

Why I Should Forgive

[Ephesians 4:32](#) (NKJV)

³² And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

Have you ever been wronged in such a way that you find it difficult to forgive? Have you ever been hurt so severely that you just can't let it go? Have you ever had someone say something to you or about you that cause you to be bitter toward them? Have you ever been lied too, deceive or manipulated by someone? Have you ever been physically hurt, emotionally mistreated, or sexually abused? Have you ever been taken advantage of or stolen from or unfairly treated? Has someone ever said something or done something that offended you?

Have you ever been sinned against, not just once but so many times you have lost count?

Well, if you have, I would offer a welcome to the fallen world. Welcome to the sin cursed planet filled with sinners who sin on a continual basis. Welcome to the world that lies in the lap of the evil one that is occupied by men and women who find it easier to

tell a lie and hurt others that to tell the truth and live in peace.

I would add also, if you are a christian, welcome to the imperfect church, where imperfect people who are on a path to complete sanctification still sin in the flesh and cause hurt and disappointment.

As one person once stated, if you are looking for a perfect church and you think you found it, you better leave it because if you stay, you will ruin it. If you think that christians can't sin and can't sin in a grievous way and cause extreme hurt and disappointment, then you might want to check your theology and your reading of the Bible and what you call reality. The Bible is filled with examples of men and women who followed God and where followers of Christ who sinned against others and sinned against God, sometimes in terrible ways.

Moses got angry and struck the Rock

David murdered so he could have another man's wife.

David and Solomon sinned in have many wives and concubines.

Isaiah recognized he was a man of sinful lips and lived among a people who had dirty mouths.

Peter, lied to Jesus and lied to others about his relationship with Jesus.

The Disciples were selfish, and self-centered and wanted the best places in the kingdom. Paul sinned against the high-priest with his mouth. If there has ever been a reliable proof of the Bible being the Word of God and not the word of men, it is that fact that God does not hide the sinful actions of the men of God.

If men, who are naturally self-righteous were the authors of this book, I would read a whole lot differently. All the dark, sinful attitudes and actions of the prophets and apostles would be hidden or at least minimized.

My point is this. If you are alive, you will be hurt and sinned against. If you breathe oxygen and are a human you will be done wrong at some point. If all you have is one relationship with one person your whole life, you will still not be exempt from pain.

And, if you are a Christian and only live among Christians, you will be hurt and sinned against. If you go to church and participate in the ministry of that church, you will be done wrong at some point. And if you only make one friend in the Christian church and community your whole life, trust me, you are headed for pain and disappointment.

And sadly and unbiblically, I might add, some Christians have taken the wrong approach to this problem.

Some, because they have been sinned against and hurt or in an effort to guard against being sinned against or hurt, have opted out.

I mean, they have decided the best way is no way. They just won't participate. They won't come, and they won't open themselves to having a relationship with another believer. So in an effort to avoid the pain of being sinned against, they choose to sin against God by avoiding the clear commands of Scripture regarding the Christians obligation to each other in the church.

To be clear, God does not allow for you to hide and isolate yourself from hurt. In fact, God commanded the one another's of the N.T. and commands the assembly of saints and ordains that you to suffer from the verbal, emotional, mental and physical sins of others.

To run and hide is to stop the process of sanctification in your own life, and to remove the possibility of you being Christlike in a hostile and sinful world and bring glory to God by how you respond to those who sin against you.

It is clear that God does not expect us to live isolated from the relationships that can cause the most severe hurt and pain. It is assumed by the many commands in Scripture of how we should

respond, that we will be sinned against, sometimes horribly wronged.

For instance, God says,

Romans 12:14–21 (NKJV)

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil.

¹⁹ Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, “*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,*” says the Lord. ²⁰ Therefore

*“If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
If he is thirsty, give him a drink;
For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.”*

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good....

1 Thessalonians 5:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵ See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.

