

Forgiveness

Have you ever felt anger toward someone?

Has this anger ever turned to hate? Even for a short time?

Jesus said "Love your enemies"

In the Epistles, we are told to forgive one another. But in the gospels, Jesus said the same thing with more authority. He said it with a knowledge of the consequences. He didn't just say "forgive". He told what would happen if we **didn't forgive**. So if you ask "**why should I forgive someone who wronged me?**", **Jesus lays it out pretty plain.**

As Jesus was talking to the 12 Apostles, He told them they would not be forgiven if they didn't forgive. (Mark 11:25)

In the verse 12 of the Lords Prayer (Matthew 6:8-13) it says "*...forgive us our debts[trespases or sins], as we forgive our debtors [those who have sinned against us]...*". In other words: "...forgive us our wrongs, in the same manner as we forgive those who have wronged us..."

So what we're saying to God is "If I haven't forgiven those who have wronged me, then don't forgive me for the things I have done wrong."

Did Jesus really say that? Read on.

In Matthew 6:14-15, right after Jesus told the disciples how to pray (the Lords Prayer), He elaborated on the idea of forgiveness. He told them "*For if you forgive men their trespases, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespases, neither will your Father forgive your trespases*".

This is saying that we can exit (die in) this life without our sins being forgiven. Can this happen with a Christian? I would say so. Christians also refuse to forgive others sometimes.

So why is forgiveness so important? First of all, you must realize that refusing to forgive someone is a sin. Next you must realize that Jesus Christ paid the penalty for all of our sins. He already did it. It is done. He has taken the sin upon Himself and paid the penalty. BUT if we refuse to give up the sin to Him who paid for it, then **we still have it.** **And if we still have**

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the sin of unforgiveness, then (according to Matthew 6:15) we will not be forgiven our sins.

It's kind of like us kidnapping a particular sin and holding it for ransom. Jesus came and paid the ransom and now it's our turn to give the sin to Him because He paid the ransom. But if we choose not to give it to Him, even though He paid the ransom, then we still have the sin and will suffer the consequences that he told us about (in Matthew 6:15).

What happens when we die without forgiving and still have unforgiveness on our hearts?

Jesus told us.

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 18:21-35 NKJV)

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

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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 brother⁷ his trespasses." (Matthew 18:21-34)

The huge debt was about 60,000,000 times the size of the small debt. At one time the servant was forgiven the huge debt – he was debt free. But he refused to forgive a small debt owed him. When the master found out about it what did he do? His master then required full payment for his debt - **the one his master had previously forgiven him!**

After the illustration, Jesus said, *"So My heavenly Father also will do to you, if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."*

What's this saying? It seems to be saying that the Lord can UN-forgive us our sins. That is, if we die with unforgiveness on our hearts, even those sins that we have been forgiven for are added to our debt to be paid.

THIS IS NOT A GOOD STATE TO BE IN!!!

Being as this is an illustration of what heaven is like, (as Jesus said in v.23) it would appear that if we do not forgive others their sins against us, then payment for OUR sins will still be required of us – even though Jesus already paid for them. The fact that we refuse to release the sin (of not forgiving the offender) over to Jesus makes us responsible for the payment for them. The fact that Jesus said "from his heart", says that it is not enough to just say "I forgive you" to one another, but to really mean it - that is, mean it from our hearts. It doesn't say that we must forget the offence against us, but we must forgive the person(s) who offended or hurt us.

Does it say that the person who offended us must ask for forgiveness? No! Many times it's easier to forgive someone if they have admitted their guilt. But what about times when they don't admit that they were wrong? Or what about something that they are doing that offends us and they see nothing wrong with it? Should we forgive them for that? Yes!

