

# Forgiveness and Repentance

## Part 6

**If we've been offended and there is no repentance (or even if there is), how do we spiritually, emotionally, psychologically or functionally deal with the wound? How do we reconcile forgiveness as a necessary virtue to salvation?**

*Matthew 6:14, 15*

*With Study Questions*

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**For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. <sup>15</sup> But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (Matthew 6:14, 15).**

### **Preface**

Back in the mid 1980s we had a semi-regular visitor come to our house to eat and play cards. He was a man from England by the name of Daley Thompson. He had won both the 1980 and 1984 Olympic games in the decathlon and held the world record in the event. One night we decided to play tennis—doubles.

My partner was my room-mate at the time, Tom, who himself had won the 1980 Olympic trials in the pole-vault. Daley was playing with an equally excellent athlete named Craig. I was clearly the least talented athlete in the group. But I wasn't the worst tennis player. Tom and I won the first set. Daley was unsatisfied with the defeat and suggested the best two out of three. We accommodated his request. We beat him two out of three. It was getting late. The lights for the courts went out.

"How do we get the lights back on?" Daley asked. "Why? We're through." I responded. "No, let's go three out of five," Daley demanded. We found some quarters (for the lights) and continued. We won the best three out of five. Now it was about one in the morning. Four out of seven was Daley's next request. "You've got to be kidding me!" I thought, "We'll be here all night!" "Come on mate (or chap or some British term), let's keep playing." It dawned on me that we were going to play until Daley won—which he eventually did.

Tenacity is a virtue. As one who fully recognizes my own 'sinful dust-hood' before a holy God and a need for a righteousness that is not my own but one which comes from Christ—I also recognize that

the Scriptures call Christians to be tenacious—tenacious in seeking the blessings of God and tenacious in seeking virtue in our own lives.

## Review

In our series on forgiveness and repentance, we defined forgiveness as a decision on the part of the offended person to “send away” the debt of the offending person—to acquit or pardon others the way we, as Christians, have been acquitted by God.

We then pursued understanding why it is so difficult to forgive others. The bottom line of this difficulty is an unawareness or ignorance of the depth of our own sin before God—the immense unpayable debt we all owe—as we discussed in the parable of the unmerciful servant, “ALL THAT DEBT!”

Then we sought to answer the question ‘should we always forgive, even if there is no repentance?’ If we’re going to forgive as we have been forgiven, there must be repentance on the part of the offender; if there is no repentance, we misrepresent forgiveness. But that is not to say that we are to remain inactive in the life of the offender. We are to love, pray and minister to the very person who offended us, in hopes that **“God perhaps will grant them repentance” (2 Timothy 2:25).**

From there we asked the question, ‘Does forgiving always mean forgetting?’ The answer being, ‘it depends.’ If we’re remembering in order to vent, condemn or discharge our anger we remember sinfully; if we’re remembering in order to be wise and cautious (for the benefit of all—including the offender) then we remember with virtue.

Last time we sought to define repentance? What does it look like? It is, by the grace of God, an awareness of our own sin (including thoughts, words and deeds) and an apprehension of the mercy of Christ, to whom we turn, acknowledging Him as both Savior and Master. It is not penance. It is not us paying the debt for our own sin, but recognizing the debt paid by Christ alone.

Those were the first five issues in the series. The remaining topic:

**If we’ve been offended and there is no repentance (or even if there is), how do we spiritually, emotionally, psychologically or functionally deal with the wound? How do we**

# reconcile forgiveness as a necessary virtue to salvation?

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## **Benefits of Law and Gospel**

Much of our study of forgiveness and repentance has revolved around what is right, ethical or godly behavior in the face of being offended by another person. We'll now spend a few minutes examining what we all really want to get to, the existential (or experiential) aspect of the issue. It is fine to speak of ethics and godliness, but sometimes there are things that gnaw away at our hearts and we want to know how to make the pain go away.

Let me state at the onset that the five issues we've studied thus far are not mere ideologies disconnected to the human experience. I am under the conviction that the Scriptures which reveal law (what God demands of us) and gospel (what God has done for us) are tailor-made for the human condition.

All this to say that a prayerful meditation on what it means to send away the sin of our offender; to contemplate the depths of our own sin; to lovingly rebuke and pray for our offenders repentance; to only remember their offense for beneficial reasons; and to realize what repentance is (that it is not penance) will, in time, work toward the soothing of our own souls.

