

Biblical forgiveness- the implications

Psalm 51:1-19 (NKJV)

1 Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin *is* always before me.

4 Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done *this* evil in Your sight-- That You may be found just when You speak, *And* blameless when You judge.

5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.

6 Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden *part* You will make me to know wisdom.

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

8 Make me hear joy and gladness, *That* the bones You have broken may rejoice.

9 Hide Your face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

11 Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me *by* Your generous Spirit.

13 *Then* I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You.

14 Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, The God of my salvation, *And* my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.

15 O Lord, open my lips, And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.

16 For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give *it*; You do not delight in burnt offering.

17 The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart-- These, O God, You will not despise.

18 Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion; Build the walls of Jerusalem.

19 Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, With burnt offering and whole burnt offering; Then they shall offer bulls on Your altar.

Psalm 51 is the gold standard of repentance. We are not going to take it verse by verse, even though that would be very profitable. But we will refer to it as we finish out this study of forgiveness.

Now we have covered the forgiveness of God. We have determined that sin creates a debt that must be punished. And our sins are forgiven by Christ dying for those sins. The sins we commit **after** our salvation cut us off from fellowship and confession is required to restore fellowship with Christ and fellow believers. The ministry of reconciliation by fellow believers is carried out in an ambassadorial function representing God. We are declaring what we believe to be true about sins that are covered by Christ's crucifixion and those that are not. We heartily endorse that forgiveness and join in by aligning our attitudes and actions with it. And we push for closure, either by repentance of the sinner or excommunication by the church.

Now let's look at some of the **implications** of forgiveness.

In Psalms 51 we have God pointing out David's sin and David's response to that conviction. We see what repentance really looks like.

Note that Nathan saw David's sin somehow and went to David representing God's interests. He was God's ambassador in this ministry of reconciliation. He confronted David and David heard. David's heart was stricken with the sin David had committed, primarily against God and secondarily against everyone else. Then we see the fruit of true repentance. He confesses His sin clearly and thoroughly and has supreme remorse for it. But one of the most important things we must see is that the **consequences** of the sin and the **forgiveness** of the sin are not the same thing. David was not released from the **consequences** of the sin. The baby was going to die. It did not matter that God had completely forgiven David of the sin. The sin debt had been undone. David was not going to be punished eternally for the sin he had committed. God would never hold it against David to be used to condemn David. That is the **forgiveness** part of the equation. And it was complete and absolute.

Then there was the fellowship part of the equation. David prayed that fellowship not be denied, but that it would be restored. He prayed that he could recover from this sin and be restored back into meaningful fellowship with God and His people. The Bible record shows us that **this happened**. But David, we find elsewhere, prayed for the **consequences** of his sin to be removed. God did not answer that prayer.

So again we see that forgiveness accomplished the removal of God's judgment and restored fellowship with God and His people. But it did not free him from the results of what he had done.

If we define forgiveness in such a way that forgiveness is supposed to remove the consequences of our sin, we are going to be disappointed by the Holy Spirit and fellow believers when they offer us the forgiveness of God. That is one of the reasons that it is so important that we understand what forgiveness is and what it isn't.

Look at David's attitude. Does David turn on God and say hey, I confessed. I repented. Why are you still going to kill my son? I thought forgiveness would get me off the hook.

No. We see nothing of the kind. David understands what repentance is. He desperately wants His fellowship restored with God **more than anything else**. He cannot stand the thought of the Holy Spirit's presence being pulled from him. He realizes that whatever the consequences for His sins, they are fully deserved. And the longer he considers his sin, the deeper it goes. Until he finally gets it. I didn't just commit sins. I was steeped in sin. I was born in sin. He could say "forgive me God for I am the sinner".

Then he appeals to the blood for forgiveness. It is easy for us to understand that this is Christ's blood. ⁷ **Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.**

Now was David a believer? Yes. He was. So he is essentially told what we are told. Confess your sins and Christ is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. That is the prayer here. And it is referring to Christ's sacrifice of blood that saved him from his sins. His forgiveness is not based on God turning His head and **ignoring** his sins. It is based on a **blood penalty** for his sins.

It is just like our forgiveness.

It is so new testament.

Then he goes on.

