

How On Earth Can I Forgive?

Scripture top of bulletin: Ephesians 4:31-32

Scripture reading: Col. 3:12

Hymns: 482, 471, 475 (vs. 1,3,5)

October 26, 2025

Joke: A Sunday school teacher was giving a rather long lecture to 1st graders on how, when we sin, *we need to first pray* and then ask the Lord for forgiveness.

When she finished the lesson, she looked at the class and sternly asked, "Now, *what* are we supposed to do before we ask the Lord for forgiveness?"

Little Mary raised her hand and confidently said, "Sin!"

If you are alive on planet earth today, you can't help but notice that vengeance is in style everywhere you look, and that *forgiveness* is not. We see this as we drive in traffic and someone blares their horn and cuts us off because they either feel that we aren't driving fast enough to suit them, or that they *deserve* to be ahead of us in that long line at the exit.

The message is clear as they shake their fist or show a hand gesture to us: "I'll show *you!*"

In *today's* world, people actually look for opportunities to sue each other. I'm not talking about legitimate cases where people are actually harmed and may deserve compensation, but cases where people are falsely claiming that they have been wronged or injured and that they want payment of some sort. We can see on TV where revenge is hailed as "great entertainment" and at the movies where we cheer as the good guy "gets even" with the bad guy. All this has become so *commonplace* that even Christians largely accept it as "normal".

What *happened* to grace? What happened to *kindness*? And whatever happened to *forgiveness*?

The Bible tells us that forgiveness is not only the right thing to do, but that as Christians, it is required.

In **Matthew, chapter 18, verses 21 and 22**, a very familiar passage, Peter asks Jesus about how many times a person needs to forgive someone.

"Then Peter came to him and asked, 'How often, Lord, should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?'"

"No, not seven times," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven!"

Colossians 3:12-13 takes it a step further when Paul wrote this letter to the believers at Colosse,

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

Jesus didn't just *talk* about it in His parables and messages to the crowds that He ministered to; He lived it. He himself gave us SO many examples of how to forgive! Forgiving His executioners while being crucified, as well as forgiving Peter after he denied Him 3 times. These are just a few examples. -----

Did you know that how we picture God can affect our view of *forgiveness*? For example;

- * Do you picture God as a Superbeing that is *watching* and *waiting* for you to just make a mistake before He makes something bad happen to you?
- * Do you picture God as being unmerciful and unforgiving, "vengeful" even?
- * Or do you picture God in a completely opposite way – where He is ultimately neutral and forgiving, - that He looks the other way when we sin and that we really have nothing to fear from God at all?

Not **only** are these views *incorrect*, but they are also dangerously misguided when it comes to the issue of forgiveness.

I. Let's look at WHY we should forgive

The book of **Philemon 1:8-18** gives us good reasons why we, as followers of Christ, need to forgive – and forgive again. As you will remember, in this very short letter, Paul is making the case for the runaway slave Onesimus – writing to his friend Philemon, asking that he be gracious and forgiving to Onesimus as he returns to Philemon's home.

We see at the beginning of the letter that Paul *consciously* refuses to throw his weight around as an Apostle, not *demanding* anything from Philemon, but instead, he proceeds to give five reasons why Philemon should forgive this man, and in doing so, we see how this applies to us.

Vs.8 He should consider his testimony and "*do what you ought to do*". Sometimes doing the right thing, especially as a follower of Jesus, is not the easiest thing to do. Our natural human instincts kick in and sometimes we just WANT to be angry at the person. But people around us are observant and we as Christians are always being watched for how we react to situations in life. So we ought to do the right thing whenever possible.

Vs.9 He should consider his motives "*I appeal to you on the basis of love.*" In other words, don't act with revenge or a desire for justice. Paul, for example, considered himself a prisoner of Christ, *not* Rome. He knew that Rome was not really in control. And folks, it is impossible to be bitter or unhappy in a bad situation when you really *remember* that God is in control of everything that happens to us.

Vs.10 He should consider the miracle of God's forgiveness "*who became my son while I was in chains*". Paul of course wasn't speaking of Onesimus as a relative of the flesh, but as a man who became a fellow believer while with Paul. Paul witnessed the life change that Onesimus

underwent, much like all of us who come to Christ experience. If God so graciously forgives us of OUR sins and welcomes us into His family, who are we to deny that to anyone else?

Psalm 103:12 – *“As far as the East is from the West, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”*

Vs.11-14 **He should consider the possibility that people can and do change:** *"But now he has become useful both to you and me".*

Can people change? Usually not of their own volition, but since Onesimus had become a believer, Paul apparently thought so. Let's remember that in **Philippians 1:6** he writes;

"For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus."

Vs.15-16 E. **He should consider the bond between believers** - "no longer a slave, but a dear brother".

Billy Graham once said, "Forgiveness does not come easily to us, especially when someone we have trusted betrays our trust. And yet if we do not learn to forgive, we will discover that we can never really rebuild trust."

*Friends, forgiveness is difficult in most circumstances, but *especially* when we are hurting.

