My God My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Why did he speak those words?

He was experiencing all of God's wrath on all of our sins on Himself all at one time.

Read Isaiah 53:4-6.

(Isa 53:10) **Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him;** he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

It pleased the Lord?

Pleased means to be totally satisfied by the action of the substitute.

²Ibid, 15.

2. Imputation

To impute is a legal action assigning guilt or guiltlessness.

There are two sides to the doctrine of imputation.

2 Cor 5:21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

- Our guilt was assigned to Jesus. Our guilt was reckoned to His account.
- His righteousness was imputed to us.

(Gen 15:6) (Rom 3:25-26) (Rom 4:5)

Christ, dying on the cross, did not actually *become evil* in order to bear our guilt. By the same token, we do not actually have to *become perfect* in order to be credited with His perfect righteousness.

Our forgiveness is not dependent on some prior moral reform on our part. Every believer is forgiven immediately, just like the thief on the cross. No works of penance are necessary, no meritorious rituals. Forgiveness costs us nothing, because it already cost Christ everything.³

³Ibid, 27.

In the Old Testament forgiveness means to “lift up.”
In the New Testament forgiveness means to “release, to send away.”
RELEASE!

Corrie Ten Boom likens forgiveness to letting go of a bell rope at the church. As long as you keep tugging at the rope, the bell keeps ringing. To stop it from ringing, you must let go. But when you do let go, the bell keeps on ringing, the momentum is still at work. However, if you keep your hands off the rope, the bell will begin to slow and eventually stop. You must RELEASE the offense!

When we release what is rightfully ours, we actually gain a brother.

Forgiveness is not between the offender and me, but rather between God and me.
The letting go is not the letting go of a wrong; it is a letting go of my rights.

My ability to forgive has nothing to do with the extent of the offense; it has everything to do with the extent of my knowledge and obedience to God.

Though retaliation is our natural bent, God expects us to **learn** to forgive!
(Col 3:13) Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: **even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.**

God is a holy God and, therefore, must punish all sin. Sinful man cannot appease an angry God; he is the enemy of God. God stopped his anger at us (forgiveness) and made friendly again our relationship with him (reconciliation) by the work of Jesus Christ on the cross (2 Cor. 5:18,19).

Propitiation means God’s wrath was satisfied by a suitable substitute.

Substitution is the key to our learning forgiveness.

We learn to allow someone else to pay for the sin (Jesus) rather than the offender.
God imputed to Jesus our sin and His righteousness to us (2 Cor. 5:21).

How then can we do forgive even as Christ has forgiven us?

Lesson #3 The process of forgiveness

I. Recognize that a sin has been committed and must be dealt with.
2 Samuel 12:1-13

A. Develop the proper view of sin
Read 2 Samuel 12:5

Kindled – to burn, flare the nostrils

Who is the sin against? 2 Samuel 12:13

B. Develop the proper view of the penalty of sin. 2 Samuel 12:5 Rom. 6:23

Can we ever actually make the offender properly pay for their sin?

Stop to consider the separation sin has caused between them and God.

Read Isaiah 59:2.

But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.

II. Reckon that something needs to be done about the sin.

Leviticus 9:7 And Moses said unto Aaron, Go unto the altar, and offer thy sin offering, and thy burnt offering, and make an atonement for thyself, and for the people: and offer the offering of the people, and make an atonement for them; as the LORD commanded.

Atonement = To cover over

Do a brief study of the ark of the Covenant. What did it look like?

What was placed on the Mercy Seat?

What does the atonement illustration of the Ark of the Covenant picture?

*Psalm 32:1 Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose **sin is covered**.*

*Psalm 85:2 Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, **thou hast covered all their sin**. Selah.*

Ask yourself, “Has something already been done about that sin that was committed against me?”
Am I willing to let Christ’s atonement work?”

Colossians 2:14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;

What else needs to be accomplished after forgiveness?

Repentance

Write out a definition of Repentance

Reconciliation

Write out a definition of Reconciliation

These are PROCESSES!

Should forgiveness be conditional or unilateral?

Do we have to confront every offense?

John McArthur addresses these questions in *The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness*.

Unilateral (Non confrontational) forgiveness:

1. **Whenever possible**, especially if the offense is petty or unintentional, it is best to forgive unilaterally.

Ephesians 4:1-3 *I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,*

*With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, **forbearing one another** in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

2. If you are the **only injured party**, even if the offense was public and flagrant, you may **choose** to forgive unilaterally.

Remember Joseph

Remember David and Shimei -- Worthless fellow... Did David trust him?

Conditional (Confrontation needed) forgiveness:

1. If you observe a **serious offense** that is a sin against someone other than you, confront the offender.

2. When ignoring an offense might **hurt the offender**, confrontation is required.

3. When a sin is **scandalous or otherwise potentially damaging to the body of Christ**, confrontation is essential.

4. Any time an offense results in a **broken relationship**, formal forgiveness is an essential step toward reconciliation.

Remember what Nathan said to David: “Thou art the man....”

Galatians 6:1 *Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*

III. Realize that the sin needs to be forgotten.

Common statements:

I can forgive, but I just can't forget.

They hurt me.

You don't understand what they did to me.

You can't imagine the humiliation I felt.

The emotional abuse goes deep.

What does God say to us about how He forgives us?

(Jer 31:34b) *I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*

(Heb 8:12) *For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.*

(Heb 10:17) *And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.*

Is it possible for God to forget? If so how does He do it?

What is the dictionary definition of the word “forget?”

God intentionally chooses not to call those offenses to mind. He does not bring them up again!