⁶ **Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.**

This is the goal. This is what God is shooting for. He is not looking for legal technicalities. He wants a person to come clean before Him with all that he is and to call a spade a spade. Look at this and think of Isaiah. ¹⁷ **The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart-- These, O God, You will not despise.**

What God wants is **you**. He wants you coming before Him without pretention, without any theory of some goodness that lingers in your past. He wants us to look at our sin and say I sinned because that is **who I was** in my heart of hearts. Any of my defenses are lies. I am that person. I have no defense. I have no goodness. I am utterly and completely fallen. And how does God

respond? Does He rub it in our faces? No. From what I gather in scripture it is more like God to say, "well it is about time."

There is something I wanted to add here, a little side road. We never have to fear **the sin we find** when we look at our lives and our real motives. We never have to hide from that or run from that in fear. When we look closely at our lives we will always find some ugly. And as we look at it harder it gets uglier. But that sin **never ever** has the power to keep cutting us off from fellowship with Christ, no matter what it is. And the more we admit it and repent of it, the more fellowship is restored. And the more fellowship is restored, the more grateful we are. And we will find that it is really true that **he who is forgiven much truly does love much**. We simply cannot help it. So never be afraid to look at your life closely. Ok back to our train of thought. So true repentance **sees sin** for what it is and **accepts the consequences** of that sin as being perfectly justified. It does not seek to escape justice about the consequences of sin, while knowing that it already escaped Gods just penalty through Christ.

2 Corinthians 7:9-11 (NKJV)

⁹ Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing.

¹⁰ For godly sorrow produces repentance *leading* to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

¹¹ For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

True repentance of sin does not produce a desire to **escape** the consequences of our sin. Our sin natures do that by default. True repentance creates a willingness to do whatever will set things right, no matter what it costs. It wants truth revealed. And it wants it in the depth of our souls. It is not looking to cover sin or excuse sin. It is looking to reveal sin and have it truly forgiven.

And this repentance leads to restored fellowship with God.

Ok that is how David experienced it.

Now

However we define what **forgiveness** is has to be applicable in this situation.

We will use it to test what we believe. I chose the example because it is a clear

one and I don't think anyone here is guilty of it, which makes it a safe one. Here is the situation.

A wife confesses to a husband after 15 years of marriage that she committed adultery in the first month of their marriage. It was never repeated. She asks for his forgiveness. Now what does forgiveness mean here? How is it carried out in this instance? Whatever forgiveness **is** has to be able to be carried out here.

OK- The first thing we need to look at is what Jesus says about this sin in regards to marriage.

Matthew 5:31-32 (NKJV)

³¹ "Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'

³² **But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.**

If we read this with any kind of logic we have to conclude that Jesus says that what the wife did is grounds for a man to divorce his wife. God does not **prescribe** what He **forbids**. He does not tell you **not to do something** and **how to do something** at the same time. Now why is this the one allowable grounds for divorce? Probably because this is the one thing in marriage that is different from every other relationship. It has strict boundaries. And violation of that boundary is reason to dissolve the marriage relationship. Now, this is important. Does this mean the husband is free not to forgive his wife? **No**. There is no instance anywhere of a believer having a reason to not forgive another believer when they have confessed. Forgiveness in the face of repentant confession is mandatory. So the man **must** forgive his wife. So logically he can forgive her and divorce her at the same time? Yes. The **consequences of the sin** and the **forgiveness of the sin** are two different issues. Forgiveness is like that. Forgiveness does not change our **history**, it changes our **destiny**.

This pretty well demolishes the idea that forgiveness means that the consequences of the sin are immediately undone when a person is forgiven. Forgiveness is something. And it is important. But it does not remove the consequences of a sin. If a person killed someone, they must face the civil authorities, no matter how forgiven they are. David was going to lose his son, no matter how forgiven he was.

Now suppose the person in our illustration chooses to remain in the marriage?

He must **forgive** his wife. That is mandatory. He cannot view his wife as being defined by her sin. He must understand that her sin **against him** will never be punished by God and he should adjust to being glad for that fact. He must forgive from the heart. He must be glad for the grace that God shows to his wife. That is what forgiveness does. But he does not need to continue in the marriage.

But if he does, how do we apply forgiveness?

Does this mean she says "**Forgive me.**" He says, "**I forgive you**". And the topic can never come up again? Is that the test for true forgiveness?

I have never seen a relationship that works that way. And I am not convinced that this is how forgiveness works inside the church.