"But you don't understand"

You are correct. I don't understand. But Jesus does. In fact He already

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paid for the exact sin that you are holding against that other person. Even though the other person committed the sin, we also sin if we hold on to the offence in our hearts. Jesus was killed and paid the penalty for all the sins of the world - past, present and future. He suffered on the cross. He overcame death because it could not hold him. He suffered the wrath of God to pay the penalty for my sins. He committed no sin, so death couldn't hold him. He didn't **have to die for our sins. He still would have been the Son of God. But He loved us so much that He was willing to die on the cross and be forsaken by God the Father. He loved the person that we cannot forgive so much that He died on the cross for them also. Can't we even forgive them?**

I'll get into how to forgive in a few minutes.

Jesus told us to forgive others their sin(s) against us (Mark 11:25-16). Not to do so is disobedience to God. **Disobedience to God is sin.** How can we go to heaven while still holding onto sin. We can't. Either we get rid of the sin (by forgiving the other person or persons and asking Jesus' forgiveness for holding onto it) or we don't go to heaven. It's that simple.

You may say, "But I've always been taught that once our sins are forgiven they'll never be brought up again."

Nevertheless it is a sin to hold onto unforgiveness (it is **disobedience to God**), so payment for ALL of our sins is required of us (Matthew 6:14-15). That one sin of unforgiveness still has to be paid for. And if Jesus was telling the truth in the parable, then we won't be forgiven for our sins [plural] because we weren't willing to give it up.

Keep in mind that the Bible doesn't say that when we forgive someone we must then act as if it never happened. We can still learn from the past.

When we are "saved", we are saved from having to pay the penalty for our sins that we have committed.

Let's look at what salvation means to a Christian. Salvation means having been saved – from having to pay the penalty for our sins. If we had to do this ourselves, we would never get it done – thus we would never enter Heaven. Without our salvation we wouldn't enter Heaven. However, Jesus Christ already paid the penalty for our sins. If we accept the fact that Jesus

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Christ, as God's son paid the penalty for our own sins and ask Him (Jesus) to enter our heart, then we are "saved".

Ezekiel 18:²⁴ *But if a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits sin and does the same detestable things the wicked man does, will he live? None of the righteous things he has done will be remembered. **Because of the unfaithfulness he is guilty of and because of the sins he has committed, he will die.** (NIV)*

This seems to go against the common belief of "Once saved, always saved". Meaning that once we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, then we don't have anything to worry about for the rest of eternity. We are saved - no matter how we act or what we do. But Jesus didn't say that.

To be sure, Jesus Christ DID die and pay the penalty for ALL the sins of the world. But just because He paid for them all doesn't mean that all will be forgiven for committing them - we have to do something too.

We have to accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior (as the one who paid the penalty for our sins)

If He is our Lord and Savior, then we will be followers of Him.

If we are followers of Him then we will be obedient to Him.

If we are obedient to Him then we will forgive others when they wrong us and not hold onto unforgiveness.

We are told that the Lord will forgive us our sins if we believe that Jesus paid the penalty for them. If we commit a sin and ask the Lord for forgiveness, He will forgive us because Jesus already paid the penalty for it. But if we have to pay for our sins ourselves, then we aren't going to heaven until they're paid for.

What if we go right back and commit the same sin again? Will the Lord forgive us? Yes, because Jesus paid the penalty for it.

If we choose to hold onto the offense then how can we be forgiven? Stop holding onto the forgiveness and give it to Jesus.

What if we commit a sin that is continuous – it doesn't stop? How could Jesus pay the penalty for this sin if we didn't really give Him a chance? If we continually commit the sin, can it be forgiven? But if we are forgiven, the sin would still be there because it's continuous – so how could it be forgiven? That's what refusing to forgive someone is – a continuous sin.

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Jesus made it quite clear that we are not to hold onto unforgiveness – because if we do then **our sins(plural) will not be forgiven.**

In Revelation 3:5, near the end of the letter to Sardis, the Lord says, *"He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels."*

Where the Lord says, *"I will not blot out his name out of the Book of Life"*, it must be that the name had to be in the Book of Life to begin with. So the person was already saved at this point. It was after they were saved that their name could be blotted out of the Book of Life (for those who did not overcome).

This appears to answer the question, "If we are saved once, can we lose our salvation?" The answer is, Yes.

Why should we forgive?