1 Peter 3:8–9 (NKJV)

⁸ Finally, all *of you be* of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, *be* tenderhearted, *be* courteous; ⁹ not returning evil for evil

or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.

Matthew 5:39–40 (NKJV)

³⁹ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. ⁴⁰ If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have *your* cloak also.

Luke 6:27–28 (NKJV)

²⁷ “But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.

Leviticus 19:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I *am* the Lord.

All of these text assume you will be sinned against and hurt in a variety of ways.

Yet we are command to Love them, Bless them, help them, do good to them, show compassion.

In other words, we are to respond the way God commands us to because this is the way God treats the sinner and the way we most glorify God is to treat sinners the way God treats us.

And one of the primary ways we can reflect the character of God to the sinful world is how we respond when we are sinned against.

And that way is the way of forgiveness.

A theme that clearly runs through the whole Bible is that God is a forgiving God. He Forgives sin and sinners and all sin is ultimately against God because to be a sin you have to violate or disobey His sandard or his commandment.

So murder is a sin against another person but ultimately is sin against the one who said murders is a sin.... God

Yet God is a forgiving God. He forgives murderers, adulterers, liars and thieves. He loves to forgive blasphemers, homosexuals and idolaters.

He finds joy is canceling the offense, erasing the sin, casting it as far as the east is from the west.

His ocean of forgiveness has no bottom, and has not shore. It is boundless, limitless and unrestricted

No sin is no sinful that it can't be forgiven by God. No abuse is so bad that God can't restore the sinner. No

hurt and offense is so extensive that it can't be swallowed in the waves of God's forgiveness

GOD FORGIVES

According to Exodus 20, in the context of the ten commandments, that will condemn you to death if you do not obey them perfectly,

says that, God **shows** "mercy to thousands"

Exodus 20:6 (NKJV)

God is a God who forgives

Psalms 130:3–4 (NKJV)

³ If You, Lord, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?

⁴ But *there is* forgiveness with You,.....

Psalms 86:5 (NKJV)

⁵ For You, Lord, *are* good, and ready to forgive,
And abundant in mercy to all those who call upon
You.

Psalms 103:2–3 (NKJV)

² Bless the Lord, O my soul,

And forget not all His benefits:

- 3 Who forgives all your iniquities,
Who heals all your diseases,

Isaiah 1:18 (NKJV)

- 18 “Come now, and let us reason together,”
Says the Lord,
“Though your sins are like scarlet,
They shall be as white as snow;
Though they are red like crimson,
They shall be as wool.

Isaiah 55:7 (NKJV)

- 7 Let the wicked forsake his way,
And the unrighteous man his thoughts;
Let him return to the Lord,
And He will have mercy on him;
And to our God,
For He will abundantly pardon.

Jeremiah 31:34 (NKJV)

- 34 No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and
every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for
they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the

greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

Daniel 9:9 (NKJV)

⁹ To the Lord our God *belong* mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him.

Micah 7:18–19 (NKJV)

¹⁸ Who *is* a God like You,
Pardoning iniquity
And passing over the transgression of the remnant
of His heritage?

He does not retain His anger forever,
Because He delights *in* mercy.

¹⁹ He will again have compassion on us,
And will subdue our iniquities.

You will cast all our sins
Into the depths of the sea.

Jeremiah 33:7–8 (NKJV)

⁷ And I will cause the captives of Judah and the captives of Israel to return, and will rebuild those places as at the first. ⁸ I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all their iniquities by which they have

sinned and by which they have transgressed against Me.

Exodus 34:1–7 (NKJV)

And the Lord said to Moses, “Cut two tablets of stone like the first *ones*, and I will write on *these* tablets the words that were on the first tablets which you broke. ² So be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself to Me there on the top of the mountain.

³ And no man shall come up with you, and let no man be seen throughout all the mountain; let neither flocks nor herds feed before that mountain.”

⁴ So he cut two tablets of stone like the first *ones*. Then Moses rose early in the morning and went up Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him; and he took in his hand the two tablets of stone.