Having said that, I will now offer what I believe is the best method to spiritually, emotionally, psychologically or functionally deal with the wounds, not only of having been offended, but any wounds by which we are haunted? In the face of wounds, pain, sorrow, disappoint, etc, we are to be thankful, faithful and tenacious.

## **Thankful**

Recognizing God's hand in all affairs, we are to give **"thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:20)**. This does not mean we pretend that we are not in pain or filled with grief and sorrow, passions experienced by our sinless Savior (Isaiah 53:3, 4; Matthew 14:34).

But it does mean we acknowledge a divine and fatherly orchestration to our various trials which are designed to produce patience and Christian maturity in our lives.

**My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, <sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. <sup>4</sup> But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing (James 1:2-4).**

**And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup> and perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup> Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us (Romans 5:3-5).**

We are to be thankful because we know that God is not content to leave us in a state of selfish immaturity. He is willing to chastise the ones He loves in an effort to train our hearts and it is just not always an enjoyable experience.

**Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it (Hebrews 12:11).**

## **Faithful**

Along with thankfulness, we are to be faithful. By faithful I mean two things: First, faithful to ever trust in Christ. More than once I have seen those who profess faith in Christ encounter trials, and walk away, not merely from the church but from the very Savior in whom they claimed to have faith. Not to get into the nuts and bolts of the perseverance of the saint, suffice it to quote the Apostle Paul who wrote:

**And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled <sup>22</sup> in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above**

**reproach in His sight—<sup>23</sup> if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister (Colossians 1:21-23).**

In short, we are to ever trust in Christ and His provision, guidance and power in our lives.

Secondly, we are to be faithful in our obedience in the midst of trials. Abandoned, betrayed, afflicted and tempted, our Savior remained faithful—we are to imitate that faithfulness. By faithful here I mean **“steadfast and immovable.”**

**Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58).**

We are not to allow the boiling point of our own frustration to make us behave in a manner inconsistent with our faith. In our pain and heartache we are ever tempted to behave in an unseemly or ungodly manner. Steadfast and immovable does not mean we do nothing at all (the very verse calls us to abound in the work of the Lord), it does mean we do nothing sinful. We are to exercise “self-control” (Galatians 5:23; 2 Timothy 3:3; 2 Peter 1:6).

## **Tenacity**

Along with thankfulness and faithfulness, we must add tenacity. By tenacious I mean persistent and persevering—a popular term today perhaps being “pro-active.” I fear that we have become lazy when it comes to godliness. We are not hungry for it! After the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew Jesus comments on the issue of forgiveness, after the Lord’s Prayer in Luke Jesus gives a parable on persistence.

**And He said to them, “Which of you shall have a friend, and go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves; <sup>6</sup> for a friend of mine has come to me on his journey, and I have nothing to set before him’; <sup>7</sup> and he will answer from within and**

**say, ‘Do not trouble me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give to you’? <sup>8</sup> I say to you, though he will not rise and give to him because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will rise and give him as many as he needs. <sup>9</sup> “So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. <sup>10</sup> For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened (Luke 11:5-10; see also Luke 18:4, 5).**

The word “persistence” in verse 8 *anaideian* has both a positive and negative sense to it. In a negative sense it can mean shamelessness, boldness, insolence; in a positive sense it can mean persistent, tenacious, or insistent. We need to be like Jacob when the Angel of the Lord said, **“Let Me go, for the day breaks.” But he (Jacob) said, “I will not let You go unless You bless me” (Genesis 32:26)!** And we need to be willing to walk away with a limp if need be.

We need to be more like the Apostle Paul who didn’t run **“with uncertainty”** or fight **“as one who beats the air”** but **“discipline(d)”** his body to **“bring it to subjection” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)**. We are not saved by works but that doesn’t mean we don’t know what good works are. And it certainly doesn’t mean we should not work hard. I fear my decathlon friend wanted to win that tennis match more than most Christians I know what to be holy. That word “persistence” means “persisting in the face of all that seems reasonable, and refusing to take a denial.”<sup>1</sup>

There is a very fun scene in a movie called *As Good As It Gets* where the leading man feels as if he has finally so offended the woman he loves that he’s lost her. It’s the middle of the night and his friend is trying to fire him up. It goes like this:

I think you've got a chance. The only real enemy you have is her ability to think logically -- the best thing you have going for you is your willingness to humiliate yourself if it

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<sup>1</sup>Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Lk 11:8). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

gives you one chance in whatever -- so go catch her off-guard.

