

## THE DOCTRINE OF FORGIVENESS

Not long ago a minister wrote an article that was about Christian forgiveness. He told the story of a woman who had been sexually harassed on her job and when she filed a complaint, she was fired. She said over a year later, she was still angry about this, so she contacted this pastor who told her we all know Jesus wants you to forgive this and move on with life. Is that true? Is that what Jesus wants? Does Jesus demand that we hand out blanket checks of forgiveness to people who never say, "I am sorry"? What does the Bible really say about this subject? Truth is we really need to know. Because if we hand out blanket checks of forgiveness and we are not Biblically supposed to do that, we are actually doing that which is contrary to the Word of God and that will never accomplish the will of God.

**QUESTION #1** – Why study the subject of forgiveness?

**Reason #1** - Because forgiveness is a subject found in the Bible.

There are well over 100 verses in the Bible that mention forgiveness. Plus, when you carefully study Bible doctrine, forgiveness is a major subject. This is obviously a doctrinal and Biblical theme worthy of careful consideration and investigation. We need to know God's Word on every subject, especially one as important as forgiveness.

**Reason #2** - Because people have various ideas and opinions about forgiveness and many of them are wrong.

Some think it is their responsibility to forgive everyone everything, even if the person does not say they are sorry. Some think God will just overlook sin and forgive it all even if it is not faced. Some think God will just forgive everyone and love them into heaven. Those concepts are not only wrong but they are dangerous.

**Reason #3** - Because we are all people who need the forgiveness of God.

This is an extremely important doctrine because we are all sinners and we all need forgiveness and therefore we should be as precise and accurate in our understanding about this as we can be. None of us are perfect, which means we all need God's forgiveness for something.

**Reason #4** - Because we do have the responsibility to forgive others.

There are passages, even in this Grace Age, that speak of the fact that we should forgive others (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13). If this is what we are supposed to do, it stands to reason that we would want to understand the subject as precisely as possible.

## THE DOCTRINE OF FORGIVENESS (2)

**QUESTION #2** – What are the actual words in the Bible that are connected to forgiveness?

Forgiveness is a great word in any language and it is certainly true in studying Biblical languages. In analyzing this, we may break it down into two main categories:

**Category #1** - Words in the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament there are three different main words used in connection with forgiveness:

**(Word #1)** – Nasa - נָשָׂא

The basic meaning behind this Hebrew word is to take up or lift up something such as lifting up some load or burden (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, pp. 567-568). This has the idea of lifting the sin off of someone and bearing it and taking it away. William Wilson, a Hebrew scholar of the 1800's, said this word has to do with not only forgiving the sin, but taking away the guilt (*Old Testament Word Studies*, p. 174).

It is used in many O.T. passages: Gen. 50:17; Ex. 10:17; 32:32; 34:7; Num. 14:19; 14:19; Josh. 24:19; I Sam. 25:28; Ps. 25:18; 32:1; 32:5; 85:2; 99:8; Is. 2:9; 33:24

**(Word #2)** – Kaphar - כָּפַר

The basic meaning behind this word is to cover or cover over. This includes the idea of completely covering over the sin and freeing the person from the charge (*Ibid.*, p. 411). The emphasis of this word is forgiveness by atonement (*Ibid.*, p. 174).

This word is used in different O.T. texts: Deut. 21:8; Ps. 78:38; Jer. 18:23

**(Word #3)** – Salach - סָלַח

The basic meaning of this word is to pardon someone in the sense of forgiving them (*Ibid.*, p. 588). This word is only used of God and it implies that He forgives even though He has been offended (*Ibid.*, p. 174).

This word is also used in various O.T. texts: Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:10, 13, 16, 18; 6:7; 19:22; Num. 15:25, 26, 28; 30:5, 8, 12; I Kings 8:30, 34, 36, 39, 50; II Chron. 6:21, 25, 27, 30, 39; 7:14; Ps. 86:5; 103:3; 130:4; Jer. 31:34; 36:3; Dan. 9:9, 19; Amos 7:2.

## THE DOCTRINE OF FORGIVENESS (3)

### **Category #2** - Words in the New Testament.

In the New Testament there are four different Greek words used in regard to forgiveness:

#### **(Word #1)** - Apoluo απολυω

This word is rarely used in the N.T.. The basic meaning of this word is to set free or release (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 53).