⁵ Now the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. ⁶ And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, ⁷ keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,

Nehemiah 9:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ They refused to obey,
And they were not mindful of Your wonders
That You did among them.
But they hardened their necks,
And in their rebellion
They appointed a leader
To return to their bondage.
But You *are* God,
Ready to pardon,
Gracious and merciful,
Slow to anger,
Abundant in kindness,
And did not forsake them.

2 Corinthians 5:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Ephesians 1:7 (NKJV)

⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace

Romans 5:20 (NKJV)

²⁰ Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more,

Acts 13:38 (NKJV)

³⁸ Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins;

Why I should Forgive

Because of....

The mandate of Scripture

The magnitude of our Sin

The management of our Soul.

Why I should Forgive

I. Because of the Mandate of Scripture

Ephesians 4:32 (NKJV)

³² And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

Ephesians 5:1 (NKJV)

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children.

Colossians 3:12–13 (NKJV)

¹² Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; ¹³ 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*.

Mark 11:25 (NKJV)

²⁵ “And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.

Luke 6:37 (NKJV)

³⁷ “Judge not, and you shall not be judged.
 Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned.
 Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

2 Corinthians 2:6–11 (NKJV)

⁶ This punishment which *was inflicted* by the majority *is* sufficient for such a man, ⁷ so that, on the contrary, you *ought* rather to forgive and comfort *him*, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. ⁸ Therefore I urge you to reaffirm *your* love to him. ⁹ For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. ¹⁰ Now whom you forgive anything, I also *forgive*. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, ¹¹ lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.

We should forgive

Because of....

I. The mandate of Scripture

II. Because of the magnitude of our Sin

Matthew 18:15–35(NKJV)

¹⁵ “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that *‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’* ¹⁷ And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

¹⁸ “Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

¹⁹ “Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

²¹ Then Peter came to Him and said, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”

²² Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

²³ Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten

thousand talents. ²⁵ But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. ²⁶ The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' ²⁷ Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.

²⁸ "But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took *him* by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' ²⁹ So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' ³⁰ And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. ³¹ So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. ³² Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. ³³ Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' ³⁴ And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.

³⁵ “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”

Colossians 2:13–14 (NKJV)

¹³ And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, ¹⁴ having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

1 John 1:9 (NKJV)

⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Why I should Forgive

Because of....

The mandate of Scripture

The magnitude of our Sin

The management of our Soul.

1. Forgiveness verifies Salvation.. not determines

Matthew 6:12–15 (NKJV)

¹² And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors.

¹³ And do not lead us into temptation,
But deliver us from the evil one.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the
glory forever. Amen.

¹⁴ “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Mark 11:25–26 (NKJV)

²⁵ “And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. ²⁶ But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.”

James 2:13 (NKJV)

¹³ For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Matthew 5:7 (NKJV)

⁷ *Blessed are the merciful,
For they shall obtain mercy.*

2. Forgiveness Frees the Soul from Bitterness

Ephesians 4:31–32 (NKJV)

³¹ Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.

³² And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

88.201 πικρία^b, ας *f*: (a figurative extension of meaning of πικρία^a ‘bitter taste,’ 79.40) a state of sharp, intense resentment or hate—‘bitter resentment, spite, bitterness.’ ὧν τὸ στόμα ἀρᾶς καὶ πικρίας γέμει ‘whose mouth is full of curses and bitter resentment’ Ro 3:14; πᾶσα πικρία καὶ θυμὸς ... ἀρθήτω ‘get rid of ... all bitterness and anger’ Eph 4:31.

Bitterness (*pikria*) reflects a smoldering resentment, a brooding grudge-filled attitude (see Acts 8:23; Heb. 12:15). It is the spirit of irritability that keeps a person in perpetual animosity, making him sour and venemous

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1986). [Ephesians](#) (p. 190). Moody Press.