I believe that forgiveness is as much a **commitment** as an **event**. The commitment to forgive may be decided at one point. And it might be as sincere as can be. But that commitment will need to be remembered tomorrow when the pain from the sin is discovered in some new implication or memory.

I think it is very similar to the decision to marry. We say "**I do**" one day. And then when other tempting opportunities come up to say "**I don't**" we stick with our original commitment. Forgiveness is a commitment to deal with the person from a position **of them being forgiven of the sin** that they have committed. We must orient to the fact that God no longer holds that sin against them and will fellowship with them in spite of their past sins and their implications and consequences.

In our example, the husband has at least three issues to deal with.

First is **aligning with God in the fact that the sin is forgiven**. We have adequately spoken about that.

Second he has to wrap his mind around **the sin** that was committed. He has to do business with the reality of the sin that was done. Some might say he should just refuse to think about it. But how can you process something you refuse to think about? How can you work through the anger and hurt without thinking about how God's word applies to the process you are going through? You cannot possibly learn about God's word and real life if you simply refuse to think about it. Growth comes from believing and applying God's word in every situation in your life as you process your way through it. So this man is likely to experience a great deal of growth by applying God's word to his feelings and thoughts.

Third the man in the situation needs to deal with the issue of who his wife **is** and **was**. And this might be the harder issue. The wife may have only been unfaithful once, but she we deceptive multiple times. How would that man deal with the relational implications of the deception? What is the man to think of those years when in one area of her life he was living with a stranger. Do you see what I mean? This thing called forgiveness is not for sissies or fools. To deal with these issues takes a great deal of wisdom. What is the **statute of limitations** on processing the hurt and confusion? When has a person truly forgiven? Or is this no longer about forgiveness? Is it simply about how to live up to the **commitment** of forgiveness, how to go on **not defining this person by a past sin**, while still having to develop a real relationship with who the person really is?

Now suppose the woman in our illustration goes to the elder with a complaint. She says that her husband has not forgiven her. He keeps wanting to talk about the past. He keeps asking questions.

Elders must be discerning about sin. This is one of the primary responsibility of elders since the ministry of reconciliation is much of what the church is about. We must be good at discerning what sin is. We must be absolutely committed to carrying out Jesus instructions of go, take someone, and then take it to the church, no matter what the personal implications are for us. This is a requirement of an elder.

And then we must be wise at sorting through the implications of forgiveness in our relationships with each other.

Should the elders be hard on the guy for having to work through the implications of the sin to the relationship? Should the instruction be- you say you forgave this, now forgive it? Again, do you see the difficulties? If the husband is punishing his wife by needlessly and cruelly rubbing her nose in her sin, yes. He needs to stop. If she thinks that forgiveness means that he cannot work through his hurt and betrayal she is mistaken. If she thinks he is being cruel because he is trying to heal and needs help to do so, she is mistaken. Where are the limits? Where are the lines? You can see the problem.

Ultimately I think the process of working through the process of living up to our commitment of forgiveness needs to be refereed by what scripture says about love. We must be committed to the welfare of the other person. The husband must be committed to the welfare of the wife and be willing to pay whatever price that is right to pay. The wife must be committed to the welfare of the husband and be willing to pay whatever price is right to pay.

And one can expect that the process will be highly charged emotionally for both parties. That is the kind of stuff that Christians have to take on. That is why we cannot afford to have some flippant view of forgiveness.

Part of the problem with forgiveness is that, to the degree that a person has sinned against us in a very important way, the forgiving party must bear the repercussions of that sin even though they did not commit it. If we come up with a different view of forgiveness we are just fooling ourselves. The **consequences** of sin often do not go away when the **damnation** of them leaves. And forgiveness does not mean pretending. It doesn't mean if you really mean it when someone says they forgive you that "poof", the sin never happened. The sin did no harm. The sin was nothing. Forgiveness is serious business. It is a serious commitment to go against our fleshly responses for the good of another believer. And it is like parenting. If it is easy we probably aren't doing it right.

When we are **forgiven**, that does not free us from the harm that our sin has done to others. When we **forgive**, that does not free us from the harm that sin has done to us. Forgiveness means that God will not damn us for it and believers will not define us by it. And we are glad for that.

