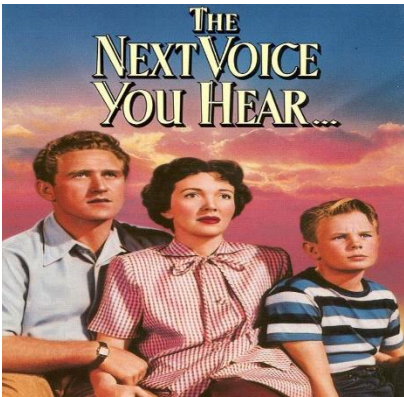


EMOTIONAL BOUNDARIES: FORGIVEN & FORGOTTEN

by David Lee Burris

Brief Synopsis “Movie Parable” “The Next Voice You Hear”



(1950) “Joe and Mary Smith and their young son Johnny live in a modest home in a suburban Los Angeles neighborhood. The Smiths lead simple lives defined by mostly their daily routines: Joe works hard at his steady job at the Ajax Aircraft Plant and Johnny attends school and delivers newspapers, while Mary, who is nine months pregnant, is a homemaker. One evening, while Mary is helping Johnny with his homework, Joe turns on the radio in the living room, expecting to hear his favorite program. However, instead of the usual programming, Joe hears a voice that identifies itself as the voice of God. Though perplexed by the voice and initially believing it to be a hoax, Joe later tells Mary that he heard the voice tell him that God will be broadcasting on the radio for the next few days. The following morning, Joe reads in the newspaper that three thousand people reported hearing a strange voice on the radio the previous night, and that they all heard the same thing he heard. Later that evening, when Joe returns home from his bowling game, Mary tells him that she heard the voice of God on the radio and that it said that God was planning to perform miracles. As the government begins an investigation into the mysterious radio voice, which is now being heard all over the world, the talk of the town is the voice of God. The next time that God addresses the world, a fiery thunderstorm suddenly advances upon the city, sending Mary and Johnny into Joe's arms for comfort. Joe tries to calm them by insisting that the storm was a coincidence, but Mary is not convinced. As all scientific attempts to explain the voice fail, people all over the world begin to conclude that the voice really is God. Joe eventually decides that the voice is real, too, and that he has been given a sign from God to respect his boss, Fred Brannan, and to be kinder to Mary's sister, Ethel. On the fourth consecutive day of God's radio broadcasts, **the world is instructed to perform miracles of kindness and peace...**

The following day, while drinking in a bar with his friend Mitch, an intoxicated Joe has a epiphany and realizes that the time he spends with Mitch in bars is wrong. Before staggering out of the bar, Joe tells Mitch that he is the ‘voice of evil.’ When Joe returns home, Johnny sees his father drunk for the first time and is ashamed. Joe quickly reforms his ways and, the following day, apologizes to Ethel for his past behavior. Johnny, however, becomes disillusioned and runs away from home. Joe finds his son at Fred's house, and their frank discussion leads to a reconciliation. The next day, the Smiths attends a special church service to hear the voice of God speak on the radio, but on that day, the 7th day, no voice is heard. Their minister concludes that God must be resting, and with that pronouncement, Mary goes into labor. Hours later, Mary gives birth to a baby girl, and Joe and Johnny are overjoyed.” – TURNER MOVIE CLASSICS

GOD’S SPOKEN FOCUSING ON OUR INNER LIVES: [FORGIVING](#)

Understanding Forgiveness

By **Wayne Jackson**

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There may be no word in the English Bible that quickens the beat of a sinner’s heart more than that of “forgiveness.”

Little wonder, then, that poet Alexander Pope wrote: “To err is human; to forgive, divine.”

In this study, we wish to probe this theme from two vantage points: **divine forgiveness**, that which proceeds from God to man, and **human forgiveness**, that which we extend to one another.

Forgiveness Biblically Portrayed

There are a couple of interesting words in the Greek New Testament that are rendered by the English, “forgive.”

One term is **aphesis**. Etymologically, it means “to send away.” The word had a variety of meanings in secular Greek, but in its thirty-six times in the New Testament, it always is associated with the “pardon of sins” (Spicq 1994, 242).

See, for example, the use of “forgiveness” in Matthew 26:28 and Acts 2:38.

A second term used for forgiveness is **charizomai**. It meant to bestow a favor or to show kindness.

In Romans 8:32, **charizomai** is rendered “shall ... freely give.”

In his second Corinthian epistle, Paul admonishes the saints to forgive a certain wayward brother. Presumably, he was talking about the offender mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5. The impulse for the forgiveness he was commending was so that the erring brother might not be overcome with sorrow (2 Cor. 2:7).

In Colossians 3:13, Paul twice uses the term—once for the forgiveness we ought to extend to one another, and then to that which we received from Christ. There is the suggestion that just as the Lord **graciously forgave us**, we should wholeheartedly extend the same kindness to others. Although, as we shall presently note, forgiveness is not extended unconditionally.

God's Forgiveness Portrayed in Word Pictures

There are numerous exciting expressions of figurative language in the Scriptures that portray a rich picture of forgiveness as such flows from the mind of God.

David praised the Creator for his loving-kindness because:

“As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us” (Psa. 103:12).

The good king Hezekiah thanked the Lord for his redemption, proclaiming that “you have thrown all my sins behind your back” (Isa. 38:17).

The prophet Micah is even more picturesque. He describes Jehovah as treading our iniquities under his feet and then casting the residue into the sea (Mic. 7:19).

What a lovely promise, so brimming with comfort.

The New Testament is equally vivid in its characterization of pardon. When one turns to God in obedience, his sins are “blotted out” (Acts 3:19; cf. Psalm 51:1,9). The Greeks used this term of “washing out” the ink from a papyrus sheet so that it might be used for writing again (Moulton 1963, 221).

Another interesting term is **apolouo**, to “wash away” (used of water immersion, Acts 22:16). The middle voice form here shows the individual's personal involvement in the act. Saul had to make the decision to submit to the washing away of his sins. Vine notes that Saul had “to arrange for the thing to be done” (1965, 132) — hardly something an infant can do!

The Scriptures use the term “redemption” as an equivalent for forgiveness.

Paul declared that it is in **Christ** that we have our “redemption **apolutrosis** through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses” (Eph. 1:7).

Redemption originally had to do with buying back a slave from his captivity (Arndt and Gingrich 1967, 95). In the New Testament, it suggests the offer

of freedom from the consequences of sin on the basis of Jesus' atoning death (cf. Rom. 3:24).

The Lord was a blemishless sacrifice who bore the penalty for our sins (cf. Isa. 53:5-6).

Implications of True Forgiveness

The idea of forgiveness stirs the soul and has some intriguing implications.

First, forgiveness implies **an offense has been committed**. If there is no breach of propriety, no forgiveness is needed.

The fact that accountable human beings require forgiveness, therefore, suggests that they have committed offenses (sins) against their Creator. This, in itself, suggests that **a standard of conduct has been violated**.

The Bible addresses both of these matters in one verse. An inspired apostle declares that "sin is lawlessness" (1 Jn. 3:4). Lawlessness literally means "without law," and it represents a "revolt against God" (Bromiley 1985, 654). All of us, to a degree, are **spiritual outlaws!**

Second, forgiveness implies the inability to remedy the violation of the law.

