



Why We Forgive

"Come now, let us settle the matter," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."
Isaiah 1:18

How do you define forgiveness?

Forgiveness is what exists in the gap between the standard God holds us to and the reality of our sin. *"Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy" (Micah 7:18-20).*

Then, in our human experience, forgiveness is the gap between the pure motives and actions that we desire of others, and the reality of how they fail to meet them. *"Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Colossians 3:13).* We have an axiom in Chi Alpha that says it this way: what God does in you, He wants to do through you. Forgiveness is a blessing we receive from God so that we can pass it on to others. God's forgiveness in our lives is meant to expand our capacity for forgiveness to those who have wronged us.

But what is forgiveness?

Forgiveness is acknowledging that the other person hurt you, and yet offering them your mercy. You are turning over the debt slip they owe you into the hands of God. Forgiveness is saying, "you have hurt me, but the debt you owe me is gone - I will pay the cost as Christ paid the cost for me, and I will acknowledge that justice is His alone."

Our Enormous Debt

Read the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant in Matthew 18:21-35

The first servant owed 10,000 talents. Did you know that one talent was the equivalent of 15 years wages? That means the servant would have to work non-stop for 150,000 years to pay that back! Your salvation through Jesus on the cross was not just a gift; it was payment of your impossible debt. This parable compares our offenses against God to debt in order to help us understand our actions as currency in the kingdom of heaven. Remember, the King not only has the power to call us to pay our debt of disobedience, but also the right and duty to do so. He is the King, and I'm sure many of us, myself included, are guilty of treason, theft, slander of the King and his policies, insurrection, aligning with the enemy, and even claiming to be King. Sin always has a cost.

Our Debt is Forgiven

This servant owed his King 150,000 years' worth of wages, and yet the King showed mercy. Look at the wording - the servant asked for patience, right? But the King went above and beyond by canceling the debt instead of giving more time to pay it. The King knew the servant couldn't pay, and so he absorbed the debt himself. Another one of our Chi Alpha axioms is: when forgiveness is extended, someone must absorb the wound. This means someone lets the demand for payment end with them, carrying the cost themselves. And in this case, we see that the King is willing to bear even the most exorbitant debt, the deepest grievances. That's our King!



"Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23).

Every morning, God's mercies are new. This means every morning, we can be that servant looking at the King saying: "I know I've sinned. And your law explicitly says that the wages of sin is death. But will you have patience?" and He says, "not only patience, but I will cancel your debt. I will pay it myself. I will absorb the cost." And He did, on the cross.

So, not surprisingly, when the King hears of the servant He had *just* pardoned abusing other servants for their debt, He is incredulous! He says, "shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" In the Kingdom of God, mercy begets mercy.

Consider this: when we hold a grudge against our offender, we are essentially putting them in a prison where they are unable to repay the debt we feel they owe, just like the unmerciful servant did to his debtor. We have already sentenced them to the jail of judgment in your mind. When we talk badly about those who have hurt us to others, we are grabbing them by the throat and leaving bruises on their reputation. We are cutting off their ability to respond and instead replacing it with our own pronounced condemnation. Yet the Lord says, "Love keeps no record of wrongs", and offers us a clean slate. What wrongs are you keeping a hidden record of while rejoicing that your slate is clean?

Forgiveness Inspires a Reaction

Now to be clear, Jesus is not implying causality in this parable. He is not trying to scare us into forgiving others for the sake of securing our own forgiveness. Jesus tells us that we must forgive "from the heart" (Matthew 18:35). Instead, Jesus is emphasizing a significant point: if you have received mercy, you will want to offer mercy. If you have been forgiven, you will want to learn to forgive.

The unmerciful servant did not personally *receive* the Lord's forgiveness. Look back at what he says when he first encounters the king, he says, "Be patient with me, and I will pay back everything." We know that the King has canceled the debt, but the servant never seemed to understand. He is frantically scraping together pennies to repay an impossible sum, trying to justify himself. Doesn't that sound hopeless? It is no wonder he is resentful and hostile to someone who is just like him - a sinner in need of mercy.

Are you living in the forgiveness that God has offered you, or are you still living as someone with a large debt to pay? Perhaps the person you need to forgive right now isn't your neighbor; maybe it's yourself. Jesus has already offered forgiveness. Have you accepted it, or are you still punishing yourself? Are you still carrying the burden of your sin, trying to earn your way back into the graces of the King? Are you still justifying yourself based on the shortcomings and debts of others?

Are you withholding forgiveness over a small offense, when you have been forgiven so much? Who are you struggling to forgive? Are you (whether physically or metaphorically) standing like a king above someone else and demanding they ask for your patience, and respect your power over them, instead of showing them mercy and pointing them to the King who pays all debts?

The Question You Have Been Wanting to Ask

Does this mean that forgiving is abandoning justice? Honestly, some of us won't see vengeance on this side of heaven. Our worldly justice system is just a shadow of the heart of God. He looks at what someone did to His beloved child and He desires justice for it more than we can imagine! We all will appear before the King and will be called to pay our own account. On that day that person will have to face the punishment they justly deserve before the King who has the power and right to exact it, or they will be forgiven because of their faith in Jesus, just as you have been forgiven. Either way, justice *will*



come. Whether it comes at the final judgment, or on the Cross, God's justice is secure. This is why we can have true peace when we allow these debt slips to pass from our hands and into the hand of our just and merciful King. When you forgive as a Christian, you can rest knowing that justice ultimately will be served, no matter what.

Relevant Scriptures

1 John 1:9	<i>"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us..."</i>
Matthew 18:35	<i>"... unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."</i>
Matthew 6:14-15	<i>"...if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins"</i>
Daniel 9:9	<i>"The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled..."</i>

Questions for Discussion

- What do you think is the difference between *acknowledging* you've been hurt (as in the definition of forgiveness) and *excusing* it?
- What do you think it means to "absorb the wound"?
- What is the most difficult aspect of forgiveness for you? How does this parable address that difficulty?
- Why does forgiving not mean that you have to give up on justice?

Recommended Resource

If you feel like you need to forgive someone today, if you want the freedom of giving over the debt slip you've clenched in your hands and heart over to God, the resource Forgiveness on our website walks us through how to forgive. May the Lord give you peace and freedom from your hurts!