88.202 πικραίνομαι: (derivative of πικρία^b ‘bitterness,’ 88.201) to have bitter resentment or hatred toward someone else—‘to be embittered, to have bitter hate.’ οἱ ἄνδρες, ἀγαπᾶτε τὰς γυναῖκας καὶ μὴ πικραίνεσθε πρὸς αὐτάς ‘husbands, love your wives, and do not be bitterly hateful toward them’ Col 3:19.

Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). In [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 763). United Bible Societies.

Colossians 3:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them.

Ephesians 4:31–32 (NKJV)

³¹ Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.

³² And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

Wrath (*thumos*) has to do with wild rage, the passion of the moment. **Anger** (*orgē*) is a more internal smoldering, a subtle and deep feeling. **Clamor** (*kraugē*) is the shout or outcry of strife and reflects the public outburst that reveals loss of control. **Slander** (*blasphēmia*, from which we get blasphemy) is the ongoing defamation of someone that rises from a bitter heart. Paul then adds **malice** (*kakia*), the general term for evil that is the root of all vices

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1986). [Ephesians](#) (p. 190). Moody Press.

forgiving (lit., “being gracious,” *charizomenoi*, the participle from the verb *charizomai*, “to give freely” or “to give graciously as a favor”).

Hoehner, H. W. (1985). [Ephesians](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 637). Victor Books.

Forgiveness is Christianity at its highest level. It reflects God’s immense forgiveness through Christ

Forgiveness Deflects Pride

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.

Self-glory, self-protection, ego, pride, vengeance, and retaliation have no place in the heart of true forgiveness. It doesn't wallow in pity nor does it gather supporters in the quest for vengeance. It doesn't bask in the sympathy offered by supporters.

True forgiveness sets aside the wounded ego. One of the most beautiful biblical illustrations of this is Joseph, whose own brothers sold him into Egyptian slavery. In Egypt Joseph was falsely accused by Potiphar's wife and then imprisoned for several years. For many people those would have been years of festering resentment and time spent plotting revenge. Not Joseph. When he finally encountered his brothers again, he was in a position to save them from famine. He told his brothers, "Do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life" (Genesis 45:5).

All Joseph saw was the divine providence:

For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. (Genesis 45:6–7)

Where's the ego in that? Where's the "poor me"? Where's the coddled misery? Where's the self-pity? Where's the longing for vengeance? There isn't any. Forgiveness erases all such evil influences. Forgiveness frees us from the bitter chains of pride and self-pity.

Forgiveness Shows Mercy

Paul admonished the Corinthians to show mercy to a repentant offender whom they had disciplined: "Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority" (2 Corinthians 2:6). The discipline the man had already suffered was enough. He had confessed his sin and repented. Paul wanted the Corinthians to back off. Now it was time to show mercy.

Christians should be more eager to forgive than to condemn, because forgiveness, not condemnation, epitomizes the heart of our Lord (Luke 9:5; John 3:17). Furthermore, we who live only by the mercy of God should be eager to show mercy to others. When an offender repents, we should restore him in a spirit of gentleness, realizing we too could be in the same situation (Galatians 6:1). We accept his repentance. That should be the end of the issue. That's the whole gist of Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:13, which tell us we should forgive in the same manner Christ forgave us—generously, eagerly, magnanimously, and abundantly.

Forgiveness Restores Joy

Paul, modeling the forgiveness he wanted the Corinthians to show to the offender, was eager to restore the man's joy: "You should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow" (2 Corinthians 2:7).

Sin destroys joy. David noted this in his great confession of sin: "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation" (Psalm 51:12). Sin always shatters the

sinner's joy. But forgiveness restores the joy. Two verses later David wrote, "Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation; then my tongue will joyfully sing of Your righteousness" (Psalm 51:14).

So Paul instructs the Corinthians to forgive their brother and end his sorrow. The sorrow of discipline had brought him to repentance; now it was time for joy. The believers in the Corinthian fellowship needed to be more eager to bring the man joy than they were to cause him sorrow.