(Phil 2:5) *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:*

Forgetting is a matter of **choice and action!** We must refuse to bring up the offense again.

Corrie Ten Boom's relates an amazing lesson in her book *The Hiding Place?*

It was a church service in Munich that I saw him, the former S.S. man who had stood guard at the shower room door in the processing center at Ravensbruck. He was the first of our actual jailers that I had seen since that time. And suddenly it was all there -- the roomful of mocking men, the heaps of clothing, Betsie's pain-blanching face.

He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. "How grateful I am for your message, Fraulein," he said. "To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!"

His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often to the people in Bloemendaal the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side.

Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him.

I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give me Your forgiveness.

As I took his hand the 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.

Forgiveness Lesson 4

Unforgiveness is a toxin. It poisons the heart and mind with bitterness, distorting one's whole perspective on life. Anger, resentment, and sorrow begin to overshadow and overwhelm the unforgiving person – a kind of soul-pollution that enflames evil appetites and evil emotions. Such bitterness can even spread from person to person, ultimately defiling many (Hebrews 12:15). **Forgiveness is the only antidote.** Forgiveness is a healthy, wholesome, virtuous, liberating act. Forgiveness unleashes joy. It brings peace. It washes the slate clean. It sets all the highest virtues of love in motion. In a sense, forgiveness is Christianity at its highest level.⁴

Review:

The Principles of Forgiveness – God expects us to forgive!

Matthew 6:12,13 Colossians 3:13,14

Forgiveness reveals a lot about what we believe about doctrine.

Propitiation – Satisfied by a suitable substitute

Imputation – Assign guilt or guiltlessness

Substitution is the key to our learning forgiveness!

I John 1:9

Forgiveness is not between the offender and me, but rather between God and me.

Forgiveness is not the letting go of the wrong, but rather the letting go of our rights.

The Process of Forgiveness

I. Recognize a sin has been committed.

II. Reckon that something needs to be done about the sin.

God provided the Atonement - covering

Ark of the Covenant illustration

Christ is the substitute!

For the forgiveness to be effective **on our part**, we must repent, make restitution, and repeatedly obey.

Think about this:

By providing the substitute, God frees himself from the hurt of our offense.

⁴John F. MacArthur, *The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 161.

III. Realize that the sin needs to be forgotten (our term) remembered no more (God's term).

Hit the eject button, replace that incident's video with Christ's atonement.

Forgiveness is the act of **intentionally choosing not to call the offense to mind.**

Oh, I forgive them, but I just can't forget...

What is actually being said is, "I will not allow the relationship to be as it once was."

We haven't obeyed God about seeking reconciliation following forgiveness.

Lesson 4

Process of Forgiveness continued

IV. Reach for reconciliation

Reconciliation involves two elements:

1. Comfort
2. Confirming love – a restored relationship

How does reconciliation work in our relationship with God?

Read Romans 5:8-11

God exchanged our position as an enemy for that of a trusted family member. He gave us a favored position.

Read Colossians 1:22 and Ephesians 2:16.

The words used here for reconcile speak of a special kind of heightened reconciliation. It means that the relationship is restored to a former state of harmony!

Read II Corinthians 5:18

God is the author of reconciliation.

Christ is the agent of our reconciliation.

We must accept the reconciliation.

How should that reconciliation relate to our responsibility of reaching for reconciliation?

What is meant by the terms "ministry of reconciliation" and "word of reconciliation?"

Read II Corinthians 2

Normally, we assume that the person here is referring to the incestuous man.

However, it could be someone entirely different. It probably was.

Background and context observations point to a developing mutiny.

After Paul wrote I Corinthians, one of the people in the church started a division that sought to discredit Paul. It was an all out attack.

Most of II Corinthians is spent correcting the attacks this man brought against Paul. Paul had to reaffirm his true apostolic credentials.

Apparently, Paul wrote a letter dealing with this problem. It was known as the **REBUKING LETTER**

2 Corinthians 7:8 For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season. Obviously, this was not the book of I Corinthians that we have. In that letter, Paul instructed them about enacting church discipline against the rebellion leader.

(I Corinthians 5:9 alludes to another letter written before I Corinthians – 4 letters in all.)

Paul sent Titus to check on the condition of things after that letter dealing with the problem.

Titus had returned. Paul was encouraged about the report of true repentance

(II Corinthians 7:6-16).

If someone had led a rebellion against you, what would be your response?

Paul says, **comfort this guy, and confirm your love to him.**

This is a refreshing and godly example. Often the offended party feels justified in withholding forgiveness. Not Paul. He demanded no personal apology. He sought no act of penance... This illustrates the absence of pride in Paul's heart. Pride, I am convinced, is the primary reason most people refuse to forgive. They nurse self-pity (which is nothing but a form of pride). Their ego is wounded, and they will not stand for that. Prideful reactions to an offense can run the gamut from those who simply wallow in self-pity to those who retaliate with an even worse offense. All such responses are wrong because they are motivated by pride.⁵

Read II Corinthians 7:7,11.

First element of reconciliation

⁵Ibid, 166.

1. Comfort the offender

Genesis 5:29 – The name “Noah” means comfort

Read Psalm 23:4 – What is pictured here?

The shepherd goes out of his way to get the lamb who has gotten himself into trouble.

Read John 14:16,26 Why did God give us the Holy Spirit?

2nd element of reconciliation

2. Confirmed relationship restored.

Love

What is love?

*Making a decision to sacrifice my selfishness

*Making a commitment to communicate commitment

How did God demonstrate that kind of love for us?

What selfishness issues do you need to deal with before you can love the offender?

What was can you communicate commitment to the offender?