II. Next, let's look at WHAT forgiveness *is* and what it *is not*

1. Forgiveness is *not* the same as reconciliation.

You can fully and effectively practice biblical forgiveness toward someone without ever being able to reconcile the relationship. **Romans 12** says,

"In as far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men."

In this life, it's simply not possible to "kiss and make up" with everyone. Some people absolutely refuse to talk to you, much less reconcile; there are people who have died so there is no chance of coming together to mend fences; there are people who may never even realize they have hurt you and remain oblivious to how you are feeling. But the point of forgiveness is this: before God, you as a Christian must **decide** as an **act of obedience** to forgive someone who has wronged you. Then, you simply **do** it, no matter what *they* do or don't do.

2. Forgiveness flows from God's forgiveness toward us.

Colossians 3 says, *"Forgive one another as God has forgiven you."* There is *no comparison* between my sin and offenses toward a Holy and Righteous God, and any of the offenses that others will ever inflict on me. **Biblical forgiveness always rests on the foundation of God**

having freely forgiven us through Jesus Christ. He therefore admonishes us to forgive others with that “grace with which we have received.”

3. Forgiveness is not “giving up” justice or saying that what was done was “ok”; instead, it is turning people over to God. It’s letting the offender off of *your* hook and letting **God** deal with them - It doesn’t mean that they’re off God’s hook. Peter said about Jesus,

“Who being reviled, did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.”

It’s really hard to have something happen to you, or watch something awful happen to someone else and not have the feeling that you *want* that offending person punished right this minute. Sometimes when this happens in my life, the only solace I have is, “God will get them in the end.” *And don’t get me wrong* – God “getting them” may mean that the person eventually comes to know Jesus as Savior. But it can *also* mean that God will mete out His perfect justice to that person in His own good time. I trust God’s judgment.

Finally, and this may be the *greatest encouragement* for us to practice biblical forgiveness.....

4. Forgiveness brings freedom.

It brings freedom from the heavy burden of recounting the sin, the hurt and the bitterness, and remembering the pain. It stops the playing over and over again in your head all the details of the offense.

Hebrews 12:15 says, “*See to it that no one misses the grace of God; and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.*”

Forgiveness takes the weight off of the Christian’s shoulders. It doesn’t *matter* if the person doesn’t deserve to be forgiven – we didn’t either, but God forgave us. It doesn’t *matter* if the person doesn’t say “I’m sorry” because you ultimately should not be forgiving someone just so you can hear something back from them. You are forgiving because it is the *right thing* to do/ and it is freeing for your soul.

III. We’ll now examine HOW I should forgive as a child of God

The concept of “forgiveness” is present in approximately 250 New Testament passages, translating from the Greek language as the words “forgive” and “forgiveness”. It also has the connotation of “letting go” “putting away,” “deliverance from,” and “liberty”. If you are here today or listening to this message over the phone or on YouTube, and you harbor feelings of anger or even hate toward another person – if you feel that you can’t forgive somebody – but you also believe that God is speaking to you and desires for you to begin the process of

forgiving biblically, then here are just a few steps in dealing very personally and practically with this issue.

First, identify the specific people and the hurt or hurts that you believe that they were responsible for. Speak their names and the offenses. Ask God to bring to your mind any additional people you've been holding onto with an unforgiving spirit.

Secondly, before God, admit to Him the hurt and even the emotions of hatred or anger that you've held onto toward the person or people.

Third, as an act of your heart but also of your will, release each person and each offense that comes to mind about that person to God. Tell God honestly, and clearly, saying something like, "Father, I forgive (name) for (whatever the offense is)." **Speak their name. Speak the hurt that you are feeling.** Then, clearly and pointedly, pray one at a time over each name, telling God that you release this person to Him, knowing that HE will take care of this offense with His justice and also His mercy." **Don't be vague**; don't say something like "*Lord I want to forgive*". Be concrete and specific. Stay with each individual until you are sure you've dealt with him or her and with the pain that you remember. Remember that this is for **your** benefit, so continue until you know it's finished.

Finally, claim God's peace and freedom. Remember that YOU are responsible for your own actions before the Lord; you are not responsible for what anyone else does or *doesn't* do. But by doing the right thing, YOUR actions *may be an encouragement* to others. **Be assured** that how you handle hurt *will be* observed by and affect others, even if you are not aware of it.

Then thank God, and say, "Father, I now claim the peace and freedom You will give me; I leave this offense with you; I trust you with it; Thank you for the grace to release them, as you released me."

Now that we have gone through these basic steps of forgiving, I would like ALL of us to bow our heads and take a few short minutes to think of an offense that we have been holding onto – an event or a person that we can't get out of our mind that continues to sap the energy and happiness from our soul. In this time together, as you are surrounded by God's people, speak to Him about this matter and with His help, remember again how He forgave each of us. Release the hurt and anger to Him. We will take the time now to do that silently as we bow our heads..

Let us pray together: "Father, I now claim the peace and freedom that You will give to me if I ask in all sincerity. I attempt with all that I have to **leave** this offense that I have been carrying with you; I trust you with it. Thank you for the grace to release these hurts and forgive, as you have forgiven me." **Amen.**

References: [Jeff Hughes](#) “Why We Forgive”, Nov 28, 2017