There are many of us who take a very defensive posture when it comes to the wounds in our lives; we curl up and hope it goes away. And certainly there may be a season of quiet reflection where we're called to **"be still"** and know that God is God (Psalm 46:10). But we must also recognize the very active call that God puts before us to **"be holy in all (our) conduct" (1 Peter 1:15)**. And to pursue the blessings of God through our prayers, piety, patience and active obedience—as James writes:

**But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does (James 1:25).**

How do we spiritually, emotionally, psychologically or functionally deal with the wounds in our lives? The answer is thankfully, faithfully and persistently seeking the blessing of God, especially through the suffering which is, more times than not, the most effecting method of refining the sinful human heart. Now the last question

**How do we reconcile forgiveness as a necessary virtue to salvation?**

I am going to deal with this just briefly but, hopefully, biblically and sensibly. The passage certainly sounds ominous.

**For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. <sup>15</sup> But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (Matthew 6:14, 15).**

Let me state that it is a mistake to read the passage thus: "Because you have forgiven others, you are earned the forgiveness of God." That God requires a certain behavior for those who call themselves Christians does not mean that that behavior somehow contributes to their salvation.

When Paul writes: **“Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9)**, we should not understand that the ability to avoid those behaviors somehow earns us salvation. Paul could just as easily added “unforgiving” to the above list.

We must all also understand that at some level we all continue in the very sins Paul just listed—especially if we understand sin as including any thought, word or deed—as Jesus defines it (Matthew 5:22; 28). So it is not a matter of earning our salvation through obedience—an obedience which, at its best, is still tainted with sin for which reason Jesus calls us “unprofitable servants” (Luke 17:10).

It is rather an unwillingness to even seek to be a servant that reveals a hypocritical and duplicitous heart. We are not to think we can call on Jesus as Savior and ignore Him as Lord. Jesus has called the church to expose (at whatever level it is capable) such hypocrisy with disciplinary action, the end of which (if there is no effort at repentance) leads the church to regard the offender as “a heathen or a tax collector” (Matthew 28:17); in other words, an unbeliever.

I might add here that we are not talking about a person struggling with sin but rather a person committed to not struggle. It is one thing for a person to struggle with lust or anger. It is quite another thing for professing Christians to start a ‘gays for Christ or adulterers for Christ or molesters for Christ’ chapter in their local church.

Yet an unforgiving heart, above other offenses, seems to have a stage of its own. As if Jesus is holding it above the other sins. It’s as if Jesus is teaching the utter folly in having a higher standard than God when it comes to forgiveness. And His response to the unforgiving is to make them aware of the legal venue in which they desire to operate.

**“For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you” (Matthew 7:2).**

Do we earn our salvation by becoming excellent at forgiving others? Not a chance! But a professing Christian’s lack of willingness (however feeble their efforts may be) to forgive others, is a telling

sign that they have not grasped the forgiveness they need from a God whose mercy knows no boundaries. As our confession teaches:

**As there is no sin so small, but it deserves damnation; so there is no sin so great, that it can bring damnation upon those who truly repent.<sup>2</sup>**

God is gracious to us, we, therefore, are called to be gracious to others. When we are the recipients of the Good News of forgiveness should we not be willing to bring the good news of our forgiveness to others?

## Questions for Study

1. Review the components of forgiveness and repentance (page 3)?
2. How do these components aid us in our search for peace among the wounds of being offended (page 4)?
3. Why would Christians be thankful in all things (pages 4, 5)?
4. What does it mean to be faithful in the midst of life's trials (pages 5, 6)?
5. Is tenacity good or bad? Explain (pages 6, 7).
6. Briefly explain how we spiritually, emotionally, psychologically or functionally deal with the wounds in our lives (page 8).
7. Do we earn forgiveness by forgiving others (page 8)?

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<sup>2</sup>The Westminster confession of faith. 1996 (Chapter XV, 4). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

8. Explain how forgiveness is a necessary virtue to salvation (pages 8, 9).