In one of his parables, Jesus told of a man who was head-over-heels in debt to his lord. In describing the hapless condition of the debtor, the Lord said that "he had not wherewith to pay" (Matt. 18:25).

That man represents you and me. We do not have the wherewithal to remedy our despicable condition.

We cannot untell a lie once it is told. We cannot un-commit adultery after the foul deed has been done. Sin cannot be undone by any human maneuver.

And so, according to the language of the parable, the lord (representing God) "being moved with compassion, released him [the debtor], and **forgave** him the debt" (Matt. 18:27).

Can Forgiveness Be Conditional?

Does imposing a condition for forgiveness compromise the forgiver's moral integrity? In other words, is it possible to forgive and yet place conditions on forgiveness?

Let's reason together.

If it is the case that God is **absolutely good**, and if it is further the case that he forgives **conditionally**, then forgiveness may be imposed conditionally with no forfeiture of ethical principle.

There is no better illustration of this concept than that of the request of Christ while on the cross. Regarding those who were in the process of murdering him, the Lord petitioned: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34).

Did God at that point in time forgive those Jews unconditionally?

He did not. This is evidenced by Luke's inspired record of Acts 2. Here's the charge Peter levied against the Hebrews:

[Y]ou by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay [the Christ] (Acts 2:23).

Concerning those sins, the apostle subsequently would say, "Repent" (Acts 2:38).

It is obvious that you need not repent of sins that are **already forgiven**.

Further, Peter admonishes:

[B]e immersed every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto [for] the remission [forgiveness] of your sins (Acts 2:38).

Clearly, the promise of forgiveness to these folks who had become convinced of their complicity in the Messiah's death was conditional.

God is willing to freely forgive us (Rom. 6:23), but there must be the expression of genuine faith in doing what he requires for the reception of that graciousness.

In addition, it is also true that when the child of God becomes lax and transgresses his Father's will, the pardon extended to him still is conditional. John wrote:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins (1 Jn. 1:9; cf. Acts 8:22).

Note the word "if." The condition of confession is imposed in order to receive the blessings of forgiveness.

Two Kinds of Forgiveness

For lack of a better expression, what we've been talking about thus far is **vertical** forgiveness — the forgiveness we all desire from our loving Father for the sins we have committed against him.

But there is also forgiveness that we might designate as **horizontal**. It is the forgiveness we are required to extend to each other.

In the model prayer, Christ taught his disciples to pray these thoughts:

Our Father ... forgive us our debts [vertical], as we also have forgiven our debtors [horizontal] (Matt. 6:9ff).

Or note Paul's encouragement to the Colossian saints. They ought to be forbearing to:

"one another, forgiving each other, if any man have a complaint against any; even as the Lord forgave you, so also do ye" (Col. 3:13).

Can We Actually Forgive Sins?

When the Lord Jesus once asserted his divine nature by forgiving a man's sins, his Jewish antagonists were chagrined. They silently thought, "Who can forgive sins but one, even God?" (Mk. 2:7).

The fact is, they were correct. In the ultimate sense, only God can pardon sin.

A man cannot say to the thief who has stolen his car, “I forgive you,” and the sin account be **fully settled**. In the full analysis, all sin is against God (Gen. 39:9; Psa. 51:4).

It is rather well-known, that Roman Catholic theology claims the authority to grant **actual forgiveness** lies within the domain of that church. When an erring Catholic confesses his sins to a priest, the priest responds with what is designated as “actual absolution.”

I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen (Van Doornik, Jelsma, and Van De Lisdonk 1956, 286).

It is alleged, however, that Christ granted to the apostles the right of forgiving sins. A text from John’s Gospel is cited for proof: “[W]hose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them” (Jn. 20:23).

However, the passage does not provide the coveted support.

The second verb, “are forgiven,” in the original text is a perfect tense form. The impact of this verb tense describes an action that has occurred already, with the effect remaining.

The sense thus is: “Whose sins you declare to be forgiven, must be those forgiven already [by God].”

The text merely suggests that one’s declaration regarding forgiveness must be in harmony with the divine pronouncement.

Robertson noted:

What [Jesus] commits to the disciples and to us is the power and privilege of giving assurance of the forgiveness of God by correctly announcing the terms of forgiveness (1932, 315).

And the narrative in Acts 2 demonstrates that this is a correct view of this passage.

In that case, the Lord’s apostles did not personally forgive anyone. Rather, they merely proclaimed the conditions of pardon (Acts 2:38). God himself bestowed the actual forgiveness.

In What Sense, Then, Do We Forgive One Another?

Our forgiveness of each other has to do more with an **attitude** than a specific act. Reflect on the following principles which highlight the sort of temperament that we must cultivate if we would be Christ-like (Lk. 23:34).

- The forgiving person does not attempt to take revenge upon those who have wronged him (Rom. 12:17ff).
- The forgiving person does not hate the offender. Rather, in spite of the person's evil, he loves (**agape**) him still. For the meaning of **agape** love, see our article, [The Challenge of Agape Love](#) .
- The forgiving person is kindly disposed and tenderhearted toward his adversary (Eph. 4:32).
- The forgiving person is approachable. He leaves the door for reconciliation wide open and longs for the welfare of the transgressor.
- The forgiving person is not merely passive in waiting for the offender to repent. He actively seeks the repentance of the one who wronged him (Matt. 18:15-17).

There is, though, a passage that puts these principles into sharper focus. Jesus said:

If your brother sins, rebuke him; if he repents forgive him (Lk. 17:3).

The two imperatives (“rebuke” and “forgive”) are conditional. I may not rebuke my brother for a sin he has not committed. Nor am I to declare him forgiven of the sin for which he refuses to repent.

Does this instruction conflict with what we've said above?

It does not. While we are to cultivate the disposition detailed earlier, we are not at liberty to simply dismiss a brother's evil, thus freeing him, as it were, from his obligation to make things right with God.

The offender still must be held accountable for his reprehensible conduct.

Forgiveness From the Heart

In addressing the smugness of Peter, Jesus cautioned that we can only expect pardon from God when we are willing to extend forgiveness to others “from your hearts” (Matt. 18:35).

There is a difference between lip forgiveness and heart forgiveness.

A lovely Christian woman I know had a son who was brutally murdered. She struggles with how to sincerely forgive the vicious killer who forever disrupted her mental tranquility.

Few of us will ever face such a rigorous challenge. What shall we say to help her with this problem?

First, as indicated above, forgiveness does not mean that the sin is to be ignored. There are both moral and civil consequences to a horrible act such as we have described.

The wounded mother is not obligated to frustrate the legal process by which her son’s murderer is brought to justice. Even though the killer could obtain pardon from God through obedience to the gospel (even as Saul of Tarsus did—see Acts 26:10; cf. 22:16), he still must suffer the temporal consequence of his violation of civil law.

That aside, here are some truths that may help us to cultivate the type of compassionate and forgiving spirit that is God-like (cf. Matt. 18:27) as difficult as that may be to achieve.

We must take note of the **value of the human soul**. Any soul and every soul is worth more than the entire universe (Matt. 16:26).

Paul once spoke of “the brother [a solitary person] for whose sake Christ died” (1 Cor. 8:11). If the Lord Jesus died for all (1 Tim. 2:6), who are we to be selective with those we are willing to forgive?