Mark 11:25 says that *"if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. **But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.**"*

So I should forgive others because Jesus paid the penalty for the sins I have committed ever since I was born and I won't be forgiven for my sins if I don't forgive them.

Luke 6:37 *Jesus said "Therefore be merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you shall be forgiven."*

This insinuates that:

We can be in a state where we will be judged.

We can be in a state where we will be condemned.

We can be in a state where we will not be forgiven.

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Who should I forgive?

"If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. ⁴ If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." (Luke 17:3-4)

So we are to forgive our brothers - fellow human beings.

How do I go about forgiving another person?

By praying to the Lord.

The prayer is better if said out loud. It doesn't have to be in the presence of anyone else, however. It's just between you and the Lord. But when you say it out loud, it seems to be more real.

A prayer similar to the following:

"Lord, I forgive [name] for [the offense against you]. Lord I don't feel like it. But I know that you can change my heart. I know that you already paid the price for the offense against me, but I am finding it hard to forgive them. I forgive them by choice. Forgive me for harboring unforgiveness toward them and Lord, I ask you to please change my feeling toward them. "

Do I have to tell the other person that I forgive them?

It isn't required, but there are times when it would be a good thing if you did because it may remove any guilt the other person was carrying. However, since unforgiveness resides in your heart, that's what needs to be fixed.

> Keep in mind that the person who offended you may be perfectly at peace. So who is really hurting from the offense? You are! So you are the one who needs to forgive the other person.

Unforgiveness is in **your heart**. **And unforgiveness can have dire consequences.**

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What are some consequences of unforgiveness?

Physically

Ulcers and many other physical ailments – perhaps even cancer among them.

Sometimes it breaks up a long standing friendship – even a marriage.

Spiritually

Unforgiveness impedes or inhibits spiritual growth.

Unforgiveness sometimes drags us away from God.

What Happens When We Die and Our Sins Are Not Forgiven?

Even though Jesus paid for our sins, if we're still holding onto them (like unforgiveness) then we are choosing to pay for them ourselves. We are choosing to ignore Jesus' payment for our sins and refusing to release them. Somebody has to pay for them. If we choose to ignore Jesus payment for our sins (because we are still holding onto them and won't forgive the one who offended us) then who is left to pay for them? Us.

How is sin paid for? By being separated from God.

How long does it take a sinner to pay for one sin? Forever

The illustration in Matthew 18:21-35 (where the master UN-forgave his servant his debt because the servant didn't forgive one who owed a debt to him) seems to be saying that if we have unforgiveness on our hearts when we die (at the time of judgment) then we will be required to pay the debt of our own sins. This alone will keep us out of heaven - because we can never repay the debt of our sins.

After Jesus was mentally reprimanded by the scribes for telling a paralytic (lying on a bed) that his sins were forgiven, He said, *"Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say 'Arise and walk?' But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" - then He said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house."* Matthew 9:4-6 (NIV)

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This seems to insinuate that saying "Your sins are forgiven you" and "Arise and walk" are synonymous with each other in His eyes. Does this mean that in order to be healed that we need our sins forgiven? Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven you" first - which insinuated that He was healed (if they are synonymous). If He said "Arise and walk" first, it would appear that the man was already forgiven for his sins. This would sure explain a lot of sickness in the world. It also would explain the importance of forgiveness in the plan of salvation.

What about forgiving ourselves?

Does the Bible say anything about this?

When Jesus was eating at one of the Pharisee's houses (Luke 7:36+), a "woman in the city who was a sinner" stood at Jesus' feet as He was eating and washed His feet. She was crying as she did this. I believe that she was a prostitute, and that she didn't want that kind of a life and felt really bad about herself. I don't know why she felt the need to wash Jesus' feet, but I think she did want to be forgiven by Him. He spoke to her in love. He told her that He knew she had committed many sins, and He also told her that her sins are forgiven. Can you really imagine that? She was probably carrying the load of guilt, which amounted to not forgiving herself, for quite some time. And then Jesus told her that her sins are forgiven. Wow! She may not really have known who Jesus was, but at least another person cared for her and believed in her - that she was worth something! The whole load of self-guilt was lifted from her as Jesus told her that her sins are forgiven!