If we expect that forgiveness will free us from the harm our sin has done, we will always be dissatisfied by the quality of fellow believer's forgiveness of us. At the end of the day, if we had wanted to be free from the harm that our sin does to others, we should not have committed the sin. That is sort of the point when God warns us a million times not to do it. Don't do it. Once we have, the consequences are on us.

I know that I have posed more questions than answers in this illustration. But I think it is important that we think through this stuff. If we have **pat answers**, we need to consider if they really fit every situation. If it is commanded by Christ we better be sure exactly what it is and what it is not. Now let's look at another angle.

I said earlier that our repentance and our restoration of fellowship is on a continuum. It is not **all** or **nothing** like our justification through Christ is. And it primarily depends upon our repentance and confession.

So let's look at this from the perspective of repentance.

Suppose I have stolen \$100K from you knowing that I should not have done so but I did it anyway. And I confess that I stole \$1000 from you explaining to you the great duress of a debt I had that would have destroyed my family. So I stole. What happens in partial confession and partial repentance? We can fool ourselves in all kinds of ways, so even if I give a partial repentance I might be sincerely confessing what I believe about myself. So what happens?

We only have **restored fellowship** to the degree that we have **true repentance**. If I am hiding something from myself, I will not have fellowship restored on that thing until I confess it and repent of it. Does that mean that sin will be held against me in the final judgement? No. That is impossible if I am a believer. But deep in my heart I know the truth. And as long as I feel I need to hide the truth I will never be set free of it. It will always impede relationship with God and fellow believers.

We see this in Psalm 51 and that is why it is so good. **Truth to the core** is the goal in repentance. The goal is not to have just enough truth that we can get someone off our back. It is not just enough truth that we can make them look silly for having a bad opinion of us. No. It is **gut level truth** that does not care what people might make of it. It is looking at our situation, not trying to figure the angles and to make light of what we did, seeing it in its best light. It is digging to the bottom, letting the evidence guide us to what is really true about us. And then saying- yes, that is me. That is what David was talking about. We can **do** less. And **when** we do less, we will end up with a shallower relationship with God and His people. But if we will let the Holy Spirit have His way, if we will have the guts to say, "I want to see the truth, I don't care what it is." We will have repentance that sets us free in the deepest levels. We will walk in the light as He is in the light. That is pleasing to God.

Now, how do you know if I have forgiven you and how do I know if you have forgiven me?

Is my test of forgiveness that if you have forgiven me that you will never bring my past up? Well the Holy Spirit, and Paul do not seem to live by that rule. So maybe we should drop that litmus test.

So how do we know? Do I believe that God will never punish you for your sin? Do I define you by what Christ has done rather than what you have done? Do I see you as a child of God dearly loved by God? Those are pretty good signs of forgiveness.

If I bring up your past that you have already confessed or you bring up mine, the question to ask then is **why is this happening?** If you are trying to tell me I can never be forgiven, or that my sin is unforgivable, or that fellowship can never be restored, that is the ministry of the devil. He is the great accuser of our souls. He wants to use our sins to convince us that we are unforgivable. If that is my goal or that is yours, we need to go back and look at what you and I have been forgiven from. That is **not** forgiveness. God **condemns** that behavior categorically. There is **no excuse**.

But if you bring up my sin because I have become haughty and have forgotten where I came from, you are doing me a favor. Paul did that in his epistles.

If you bring up my sin because you believe that I have only partially repented of things that are obvious to you, that might be a kindness if it is in cooperation with what the Holy Spirit is doing. Although I may not immediately regard it as one.

If you bring up my sin because you are trying to deal with the repercussions of it and it is difficult for you, that is understandable.

At the end of the day, forgiveness means the debt that we have for the punishment of our sins is released. And it means that fellowship with God and with believers has been restored based on the relationship that we have with God. If a person commits himself to that process, he is on the right side of the equation. We will never do this perfectly. But we must be committed to pronouncing each other children of God and forgiven of sins.

So this ends what I wanted to share about what I have learned about forgiveness. I hope it does not end our study of forgiveness.

I thought it might be good to close out the study with what God says about that which should surround and motivate this ministry of forgiveness. It is a change of topic, but I think it helps us know if what we are doing is from flesh or from God.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 (NKJV)

⁴ Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;

⁵ does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;

⁶ does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;

⁷ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸ Love never fails.