Some sins have greater temporal consequences than others. Murder carries a greater penalty than shoplifting a pack of gum.

But all sin — any sin — is still a serious violation of the will of God. The inspired James noted that “the sin” (one sin, any sin) ultimately brings forth death (Jas. 1:15).

We look on murder as a particularly atrocious act, but God put it in the same catalog with strife, malice, backbiting, insolence, boasting, disobedience toward parents, covenant-breaking, idolatry, fornication, stealing, covetousness, drunkenness, sodomy, jealousy, factiousness, envy, cowardice, and lying (Rom. 1:28ff; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Rev. 21:8).

Here’s the point. When we consider how our holy Creator views sin, we can hardly afford to be selective in what sins we will pardon.

We must reflect on our own past and be painfully aware of how we have disappointed the Lord so terribly and frequently.

Because we have a tendency to minimize our own blunders and maximize the mistakes of others.

But inspiration puts the matter into sharper focus. We are to:

speaking evil of no man, not to be contentious, to be gentle, showing all meekness toward all men. For we also once were foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving different lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, [and] hating one another (Titus 3:2-3).

It is a rather terrible thing when we forget the many sins of which we’ve been forgiven (2 Pet. 1:9).

We must learn to forgive because to do otherwise is harmful to our own state of mind and even physical well-being.

In his book, *None of These Diseases*, prominent physician Dr. S.I. McMillen has a chapter titled, “The High Cost Of Getting Even.” He vividly shows that the bitter, unforgiving spirit can bring much stress and distress to both mind and body.

Forgiving can be a matter of life and death! We must try to master the art of forgiving—for others’ sake, and for our own.

The Joy of Forgiveness Received

This discussion would be incomplete if we neglected to note the attitude and corresponding action that ought to result whenever we contemplate the forgiveness we have received from our loving God.

As Jesus was visiting in the home of a Pharisee named Simon, a sinful woman (likely a former prostitute) came into the house.

She went directly to where the Lord reposed at the table. Her tears of joy flooded the Savior's feet. Drying his feet with her long hair, she gently kissed them and anointed them with precious ointment (see Lk. 7:36ff).

The Lord later explained that her actions were motivated by the forgiveness she had received from him on an earlier unrecorded occasion (see Jackson 1998, 67ff).

Her lavish actions were issuing from a heart of **profound gratitude**.

From this incident, we must learn this lesson. To whatever degree we savor our forgiveness from God and entertain an appreciation thereof, to that degree will our thanksgiving be reflected in service to the Lord.

Little gratitude equals little service and vice versa.

Oh, what a revelation this is to the character of many.

May Heaven help us to treasure the redemption of our souls and demonstrate gratitude for our forgiveness in faithful daily service to God!

Scriptural Forgiving Ethics

By H. L. Bruce

George Herbert once said, "He who cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he must pass himself." Benjamin Franklin put it like this, "Doing injury puts you below your enemy; revenging one makes you but even with him; forgiving it sets you above him." "Forgive and forget." Charles Spurgeon said, "When you bury a mad dog, don't leave his tail above the ground." Many a man will be lost, not because he was a liar, adulterer, or murderer, but because he refused to forgive.

Terminology

There are seven words in the scripture which denote the idea of forgiveness, three in the Hebrew and four in the Greek. In the Hebrew Old Testament they are "kapar," to cover; "nasa," to bear-take away guilt; and "salah," to pardon. "Nasa" is used of both human and divine forgiveness. The other two, "Kapar" and "salah," are used only of divine forgiveness. In the Greek New Testament the words are "apolyein," "charizesthai," "aphesis" and "paresis." "Apolyein" is found numerous times as "to put away," e.g. a wife (Matt. 5:31), but only once to signify forgiveness (Luke 6:37). "Paresis" is also found only once (Rom. 5:23), and suggests "disregarding," but without any suggestion of indifference. "Charizesthai" is used only by Luke and Paul, and only by the latter in the sense of "to forgive sins" (2 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 4:32; Col. 2:13; 3:13, etc.). It especially expresses the graciousness of God's forgiveness. The most common New Testament word for forgiveness is "aphesis." It conveys the idea of "sending away" or "letting go." The noun occurs fifteen times. The verb with the same meaning is used about forty times (see Baker's Dictionary of Theology, p. 226).

The God of heaven, through the greatest and grandest book that was ever written, offers unto us the most sublime blessings extant. Among those blessings, one will find the forgiveness of sins. Jehovah-God promised through the prophets and inspired the New Testament writers to confirm, that he would remember our sins no more (Jer. 31:34; Heb. 8:12; 10:17). Through God's communicated revelation, we find extensive teachings on remission of sins. In it we read, "I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely" (Hos. 14:4). "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32).

The Need For Forgiveness

The need for forgiveness is universal. In Gal. 3:22, the apostle Paul wrote, "But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." Along this same line, the apostle John concluded, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (1 Jn. 1:8-10).

It is necessary that we not only recognize the scope of our guilt before God, but we must also have a forgiving heart. As a matter of scriptural ethics, there are no limitations whatever as to the number of times that we forgive others. Jesus taught that we extend forgiveness "seven times a day" (Luke 17:4), and until "seventy times seven" (Matt. 18:22). Limitlessness is the idea! We will not be forgiven of our heavenly Father if we fail to forgive others their transgressions (Matt. 6:14-15; 18:23-35). We should forgive, on and on, those who sin and turn to us for forgiveness.

Duty to Forgive

We are our brother's keeper and we have a responsibility to each other. If a brother sins against us, we have a responsibility to try to save him. In Matt. 18:15-18, Jesus said, "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican." Another passage emphasizes the same enjoined obligation. Jesus said, in Luke 17:3, "Take heed to yourselves: if thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him, and if he repent, forgive him." In far too many instances the obligation to rebuke a brother, with a view to his restoration, is completely ignored.

On the other hand, we also have a responsibility: If a brother has something against us, we have an obligation to go and seek reconciliation. Jesus said, in the sermon on the mount; "Therefore if thou bring thy gift before the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matt. 5:23-24).

According to this, we have an obligation either way: If we have been transgressed against, we have an obligation to go, rebuke and try to restore. If, on the other hand, we know of one who has "aught" against us we have a responsibility to go and be reconciled. In many instances, the hard, cold truth is that problems exist when the involved parties do not want them solved. Grudges are held without any desire or intent to forgive.

Then there are offenders who have too much adamant, stubborn pride to repent. When conditions like these exist, unsolved problems may be expected to linger. However, when all parties are respectively penitent and forgiving-conciliate and restoring-problems will soon be amended. We should heed and practice the inspired admonition, “Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye” (Col. 3:13).

The Cost of Forgiveness

It is not only important that men have a forgiving attitude toward one another, but we all must receive forgiveness from God or else we will die in our sins and consequently, meet the Lord unprepared (see Jn. 8:21). In Revelation 21:27 we read, “And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” To understand the importance of forgiveness, look to Calvary. Jesus Christ came into this wicked, sinful world, lived among men, died the ignominious death on Calvary’s cross for the sins of mankind. My friend, he died for us. The Hebrew writer said “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Heb. 2:9). In another text, the apostle Paul wrote, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (1 Tim. 1:15). Christ died for us. He considered our sins important. His blood is the price paid. He poured it out that we might have forgiveness of sins. According to Luke, Jesus said, “Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46-47).