We should keep in mind, however, that we may not be able to forgive - by ourselves. When that's the case, as it is in most cases, we need to ask for God's help.

I will give a personal illustration.

Several years ago, I felt I was wronged by somebody. I found it very very hard to forgive that person for what they said to me. I wanted to. I tried to. But it just kept creeping up almost every day. In talking with another Christian, I found that forgiveness was really a matter of our will. I wanted to forgive the person because, as a Christian, I knew I should. That was a start. Some people want to

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wait until they feel OK about the person or don't really feel bad about them any more, or they wait until the other person apologizes or asks for forgiveness. If we do that, however, we may die before we forgive them. So instead of us keeping hold of the forgiveness (not releasing it) it is necessary to forgive the person as soon as possible.

So it's necessary to forgive the person as soon as possible.

I did forgive the person - even as they were saying the things to me. However, it kept coming back to me and I felt that I was wronged and that I had a "right" to feel angry, and that the problem was all the other persons fault. If it was the other persons fault, I could feel angry, right?

That's the way I felt. This went on for quite some time. I did turn it over to the Lord several times, but then I would take it back. I would feel angry at the other person. We finally had a talk (the other person & I) and then it was better. We've had another talk about it since also. But had I kept the bitterness and anger I could never have forgiven that person. I gave the bitterness & anger over to the Lord. I did it several times too. During the time I would not release it to the Lord, my spiritual growth was zilch. I finally gave it to the Lord and didn't take it back.

In another instance, I did something that I was really angry with myself about. In it, there were a few people that did things to me that I felt were "wrong". Within a short time - about 6 months - I forgave them all. But I still felt bad about myself. In talking to another Christian (referred to earlier) they remarked that "Jesus forgave you, why can't you forgive yourself?" I must have looked strange. I had never heard of such a thing. I really didn't know that I could forgive myself. But I did after that. And things started to get better. In a prayer to the Lord, I told Him that I forgive myself and I turned it over to Him.

I prayed, "Lord, I forgive me for (the sin). I am sorry I did such a thing and I turn it over to you Lord. I know that you have already forgiven me, but I find it hard to forgive myself. I do so now."

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I have found that it is better to forgive someone, including yourself, out loud. That is, to speak it out loud. Nobody else has to hear you - except God. But it's more real to say it out loud – like the prayer above or if it's another person, similar to the following.

"Lord, I forgive so 'n so for doing such a thing to me. I sure don't feel like forgiving them, but Lord, I choose to forgive them as you said to do. You'll have to work on the feelings Lord, because I just don't feel like it now. But I am choosing to forgive them. "

Many people do not realize that they can forgive themselves - the same as I did. And they walk around with UN-forgiveness on their hearts.

During the war in Viet Nam or Iraq some of our soldiers did things that they, never in 1000 years, would do here in the U.S. And now that they're back in the U.S. they don't want to talk about those things, and they can not bear the thought of forgiving themselves for some of the things that they did. They are walking around with a tremendous load of guilt on their shoulders. Or they don't even know that they can forgive themselves. Jesus said that we would be forgiven just for the asking. If Jesus forgave us, what are we doing holding onto the thing that He already paid the penalty for? Do we think we're better than Him? No. We aren't. Even the grossest things can be forgiven us. So we should also forgive ourselves for having committed them.

What if a person sins against me (or offends me) and they won't apologize for it?

If we continue to hold unforgiveness in our hearts, it will fester and grow like yeast. So if the other person has wronged you, choose to forgive them. If they won't accept your apology or they won't forgive you, confess it to the Lord. The other person may not even realize they offended you

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What should I do if the person won't accept an apology for my sin against them?

If we sin against another person, we sin against the Lord. Apologize to the other person and ask their forgiveness for the offense. If they don't forgive you, that's on their heart. So ask the Lord's forgiveness for the sin and for holding the unforgiveness in your heart (towards the other person). The other person will be accountable to the Lord if they won't forgive you. But the sin against the other person will be forgiven you because you asked it of the Lord.