That is the heart of God. He is always tenderhearted toward repentant sinners. He takes no pleasure in the punishment of the wicked but delights when the wicked repent (Ezekiel 18:23, 32; 33:11). "He does not afflict willingly or grieve the sons of men" (Lamentations 3:33). God is like the prodigal son's father, who ran to meet his son and embraced and received him "while he was still a long way off" (Luke 15:20).

Forgiveness Affirms Love

"By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). How

does the world know Christians love one another? What about our love for one another is remarkable, and visible, to a watching world? Is it because we socialize? No. Non-Christians socialize too. It's not our potluck meals or group activities that best display our love toward one another, but our forgiveness. Love is best manifested in forgiveness. And the real test of love is how eagerly we forgive when we are offended.

Almost nothing can fracture a church where forgiveness is practiced, because unresolved issues are never left to fester. Offenses are dealt with. They are forgiven. Transgressions are covered.

Forgiveness Proves Obedience

We have seen so far that forgiveness is inextricably tied to humility, mercy, joy, and love. Those are all noble virtues—fruit of the Spirit (cf. Galatians 5:22–23). Forgiveness prompts and nurtures all those virtues. But if forgiveness were entirely unrelated to those crucial Christian character qualities, if forgiveness did nothing to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit, it would still be right to forgive.

Why? Because, as we've seen in this series, **God has commanded that we forgive.**

Forgiveness Thwarts Satan

Paul urged the Corinthians to forgive, “so that no advantage would be taken of us by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his schemes” (2 Corinthians 2:11). Satan’s whole agenda is undermined by forgiveness. If forgiveness deflects pride, restores joy, affirms mercy, and proves obedience, imagine how Satan must hate it! Therefore, forgiveness is an essential part of undoing Satan’s schemes.

To refuse forgiveness is to fall into Satan’s trap. Unforgiveness has all the opposite effects of forgiveness: it hinders humility, mercy, joy, love, obedience, and fellowship—and therefore it is as destructive of individual character as it is of harmony in the church.

Conclusion

Forgiveness, then, is the soil in which numerous spiritual fruits and divine blessings are cultivated.

Tending and nurturing the soil of forgiveness is one of the surest ways to develop spiritual health and maturity.

Why, then, would any Christian ever deliberately withhold forgiveness? We whose very existence depends on the inestimable mercy shown to us in Christ ought to foster a similar mercy in our dealings with one another, and we ought to model forgiveness before a watching world whose greatest need is God's forgiveness. <https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B160506>

There are many definitions of forgiveness, but a simple one is *to surrender the right to hurt others in response to the way they've hurt us*. Forgiveness means refusing to retaliate or hold bitterness against people for the ways they have wounded us. It is a unilateral act — not conditional on the person being repentant or even willing to acknowledge what they've done.

Forgiveness is *not* saying that sin doesn't matter. It is not approving of what the other person has done, minimizing the offense, or denying we've been wronged. Forgiveness *is* acknowledging that the other person has sinned against us and may never be able to make it right. The apostle Paul writes, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, *as God in Christ forgave you*" (Ephesians 4:32). If God in Christ forgave us, then forgiving someone *cannot* mean diminishing the wrong

they've done. God could never do that with sin and remain just.

Forgiveness doesn't always mean reconciliation or restoration. And it does not require restoring trust or inviting the people who hurt us back into a relationship. Forgiveness is unconditional, but meaningful reconciliation and restoration are conditional (in the gospel and in human relationships) on the offender's genuine repentance, humble willingness to accept the consequences of his actions, and a desire by both parties to work on the relationship.

Forgiving people also doesn't mean they won't experience consequences for their sin. When we forgive them, however, we leave those consequences to God, who says, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay" (Romans 12:19). This doesn't mean we may not pursue legal action, if warranted, against someone who has hurt us. In certain circumstances, that may be vital for the rehabilitation of the offender or for protecting other potential victims.