Alien sinners need forgiveness. In their state of alienation, they are lost. In describing their plight to the brethren at Ephesus, the apostle Paul explained, “That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12).

In order for them to be saved, aliens must believe in the Deity of Jesus (Jn. 20:30-31, repent of their past and alien sins (Acts 17:30), confess Christ before men (Romans 10:9-10), and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). In doing this, they enter Christ (Gal. 3:27). It is in Christ that “redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins” can be enjoyed (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14).

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Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions (excerpt Forgiven to Forgiving)

John Murray makes the point that the sin we forgive is not sin against God—only He can forgive that—but are those injuries that are against us. Naturally all sin, even against us (sin with a horizontal dimension), is also vertical (sin against God). That is because He has forbidden us to transgress against one another and commanded us rather to love and do good to one another. To do what God forbids or to fail to do what He commands is sin—sin against God. That is why God's forgiveness, *as well as* man's, must always be sought. It is never sufficient to ask man alone to forgive. Because unbelievers do not know the true God, they not only cannot forgive, but they cannot be truly forgiven. They have no right to God's parental forgiveness. Since they are not a part of His family of faith, they are never truly forgiven even if a believer should be willing to grant them his forgiveness.

Until they turn in repentance to Jesus Christ as Saviour and receive judicial forgiveness from God, at best non-Christians can be forgiven only on the horizontal dimension. Even then, because it is partial, misunderstood, and misappropriated forgiveness, the horizontal forgiveness is virtually useless to an unbeliever.

Murray points out that God must forgive sin against Himself. We do not, therefore, forgive sin, considered as the breaking of God's commandments, but only as it is considered injurious to ourselves. Many of the older writers attempting to distinguish horizontal forgiveness from vertical forgiveness, speak of human—to—human forgiveness as “the forgiveness of injuries.” Actually, the same sin has two dimensions: the vertical and the horizontal. Considered vertically, the sin is an offense against God, the breaking of His commandments; considered horizontally, the sin is an injury to man.

Even the church, acting as a corporate body, does not forgive sin considered in its vertical dimension. It is incorrect to think of the church as mediating forgiveness between God and man. Rather it is always horizontal, family forgiveness among brothers and sisters in Christ, that is the focus of corporate forgiveness. The church as an organized body was given the right of disciplining the members of the household of faith with reference to the horizontal dimension of sin alone (John 20:20–23). It could admit and dismiss persons into and from the visible, organized body. But because the church had no right to the keys of heaven itself or any right to deal with sin in its vertical dimension, **its forgiveness (always directed toward those who have sinned against itself or against its members) is never parental but always brotherly.**

As for the interpretation and implications of John 20:20–23, the issue can be set forth by matching the vertical/horizontal distinction with the judicial/familial distinction, yielding a vertical-judicial/familial-horizontal split. The first relates purely to unbelievers, who by faith are forgiven once for all when they become believers. The second relates to believers and has to do with family peace and harmony, vertically as well as horizontally considered. The authority given to the church regarding the retention or remission of sins pertains to the believer, to family forgiveness, and the power of church discipline, not to the unbeliever, to judicial forgiveness, and to eternal life.

The Alternative to Forgiveness—Revenge! “Our natural desire for justice after unforgivable offenses often leads to thoughts of revenge, and those thoughts all too often feel good. Revenge has been called a wild but dangerous form of justice. But does it help? Revenge can often leave us with a haunting emptiness. Revenge, no matter how just, can never bring satisfaction, for it can never replace what has been destroyed. It also brings us down to the level of the offender. There is an old saying that goes, ‘Doing an injury puts you below your enemy; revenging an injury makes you but even; forgiving it sets you above.’ We usually do not even the score when we seek revenge; we merely set in motion a pattern of revenge. To get even only makes the other side feel he or she is now one down and so must retaliate in order to stay even. The offender becomes the offended, and on and on the cycle goes until all are destroyed.

When horrible things happen to us, there is typically a period of time when we fantasize all kinds of retributive punishment. However, staying with vengeful thoughts is like playing an endless and painful video in our minds over and over again. The desire for vengeance is always linked closely with hurtful memories of the event; we cannot separate the two. An old Chinese proverb says, ‘He who seeks revenge should dig two graves,’ for not only does revenge harm the other person, but it destroys the one seeking it as well. The path that begins with revenge only leads downward to the grave.

Not all anger is bad, but anger that is held onto eventually becomes bitterness, and anger and bitterness destroy us. They are killers. One way the Bible describes anger and grudges is as a 'root of bitterness.' We are warned, 'See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many' (Hebrews 12:15, NIV). J. B. Phillips translates that verse this way: 'Be careful that none of you fails to respond to the grace which God gives, for if he does there can very easily spring up in him a bitter spirit which is not only bad in itself but can also poison the lives of many others.' We've all seen examples of how a person's bitter spirit not only eventually destroys him or her, but it also hurts those who are around the bitter person.

Why would anyone choose bitterness over forgiveness? It's easy to forget how good bitterness can feel. Proverbs tells us, 'Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can fully share its joy' (Prov. 14:10). I've always found that proverb interesting for the way it couples bitterness with joy. The joy of bitterness almost sounds absurd, but no more absurd than our phrase 'a pity party.' While we may enjoy the fantasy of revenge for a season, we need to be very careful. Bitterness is very seductive and can easily draw us in, but the end of bitterness is always destruction."

Stoop, Dr. David. *Forgiving What You'll Never Forget* (pp. 18-20). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Apologizing (excerpt From Forgiven to Forgiving)

Whereas the Bible calls for forgiveness, the world settles for apologizing. There is not so much as a single reference to apologizing in the Bible. It is a totally unscriptural concept. *“Where did it come from?”*

No one knows the full history of apologizing, but the name itself gives something of a clue. An apology is a defence. An *apologia* was a defense made at a court trial in ancient Greece. So, rather than admit wrong, apologizing originally was defending oneself against a charge of doing wrong which, of course, is exactly the opposite of what confession of sin and seeking of forgiveness is all about.

In time apologizing became a milder sort of thing where, typically, one says, “I’m sorry.” But to say, “I’m sorry,” and to say, “I sinned against God and you; will you forgive me?” are two very different things.

Think about what happens in each transaction. When apologizing someone says, “I’m sorry” What has he done? Literally, all he has done is tell you how he feels. He *has not asked you to do anything*. When someone says, “I sinned; will you forgive me?” he is *asking you to make a promise to bury the matter once and for all*. **In apologizing no commitment is made**, the matter is not resolved, and the one who was wronged is not required to put the matter to rest. He is probably glad for the fact because in apologizing the wrongdoer has not even admitted his wrong. He has simply said he feels sorry about what happened. The principal difference between the two is simply this: God requires a commitment on the part of both parties that brings the matter to a satisfactory end. The world requires no such thing. He is freed of his burden. Now, the burden for a response has shifted. The one wronged is asked to do what God requires him to do. He must either make the promise or risk offending God. There may be indecision on his part, but there is no awkwardness occasioned by unclarity. He knows what the Bible expects of him. When he says, “I forgive you,” he promises not to bring the matter up again. **The two have both made commitments.** The wrongdoer confessed to wrongdoing; he committed himself to that confession. The offended party committed himself to burying the matter. At the end of the transaction, obligations concerning the matter are over and done with. Both are free to become reconciled. The matter has been set to rest.