Is it possible to forgive God?

By definition, God cannot sin. However, we do find ourselves blaming God for allowing something to happen in our lives that has caused us pain. When this happens, we can follow the same example for forgiving someone else.

"Lord, I forgive you for allowing my father to die in an accident. I sure don't feel like it because I'm angry with you and mad because you let it happen. But I choose to forgive you. Please help me with the feelings."

Yes. It is all right to be angry with God. Even if we know that He is doing it for our own good we can still be angry with Him. So we can also forgive Him. Because unforgiveness resides in our heart - not His, we have to move forward to remove it. We do this by forgiving the one we see as the offender. We may, intellectually, know that God cannot do wrong, but emotionally we can feel that He at least should have done things another way.

How do I know if I have forgiven the other person(s)?

Keep in mind that these are only indicators.

> If someone else has wronged you and you have the desire to tell other people about it (to show how wrong the other person is or how right you are) then you probably haven't truly forgiven them - even if you think you have. You haven't let go of the unforgiveness.

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- > If you want to show the person how wrong they were, then you probably have not forgiven them.
- > If you harbor resentment toward the person or persons then you may not have forgiven them.
- > If you do not seek reprisal or punishment or even a reprimand for the other person then you may have forgiven them.

Forgiveness is a matter of the will.

We have to choose to forgive (others or ourselves) before the feelings say so. The willingness to forgive should come first and the feelings will follow if we ask the Lords help. If we continue to wait to forgive until the feelings say it's no longer an issue, then it may be too late.

We can't even imagine the tremendous suffering that Jesus endured on the cross for us. Jesus Christ did not sin even once during His earthly life. God, the creator of all mankind, the God of all creation, targeted Jesus Christ and punished Him for all the sins of everybody in the world - from the past, the present and the future - because all of us are sinners. But, because Jesus loved every one of us so much, He was willing to suffer the punishment for all of our sins. We still have to accept the fact that He did this for us and desire to have Him (Jesus Christ) live inside us. If we don't, then we will still have to pay the penalty for them ourselves.

It's kind of like us receiving a pardon (for our sins). If we don't believe the pardon is real and we don't present the pardon to the warden, then we are still in prison. The pardon will do us no good unless we accept it and present it to the warden for our release.

So if we don't accept Jesus Christ as having paid the penalty for our sins than we still have to pay the penalty for them ourselves

For this reason, it can be seen that forgiveness is one of the biggest issues of the whole Bible. God is willing to forgive us for every sin we've ever committed - because Jesus suffered the punishment (for these sins) in our place. The whole Bible says this in many ways and is one of the main underlying themes throughout the Bible. Without

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forgiveness we would be sunk - we would have no future beyond this life. But Jesus made it possible for us to have the weight of all our sins lifted from us. Our slate can be wiped clean.

In order for our slate to be wiped clean, we have to accept the fact that Jesus Christ died and suffered in our place and allow Him to be a real part of our life. He was punished for the sins that we committed. He didn't commit any sins, but we did. And chances are that we will again. These are the sins that He suffered for on the cross.

Ask Jesus Christ into your heart today. Acknowledge that you are a sinner and that Jesus already paid the penalty for those sins. The Lord will wash away your guilt and wipe your slate clean.

What must I do to be saved (from eternal damnation)?

ADMIT your spiritual need. "I am a sinner."

BELIEVE that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross

RECEIVE through prayer, Jesus Christ into your heart and life.

Jesus said, "*Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in . . .*" (Revelation 3:20)

"*Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*"
(Romans 10:13)

Pray a prayer much like this one - and mean it..

Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner. I believe that you are the Son of the Living God and that you died on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins. I believe that you then arose from the dead. Jesus, please forgive me for the sins I have committed and cleanse me from the inside out. Right now, Jesus, I ask you to come into my heart and make me a new person.

Thank you Lord Jesus Christ for coming into my heart,

Amen