

Seeing Christ through Forgiveness

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"Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another,

*If anyone has a complaint against another; **even as** Christ forgave you, so you also must do."*

~Colossians 3:13

Introduction: *Why do we struggle with forgiveness?*

We want forgiveness to make sense. But honestly, forgiveness doesn't make sense, at least if we look at it through our feelings or thoughts. With human reasoning, forgiveness seems unfair. So is there something else going on here? It's so helpful to know that forgiveness does not originate with us—it originates with God.

Scripture Reading: Colossians 3: 1-4; 12-14.

What is forgiveness? **Forgiveness is the gracious gift of God.** *In Him [Christ] we have redemption through His blood, **the forgiveness of sins**, according to the riches of God's grace (Ephesians 1:7).*

We are forgiven, redeemed, justified, and sanctified. We have everlasting life; heaven is our home. Not because we are worthy or have earned salvation: *For it is by grace you have been saved through faith.* By faith in Jesus Christ, we have been released from the bondage of sin and become a child of God. We have eternal life.

Forgiveness is certain. *As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us (Psalm 103:12).* God says that He will remember our sins no more and will separate them as far as the east is from the west. I do not have to carry my sins around like a duffel bag of regret and shame. I lay those burdens at the foot of the Cross.

Forgiveness is cancelling the debt. *"And you, being dead in your trespasses and sins, He has made alive together with Him. Having forgiven you all your trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the Cross."* (Colossians 2:13-14).

God forgave us the sin debt we could never pay. Jesus paid it all, so we could experience God's incredible, unconditional forgiveness. All that's required of us is our response to His great sacrifice for us. For the greatest lesson Jesus demonstrated on forgiveness is by His very own life and death on the Cross. When you experience the forgiveness of God and realize that the Lord Jesus died for you, then you forgive others, you cancel the debt, and rid yourself of the poison of anger or bitterness or resentment. You are saying in essence, *"I am cancelling the debt. I'm tearing it up. You don't owe me anything. I'm not carrying it anymore. I'm setting you free."*

What's in it for me? When you forgive and release someone, actually, you are the one who is truly set free. *"The first and often the only person to be healed by forgiveness is the person who does the forgiveness. When we genuinely forgive, we set a prisoner free and then discover that the prisoner we set free was us"* (The Art of Forgiveness by Lewis Smedes).

A Story of Forgiveness: *"Forgiveness is not an emotion—forgiveness is an act of the will, and the will can function regardless of the temperature of the heart"* (Corrie ten Boom, The Hiding Place).

When we choose to forgive in Jesus' name and with His help through the Power of the Holy Spirit, God begins to put things together. But the feelings don't come first—the forgiveness comes first and feelings follow—sometimes not right away, but God begins to put things back together and rebuild us.

Can I forgive and forget?

For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more (Hebrews 8:12).

Thankfully God forgives and forgets my sin. How could God possibly forget? There is nothing He needs to learn in the process. He is omniscient—He knows everything. But the deep hurts and injuries that seem impossible for us to forgive are neither quick nor easy to get over. But we can still forgive even if we can't forget; however, we have given up the right ever to use that offense against him or her in any way.

Will my hurt go away?

"And for all these people alike, the key to healing turned out to be the same. Each had a hurt he had to forgive" (Corrie ten Boom).

When the pain is deeply personal, it's important that our reactions stay biblical. Sometimes our hurt feelings don't always want to cooperate with the Holy Spirit. Pick up your Bible and let it heal you. Forgiveness is the very thing that God does to heal hurting hearts. Sometimes we wrongly think that if we forgive, they will get away with it, thinking our bitterness and anger is punishing them. But these emotions do not change a person. Only God can.

Forgiveness is not saying, "What you did didn't hurt me deeply." The mark of forgiveness is that we no longer feel ill will toward the other person. We may not trust him or her anymore. But we don't wish them harm.

What about forgiveness in marriage?

One of marriage's primary purposes is to teach us to forgive. Withholding forgiveness is the worst kind of game you can play in your marriage.

How can a bar of soap ruin a marriage? In the novel *Love in the Time of Cholera*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez portrays a marriage that disintegrates over a bar of soap.

Who will be the first to forgive?

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves (Philippians 2:3).

“Love keeps no record of wrongs” (1 Corinthians 13:5). When there is forgiveness, hearts and lips are opened again, and Christ-like words go to work, tearing down walls and building bridges.

Christian marriages are fixed vertically before they are ever fixed horizontally. If God is not in his rightful place in my mind, guess who I insert in that place? Me. When I fail to forgive in my marriage, I make it all about me and not about Jesus Christ or my husband. I’ve been hurt and if I’m not careful, I’m going to nurse that hurt every single day. That’s when I need to stop and remind myself that God loves me, and He never allows anything to touch my life that is not for my spiritual good.

Marriage teaches us—practically forces us—to learn to live by extending grace and forgiveness. If I can learn to forgive my husband, I’ll be well-equipped to offer forgiveness outside my marriage.

How many times should I forgive? *Then Peter came to Him, and said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven’ (Matthew 18:21-22).*

Jesus is saying, “There is no statute of limitations to forgiveness. Forgiveness never holds back love.”

What if the person doesn’t think he [or she] was wrong or refuses to change?

Forgiveness is not a cruel command of God to make light of what someone did to you—it’s to make right the condition of your heart before the Lord—even if the person doesn’t change.

Is reconciliation possible?

“God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them.”

(2 Corinthians 5:19)

Another precious promise of the Gospel is **reconciliation**. We find reconciliation not only with God, but with one another. Jesus Christ came to bring healing and reconciliation.

Perhaps one of the greatest benefits we can experience when we forgive is the possibility of a restored relationship. But reconciliation in relationships is only possible when there has been forgiveness that is both requested and granted; trust must be restored; and respect must be given. But even when restoration doesn’t work, forgiveness always does.

What if I've blown it, and I am the one needing forgiveness?

But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound (Romans 5:20).

God's grace allows me to live with hope in the present because it frees me to leave my past behind. All of what I look back on and would like to redo has been fully covered by the blood of Jesus Christ.

The Greatest Short Story on Forgiveness (Luke 15:11-32)

Of course, the father in the story really symbolizes God and His willingness to forgive us and welcome us back. And because of that, the Lord Jesus wants us to know that whatever you do, you can always come home.

God does not find it difficult to forgive you. It is not as though He must regretfully give you a second chance. The price of forgiveness has already been paid by Christ, and God wants you to accept it freely.

When you are living with regret, turn to the Word of God. God wants to reassure you of His love and grace, and He does it through His Word. Old truths will take on new meaning, and new truths will jump out at you from familiar verses. The Word will become like medicine to your broken heart.

Conclusion

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God as dear children (Ephesians 4:32-5:1).

Is forgiveness possible?

Is forgiveness easy?

Is forgiveness simple?

We are commanded by God to forgive because we have been forgiven. **“Even as”**: Underline that phrase in Ephesians 4:32. Be an imitator of God. Let God's measure of forgiveness to you determine your forgiveness of others. Our ability to forgive flows out of our gratitude for what we have been forgiven.

Forgiveness is a great experience—both to give and to receive. It can be yours.

“Forgiveness is the key that unlocks the door of resentment and the handcuffs of hatred. It is a power that breaks the chains of bitterness and the shackles of selfishness” (Corrie ten Boom).