Old Testament. “A Jewish law professor, stated, ‘[The burden of] forgiveness is appropriate only when the wrongdoer has repented.’ He accurately represented Old Testament teaching. **It is considered a burden for the person who is doing the forgiving (notice, he even used the word ‘burden’), and forgiveness is only required when the offender repents of his or her offense.** This was and is the Jewish teaching on forgiveness. Islam teaches the same thing—forgiveness is required only in the context of repentance. In fact, the Old Testament doesn’t really deal directly with forgiving other people.

There are three Hebrew words used for forgiveness, two of which are used only in relation to divine forgiveness. The third word used in the Old Testament is primarily used in relation to God’s forgiving, but it also refers to humans forgiving each other. Its use with human forgiveness is minimal—only three times. And each time, it teaches us nothing about human forgiveness. This word is used in Genesis 50:17, when Joseph’s brothers implore Joseph to forgive them for what they had done to him; in Exodus 10:17, when Pharaoh asks both God and Moses to forgive him after the plague of locusts destroys everything in the land; and in 1 Samuel 25:28, when Abigail apologizes to King David as she intercedes for her wicked husband, Nabal, to keep David from killing him. This Old Testament word literally means ‘to lift, to pardon, or to spare’ someone. Joseph’s brothers want him to ‘lift from them’ the burden of their guilt. Pharaoh wants Moses to ‘lift from him’

the foolishness of not listening to Moses. And Abigail wants David to 'lift from her' the guilt, or foolishness, of her approaching him, the king. In each case, the one asking forgiveness is in a lower position than the one being asked to forgive; they are asking for something they don't deserve.

In contrast, the other two Old Testament words for 'forgiveness' deal only with God's forgiveness of humankind. God is always the subject of the verb; He is always the One doing the forgiving. This message of our forgiveness by God is unique to the Bible, as no other religious writing teaches that God forgives so completely and so graciously. In order for God to so graciously forgive us, two conditions must be met: (1) A life must be taken as a substitute for the sinner, and (2) The sinner must repent. This is distinctively Old Testament teaching, and is still true in regard to our becoming a child of God.

[In Luke 17] He is saying that when someone repents, we must forgive, even if that person hurts us over and over again. We go beyond forgiving three times and no more. That was a radical teaching in Jesus' day, and it still is. But the passage says nothing about what would happen if the other person refused to repent. Jesus is simply saying that whenever there is repentance, there must be forgiveness. This is part of the 'good news' of the gospel."

Stoop, Dr. David. *Forgiving What You'll Never Forget* (pp. 62-65). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Restitution's Not Punishment But Restoration

“Let’s consider a case of theft. It is not to *punish* the wrongdoer that he must return what he has stolen—with interest—but to *restore* that which was taken to its rightful owner. The concern in restitution is not to punish the forgiven wrongdoer but to help the one who was wronged. That is the fundamental idea behind restitution. Secondarily, it may serve as a warning to those who may be inclined to steal.

Here are several of the biblical laws on restitution:

The Lord said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites: ‘When a man or woman wrongs another in any way and so is unfaithful to the Lord, that person is guilty and must confess the sin he has committed. He must make full restitution for his wrong, add one fifth to it and give it all to the person he has wronged. But if that person has no close relative to whom restitution can be made for the wrong, the restitution belongs to the Lord....’” (Numbers 5:5–10, NIV)

In cases of death, when restoration to the person or near relatives was impossible, the restoration ‘belongs to the Lord,’ and so must be given to the priest (Num. 5:5–10). Presumably in such cases the secondary matter of warning becomes the primary one. Potential wrongdoers must learn from this that God will not countenance sin. While one may be forgiven his sinful act and not be punished for it, yet he may not enjoy the fruit of his sin.” – From *Forgiven to Forgiving*

Binding & Loosing. “Perhaps the step beyond forgiving is to loose or set free the one who has hurt us. We will never in our lifetime fully understand the interconnection between what we do in our lives and the work of the Holy Spirit in other people. But this seems to be one of the ways to understand Jesus’ statement about binding and loosing.

We see this principle of binding and loosing in two other biblical examples. These people prayed that God would forgive someone. In Acts 7:60, we see this prayer at work in Stephen as he is being stoned to death, which we mentioned earlier. He prayed, ‘Lord, don’t charge them with this sin!’ He was basically praying the same prayer as Jesus did on the cross—forgive them! He was loosing on earth something that God would loose in heaven. We also see this principle at work in the life of Job. After God has spent almost four chapters asking Job questions he couldn’t answer, God turned to Eliphaz the Temanite and said, ‘I am angry with you and with your two friends, for you have not spoken accurately about me as my servant Job has. So, take seven young bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer on your behalf. I will not treat you as you deserve, for you have not spoken accurately about me, as my servant Job has’ (Job 42:7–8). God was angry with Job’s three comforters. They had not only offended God by speaking wrongly of him, but also they had tried to mislead Job with their false ideas.

God chose not to deal with them by the standards they had just been lecturing about to Job. The interesting thing is that God didn't just forgive these three 'comforters' by having them simply offer their sacrifices. Instead, God instructed them to have Job pray for them. Again, it seems that **it was important for Job to 'loose their sin on earth,' so that they could be 'loosed in heaven.'** Perhaps Job prayed, 'Father, forgive them, for they didn't understand what they were saying.' We don't know what he prayed, but we do know that Eliphaz and his two friends were not free until Job had prayed for them.

There is obviously incredible power released as we forgive and then take that step beyond forgiveness—when we pray that God will forgive the one who has sinned against us. Obviously, not every situation that calls on us to forgive will call for that 'extra step' beyond forgiving. *But once we have forgiven, we may find it important to pray for those who 'sin against us,' and to ask that God will "forgive them, for they didn't know what they were doing."*

Stoop, Dr. David. *Forgiving What You'll Never Forget* (pp. 135-137). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

The image features a textured, brownish-gold background with a subtle, ethereal light source behind a horizon line. In the lower right, the silhouettes of a man in a long robe (Joseph) leading a donkey with a woman (Mary) riding on its back are visible against the light. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

for UNTO US A
SON IS **given**

TOBYNAC #SPEAKLIFE

GOD'S SPOKEN FOCUSED ON OUR INNER LIVES: **FORGOTTEN**

In the “Image and Likeness of God” by Eric Lyons

To sin against man either by murder or by slander is reprobable on the ground of the divine image being resident in man. A definite sacredness appertains to human life. Man must respect his fellow man, not on the ground of kinship, but on the ground of the exalted truth that human life belongs to God. To injure man is to injure one who bears the image of God (1943, 100:489-490).

Anderson and Reichenbach added: “To kill a human is to forfeit one’s own life, for the denial of another’s image is a denial of one’s own. This value emphasis is reiterated in James 3:9, where to curse persons is to fail to properly recognize the image of God in them” (1990, 33:198).

