

## FORGIVENESS

**T**here is nothing more central to Christianity than forgiveness. Webster defines the word (forgive) as follows. "v.t. to pardon; to cease to bear resentment against; to cancel (as a debt); v.t. to exercise clemency; to grant pardon.

The amazing thing about the forgiveness of God is that He not only cancels our debt, but he even removes our guilt and therefore our condemnation. In Romans 8:1-2 we read, "***There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.***" This fact can hardly be over emphasized. When Satan comes to God and brings up some sin that He has forgiven, God replies, "There is no record of that and I don't remember it." In Jeremiah 31:34 we read, "***And we shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,' declares the LORD, 'for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.'***" In Psalms 103:12 it says, "***As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.***" We read in Micah 7:19, "***He will again have compassion on us; He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.***" As we can see from these scriptures that God forgives completely. Anything less is not forgiveness. When people say, "I can forgive but I can't forget.", they are actually saying that they don't forgive.

God forgives us because it is His nature to do so. When we become His children, and His spirit dwells in us, it should become our nature as well. God made a way for us to receive forgiveness through the blood of His own Son. No greater price has ever been paid for anyone in all of history. We can not be unforgiving and claim to be His child. There are too many scriptures tying our forgiveness by God to our forgiveness of others to be ignored. Consider the two verses that follow, what we call, the Lords prayer. We read in Matthew 6:14+15, "***For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men,***

*then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."* Some people call this the law of reciprocity. It is at the heart of the Golden rule. We see it in Matthew 7:2, *"For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you."* Notice how Jesus answered Peter's question about this subject. *"Then Peter came and said to Him, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. for this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. And when he had begun to settle them, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents. But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.' And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what he owed. So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. Should you not also have mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?' And the lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. So shall my heavenly father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from his heart."* (Matthew 18:21-35) Jesus also links forgiveness with prayer in Mark 11:25+26 as follows, *"And when you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions. But if you do not forgive, neither will your*

***Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions.***" This is by no means an exhaustive listing of the scriptures about the need for Christians to forgive others. We should begin to see however that it is very serious for us to have an unforgiving heart and still maintain that we are Christians. Not only is unforgiveness a sin but the unforgiveness itself is caused by sin in our own hearts. If you have something against someone that you are unable to forgive, then you need to examine your own heart for the sin that is causing that unforgiveness. You may think that it is the other person that has the problem because they did something awful to you. That may be true, but that is their problem. Your unforgiveness is caused by your own sin. Let us say that the other person said something about you that caused you great pain and it wasn't true. If you can't forgive them, maybe it is because of the sin of pride in your own heart. Remove the pride and you remove the barrier to your unforgiveness. Whenever there is unforgiveness there is an underlying sin that is causing it. Find the sin, confess it, repent of it and you will be able to forgive the other person. The trouble is that we are so busy concentrating on the other persons sin against us that we can't see our own sin. When you are offended, it should be a red flag to you. Have you allowed bitterness, hatred, pride, revenge, or some other sin to gain a foothold in your heart? You are not responsible for the sins of others but you are responsible for your own sins. To concentrate on other peoples sins is futile. You can not do anything about them. You have everything to do with the way you allow their sins to affect you however. That is the thing that you need to concentrate on. It is true that you do have responsibility to reprove someone who sins against you. Jesus said, in Luke 17:3+4, ***"Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent, 'forgive him."*** Again, in Matthew 18:15-17 Jesus says, ***"And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. and if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a gentile and a tax gatherer."*** This is the correct way to deal with a fellow Christian when that person sins, but regardless of the way he responds to your actions, you must forgive him. Some people think

that unilateral forgiveness is not required. If the offending party doesn't ask for forgiveness, you do not have to forgive him. I would disagree with that. In fact we see two great examples of that in the Bible. As Jesus hung dying on the cross, He said, **"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."** (Luke 23:34) We may say, "Yes, But that was Jesus." Then we come to Stephen, as he was stoned to death, The last words that he spoke were, **"Lord, do not hold this sin against them!"** One might point out that, in both of these cases, they asked God to forgive their attackers. That is true, but wouldn't that mean that they had already done so themselves?

Forgiveness is not only important to fulfill our obligation to God. It is also good for our well being. When we do not forgive, we doom ourselves to a life of bondage. People become obsessed with the wrong that has been done to them. They live a life of vengefulness, and bitterness. I have known Christians that have lived miserable lives and end up being miserable to live with, because they can't let go of something that someone has done to them. I have come to believe that it is impossible to live an overcoming Christian life where forgiveness is not practiced. In fact, I don't think that it is possible to be a Christian and not practice forgiveness because you would be living in sin and there is no forgiveness for you without being a forgiver.

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