Jesus used this word in Luke 13:12 in regard to a woman's sickness and He also uses it in regard to a pardon and forgiveness of a debtor by God (Luke 6:37). This emphasizes giving a pardon to one guilty.

#### **(Word #2)** - Charizomai χαριζομαι

The meaning behind this word is to fully and freely and graciously grant forgiveness (*Ibid.*, p. 479). Paul uses this word in Romans 8:32 in speaking of the entire forgiveness package of salvation freely given to the believer by God.

This word is used in various passages: Luke 7:42, 43; II Cor. 2:7, 10, 10; 12:13; Eph. 4:32; Col. 2:13; 3:13

#### **(Word #3)** - Aphiemi αφημι

The basic meaning of this word is to send away and let go of something (*Ibid.*, p. 71). In the forgiveness context it refers to letting go of the sin case and sending it away (Rom. 4:7).

This is the Greek word that is most often used in the N.T. - Matt. 6:12, 14, 14, 15, 15; 9:2, 5, 6; Mark 2:5, 7, 9, 10; 3:28, 29; 4:12; 11:25, 26; Luke 5:20, 21, 23, 24; 7:47, 48, 49; 11:4; 12:10; 17:3, 4; 23:34; Acts 5:31; 8:22; 13:38; 26:18; Rom. 4:7; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; James 5:15; I John 1:9; 2:12

#### **(Word #4)** – Paresis - παρεσις Rom. 3:25

Very rare Greek word only used in Romans 3:25. It means to dismiss or pass over sin.

Just from the various words that are used, we could conclude that forgiveness includes the ideas of taking away the sin load and completely and graciously lifting it from a person and forgiving it to the point that one is completely free from any condemnation or punishment. The sin case is closed and the sin case is dismissed.

## THE DOCTRINE OF FORGIVENESS (4)

**QUESTION #3** – When it comes to God, what is so unique about forgiveness of sin?

There are two things that are very unique when it comes to our sin and God:

**Unique Reality #1** - Only God can forgive sin. **Isaiah 43:25; Luke 5:21; 7:49**

This is a very important point to know. No one else, except God, is in a position to forgive sin. No man can forgive sin that has been committed against God. It is pure folly to think that a sinful human could come up with some scheme or works system that could gain the forgiveness of God. God is the only Person in a position to forgive sin and He will never forgive sin through man-invented formulas.

**Unique Reality #2** - Only God's Word teaches that God will completely forgive sin on the basis of no works.

All religions of the world teach you must do something to be right with God. The Bible is the only book in the world that says just the opposite—God will never forgive anyone by their works.

All other religions teach you may make it if you do certain things. The Bible clearly says that complete and total forgiveness from sin is found in one Person and with One God (Rom. 3:23-28; Col. 1:13-14; Eph. 1:7)

Dr. Chafer points out something profound on this point: “At best, human forgiveness can do no more than to pass over, waive, or abandon any and all penalty that exists. In such forgiveness the injured party relinquishes all claim to any form of satisfaction which otherwise might be demanded or imposed upon the offender. Such forgiveness, so far as it ever exists, is only a voluntary gratuity in which the offended party surrenders all claim to compensation. On the other hand, divine forgiveness is never extended to the offender as an act of leniency, nor is the penalty waived, since God, being infinitely holy and upholding His government which is founded on undeviating righteousness, cannot make light of sin. Divine forgiveness is therefore extended only when the last demand or penalty against the offender has been satisfied. Since no human being could ever render divine satisfaction for his sins, God, in measureless mercy, has provided all the satisfaction, even divine propitiation, which the sinner could ever need.”

Dr. Chafer goes on to say, “While among men...forgiveness to others is the first and simplest of duties, with God it is the profoundest of problems.” If God is going to forgive sin, He must do it in such a way that He does “not legitimize sin” (*Ibid.*, p. 271).

**QUESTION #4** – What are the types of forgiveness that God offers?

**Type #1** - God offers individual judicial forgiveness to those who are unsaved (Acts 10:43).

Once a sinner believes in Jesus Christ, he/she is given instant forgiveness that includes the gift of righteousness (Rom. 5:17) and guarantees eternal life (John 10:28). We could call this everlasting life forgiveness.