James wrote: “But the tongue can no man tame; it is a restless evil, it is full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we the Lord and Father; and therewith curse we men, **who are made after the likeness of God**” (3:8-9, emp. added). The English verb “are made” (ASV) derives from the Greek *gegonotas*, which is the perfect participle of the verb *ginomai*. The perfect tense in Greek is used to describe an action brought to completion in the past, but whose effects are felt in the present (Mounce, 1993, p. 219). For example, when the Bible says “it is written,” this usually is stated in the perfect tense. That is to say, scripture was written in the past, but is applicable in the present. The thrust of the Greek expression, *kath’ homoiosin theou gegonotas* (“who are made after the likeness of God”), is that humans in the past have been made according to the likeness of God and **they still are bearers of that likeness**. For this reason, as Hoekema noted, “It is inconsistent to praise God and curse men with the same tongue, since the human creatures whom we curse [whether Christians or non-Christians—EL/BT] still bear the likeness of God” (p. 20).

According to biblical instruction, sin did not **destroy** the divine image stamped upon man by Jehovah. While it is true that after the Flood, God referred to the imagination of man’s heart as being evil “from his youth” (Genesis 8:21), it also is true that just a few lines later, Moses recorded God as telling Noah that murder is wrong **because man is a divine image bearer** (9:6). Thus, Hoekema properly remarked:

We may indeed think of the image of God as having been tarnished through man’s fall into sin, but to affirm that man had by this time completely lost the image of God is to affirm something that the sacred text does not say (p. 15).

If, then, it is the case that the image of God does not refer to “spiritual perfection,” how does one correlate the image that Christ Himself possessed, and “the renewed image” that Christians possess, with such passages as Genesis 1:26-27, Genesis 9:6, and James 3:9—each of which teaches that man innately bears God’s image? The answer, of course, lies in the fact that the “image of God” applied to Jesus in the New Testament is a much “fuller” term than is intended in the usage found in Genesis 1:26-27. That is to say, the image Jesus possessed (2 Corinthians 4:3-4; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3) is one that included spiritual flawlessness and the glory that emanated from the Lord’s divine nature (two traits, incidentally, that humans do not, and cannot, possess). It is obvious that Jesus represented the “image of God” in an extremely unique sense. As Robert Morey has suggested:

This is why the Apostle Paul could refer to Jesus as the messianic image-bearer of God (Col. 1:15). As the second Adam, Christ was the full and complete image-bearer. This is why Christ could say that to see Him was to see the Father (John 14:9). Christ reflected on a finite level as the second Adam what the Father was like on an infinite level (1984, p. 37).

While it is true—as both Old and New Testament testimony makes clear—that God created man in His image, the Bible similarly teaches that Christ bore the image of God. He was the **perfect** image—an unsurpassed example of what God wants each of us to be like. When Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4 about how “the god of this world hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the gospel of the glory of **Christ, who is the image of God**, should not dawn upon them,” he used the word *eikon* for “image”—the Greek equivalent of *tselem*. Verse 6 of that same chapter elaborates on what, exactly, he meant by his use of that term: “Seeing it is God that said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ who shined in our hearts, **to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.**” Paul reiterated this same fact when he wrote in Colossians 1:15 of Jesus, “who is the **image of the invisible God.**” This is precisely the point Christ Himself was making when He said to Philip: “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9). Boiled down to their essence, the two passages amount to this: If you look carefully at Christ, you will see God, since Jesus is His **perfect image**. There is a remarkable corollary in Hebrews 1:1-4: God...has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who **being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person**, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they (NKJV, emp. added).

When we reflect on the fact that Christ is the perfect image of God and is one with Him, it helps us understand just how much we are able to view God through Christ. Because Christ was without sin (Hebrews 4:15), we can witness the image of God in all of its perfection. Christ bore the image of God in a way that man cannot. Using the same type of logic, it also is reasonable to conclude that the image of God possessed by Christians (Colossians 3:10; Ephesians 4:22-24) simply is one that is more “refined” than what non-Christians possess. In commenting on Colossians 3:10, Camp wrote: Paul here implies that sin makes man less like God than he **should** be, but I believe he is using “image of his Creator” in a fuller sense than intended in Gen. 1:26-27. Man is like God in some aspects of his nature and therefore has the **potential** (and duty) of being like God in action. The sinner is less like God in action, even if the divine aspects of his nature are unchanged, and therefore can be said to be less like his Creator (1999, p. 47, emp. added, parenthetical item in orig.).

Realistically then, “the things that make mankind in the image of God are still present in the worst sinner as well as in the best saint” (Brown, 1993, 138[8]:50). All kings and peasants, all sinners and saints, possess God’s image; **it is the use of this image that makes the difference in mankind’s relationship with God.**

Therefore, God has “spoken” (Hebrews 1:1), and in so doing He has made known to man His laws and precepts through the revelation He has provided in a written form within the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 2:11ff.; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21). Thus, mankind is expected to act in a morally responsible manner (Matthew 19:9; Acts 14:15-16; 17:30; Hebrews 10:28ff.) in accordance with biblical laws and precepts. Surely, then, this is a part of our having been fashioned “in the image of God.”

Every Offense?

God has provided a means for handling the multitude of offenses that we commit against one another. But it is not by forgiveness. In 1 Peter 4:8, quoting Proverbs 17:9, Peter points out that those who love one another “cover a multitude of sins” in love. It is only those sins which throw the covers off that must be dealt with by the Luke 17 and Matthew 18 processes: those offenses that break fellowship and lead to an unreconciled condition require forgiveness. Otherwise, we simply learn to overlook a multitude of offenses against ourselves, recognizing that we are all sinners and that we must gratefully thank others for covering our sins as well.

Smedes cannot be right when he divides offenses into categories, some of which must be forgiven and some that need not be. Any offense, no matter what its nature, may create an unreconciled condition, depending on how the offended party responds to the offense. The same offense may or may not result in an unreconciled condition, depending on many changeable and unpredictable factors, such as the predisposition of the one offended, his past experiences, the number of times it has been repeated, how he interprets it, and so on. Categorized lists of offenses, therefore, are misleading and unhelpful.

The Matter of “Heart Sins”

Not all sins are outward transgressions against another. When Jesus spoke of committing adultery in the heart (Matt. 5:28), He was referring to what I am here calling a “heart sin.” The heart sin is known only to God and the sinner. It is not known to the one toward whom the sinful thought in the heart is directed. Lust, anger, envy, etc., that flare up in the heart, but are dealt with before they are outwardly manifested, need not be confessed to anyone but God. Indeed, confession to persons totally unaware of what you are thinking can lead to additional sin and unnecessary hurt. Heart sins must be carefully distinguished from other transgressions, unknown to other parties to whom you are obligated to confess and seek forgiveness. – *From Forgiven to Forgiving*

Remember, that human forgiveness among the members of Christ's church should take God's forgiveness of them as a model (Eph. 4:32). So, the question is, "Does God withhold all **consequences** once He forgives another?"

Anyone who has read the story of David and Bathsheba knows otherwise. Though He forgave David for his sin, nevertheless God took the life of David's child. Why? Was God punishing David in spite of forgiveness? God was not punishing David by taking the baby's life, though certainly the death of his child broke David's heart. *God was doing something else.* That is the important truth to grasp when thinking about continuing consequences of forgiven sin. They are never punishment, though at times they may be quite unpleasant and cause complications, pain, or sorrow. But those are side-effects, incidental consequences that flow from something else.

In David's case, by taking the life of the child, God was showing the pagan tribes which had been making hay over David's sin that He is the holy God who does not condone sin, even in His rulers. Listen to what Nathan said to David as it is recorded in 2 Samuel 12:13: "The Lord on His part has taken away your sin [clearly God had forgiven him]; you will not have to die [personal punishment was withheld]" (MLB). But, God also said, "Nevertheless, because you have provided by this action such an opportunity for the enemies of the Lord to ridicule, the son born to you must surely die" (2 Sam. 12:14, MLB).

Other consequences followed. "The sword shall not turn away from your household...[and there will be] trouble from within your own family" (2 Sam. 12:10–11, MLB). Again, the consequence that God set in motion was not designed as a punishment for David. "You have acted in secret; but I will have this done with all Israel looking on, in broad daylight" (2 Sam. 12:12, MLB). God was not going back on His promise of forgiveness. By these additional consequences, He was warning the entire covenant community that even the king cannot sin without consequences. He was using David's sin as a stern warning to all Israel.

The vital principle that must be understood about continuing consequences is this: *Continuing consequences always have some good and beneficial purpose that must never be construed as the punishment of a forgiven sinner.*

- From *Forgiven to Forgiving*

**“WE ALL AGREE THAT FORGIVENESS
IS A BEAUTIFUL IDEA UNTIL WE
HAVE TO PRACTICE IT.”**

—❧ C.S. LEWIS ❧—

Forgive and Forget?

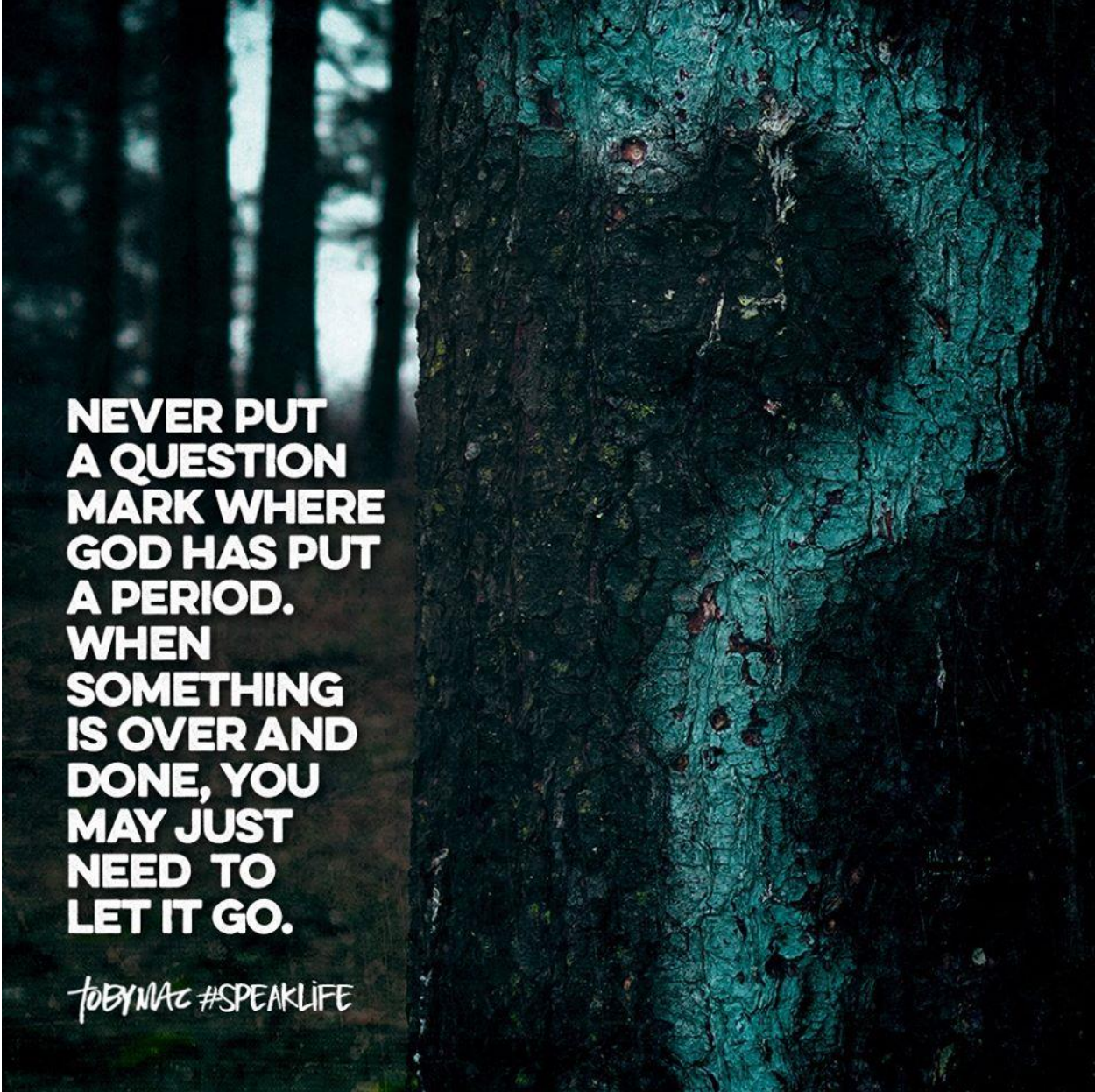
You will remember that I drew a line between “not remembering,” which I said was active and “forgetting,” which I pointed out was passive. At that point I observed that God, the omnipotent Creator of the universe who knows all things, past, present, and future, does not forget. It is impossible for Him to do so (even though those who fail to observe the distinction between forgetting and not remembering often write as if God limited Himself in order to forget). Of course, that is not possible. God cannot deny His own nature. The problem is easily resolved by remembering that forgetting, a passive activity, belongs to human beings alone. But like God, they may also not remember.

Exactly what am I talking about in calling forgetting passive and not remembering active? By that I mean that one has direct control over not remembering but does not have control over forgetting. You can *not remember* in response to a command or a promise, but you have absolutely no control over forgetting. When you forget, it just happens. Remember that we said not remembering simply means not bringing a matter up to use it against another. When you promise to forgive another, you promise to remember his wrongdoing by bringing it up to him, to others, or to yourself. That means you won't talk to others about it, and you won't allow yourself to sit and brood over it either.

The Bible never commands “forgive and forget.” That is one of those old, unbiblical statements by which people often try to guide their lives that is utterly incorrect. If you try to forget, you will fail. In fact, the harder you try the more difficult you will find forgetting. That's because the more you attempt to do so, the harder you concentrate on the incident you are attempting (unsuccessfully) to forget.

No, you just can't forget on command, and the Bible doesn't require you to do so. It asks only that you model your forgiveness after God's, and God promises to not remember.

Absolutely not. You see, the wonderful thing about God's forgiveness is this: When you make the promise to not remember one's sins against him anymore and keep it, you will find that *you will forget!* Indeed, the very best way to forget is to keep the promise. If you don't rehearse the wrongdoing to others or to yourself, more quickly than you'd realize it will fade away. Forgiving is the only way to forget. – From *Forgiven to Forgiving*



**NEVER PUT
A QUESTION
MARK WHERE
GOD HAS PUT
A PERIOD.
WHEN
SOMETHING
IS OVER AND
DONE, YOU
MAY JUST
NEED TO
LET IT GO.**

TOBYMAC #SPEAKLIFE

Forgiving Yourself. “Look also at the experience of the apostle Paul. Prior to his conversion to the Christian faith, Paul had been the great enemy of the early church, and of Jesus. He was feared by the early Christians, and rightfully so, for he had the power of life and death over them. Many were put to death because of Paul’s instruction. And we have the vivid description of Stephen being stoned to death as the early Paul, then known as Saul, stood by and watched. He was one of the official witnesses at the killing of Stephen (Acts 8:1). Paul had much to forgive himself for in his pre-conversion behavior! In truth, Paul would have been less than human if, during those silent years after his conversion, he had not struggled with the issue of how to forgive himself for the horrible things he had done against Christ and the church. Perhaps his incredible writings about God’s forgiveness came from that struggle. **Paul takes what Jesus taught and puts it into the context of our everyday lives.** For example, he urges us to ‘Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you’ (Eph. 4:31–32).

Paul doesn’t speak directly to the issue of forgiving ourselves, but he understood the power of forgiveness! He could only do that if he had forgiven himself for his past.”

Stoop, Dr. David. *Forgiving What You'll Never Forget* (pp. 120-121). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

The word *guilt* has cropped up throughout. However, since the advent of modern psychology, people have been misusing the word guilt; in the minds of many the word no longer retains its true meaning. Of what do you think when you hear the word “guilt”?

If you have not been in court lately, you may think of that miserable feeling that comes over you when you know you have done something wrong. In spite of that misuse of the term by psychologists and persons in a psychologized age, the word guilt does *not* refer to feelings.

Guilt and Guilt Feelings

What is guilt then? Guilt is culpability—that is, liability to punishment. Thomas Oden, therefore, is unhelpful when he defines guilt psychologically as, “the memory of any past action inconsistent with conscience and moral self-understanding.” Oden is speaking not of guilt as such but of the *sense* of guilt that one experiences when he sins. When he recognizes and acknowledges sin in his attitudes or actions, one senses a feeling of disease or even deep pain within. The feeling of guilt is a true, organic response of the body triggered by the conscience. Your feelings, which are your perception of your own bodily state, pick up the emotion and register it as a miserable feeling.

This subjective sense or feeling of guilt is not guilt. Guilt is culpability that may be objectively considered by others and recognized by oneself. It is the state in which one finds himself before God and others when he has sinned—a state of liability to punishment.

One may be guilty yet free from such feelings. This is what Paul meant when he spoke of those who were “past feeling” (Eph. 4:19), who had “seared their consciences with a hot iron” (1 Tim. 4:2). By continually disregarding the pangs of conscience such persons learn to live with them and at length they no longer feel them. Their consciences are like a piece of scar tissue, cauterized to the point where it no longer experiences pain at all. Eventually conscience fails and no longer makes them aware of their guilt.

Whenever I speak of “guilt” I mean “liability to punishment,” not the unpleasant feelings that may accompany it. But realize that reconciliation postponed and repeatedly avoided can lead to the false peace of a cauterized conscience. Whether or not you feel a sense of guilt therefore, is quite irrelevant. **The only question is, “Are you guilty?”** If you have wronged anyone by doing (or failing to do) something the Bible forbids (or commands), you are guilty—whether you feel like it or not. If you have allowed an unreconciled condition to remain between you and a brother, you are guilty—whether you feel like it or not. In all cases where guilt exists you must deal with it regardless of the presence or lack of feelings triggered by guilt. Incidentally, the way to deal with the sense of guilt is not by attacking the feeling directly with drugs or other means of escape, but to deal with the cause of the feelings—the guilt itself.¹

¹ Adams, J. E. (1989). [*From forgiven to forgiving*](#) (pp. i–170). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Forgiveness And Forgetting

Many Christians have a problem with forgiveness and forgetting. They ask God's forgiveness, but still feel that because of their remembering the sin, they may not have been forgiven. Sometimes, those who obey the Lord in baptism continue to remember their past sins and wonder whether God has truly forgiven them.

There is a difference between being forgiven and forgetting. Saul of Tarsus was forgiven of his sins when he was baptized "to wash away" his sins (Acts 22:16), but he remembered his past sins when he wrote Timothy (1 Tim. 1:13-15). In the Old Testament we read of David being forgiven, yet he remembered his past sins. Nathan said, "God hath put away thy sin" (2 Sam. 12:13), but years later David wrote about his past sins (Psa. 32:1-5). The apostle Peter was pricked in the heart by the crowing of a rooster (Lk. 22:61,62), and obviously repented of his sin. His life afterward shows clearly that he was aware of God's forgiveness, but no doubt the sound of a rooster crowing sent pains through his heart for a long time after that event.

The Bible records many sins that God had forgiven and did not hold against the forgiven party. Did God remember them? If not, how did He inspire the writers to write about them? Did God forgive the fornicator in Corinth, after he repented? In the second epistle to the Corinthians, Paul said, "Sufficient to such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the many; so that contrariwise ye should rather forgive him and comfort him, lest by any means such a one should be swallowed up with his overmuch sorrow" (2 Cor. 2:6,7). This clearly implies that God had forgiven him, and that they were to do likewise, yet God "remembered" in the sense that he inspired Paul to write about it. There is a difference between forgiving and forgetting.

When a child of God commits sin and asks God's forgiveness, how does he know that he has been forgiven? The same way that an alien sinner knows that God has forgiven him – by what God said! God said that if “we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn. 1:9). This does not mean that we forget that we committed the sin, but we can be assured that God treats us as though we had never committed it. He does not hold it against us.

Though Paul remembered the terrible persecutions that he had inflicted upon God's people (1 Tim. 1:12-15), he could still “forget the things that are behind” (Phil. 3:13), in the sense that he did not allow them to hinder his faithfulness to Christ. There was no doubt in Paul's mind whether God had forgiven him. Neither should there be any in our minds when we conform to the conditions God has revealed.

By Frank Jamerson

Guardian of Truth XXVIII: 4, p. 117

SUBJECT OVERVIEW IN PRESENTATION OUTLINE

Title: “The Responsibility of the Offended” By Allen Dvorak

Text: Luke 17:3-4

Introduction:

- A. Note the prayers of both Jesus and Stephen:
 - 1. Jesus: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” (Luke 23:34)
 - 2. Stephen: “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” (Acts 7:60)
- B. The Scriptures also obligate us to forgive others.
 - 1. Matthew 6:14-15; note the consequence of not forgiving our fellow man
 - 2. Ephesians 4:32
- C. Some people are understandably confused at the statement that there are instances in which a Christian should not, must not, forgive one who has sinned against him.
- D. Purpose:
 - 1. Remind ourselves of what forgiveness is.
 - 2. Distinguish between extending forgiveness and preparing for it.
 - 3. Describe how we can prepare ourselves to forgive others.

Body:

I. What Is Forgiveness?

- A. By definition:
 - 1. **[aphiemi] - verb**
 - a. “primarily, to send forth, send away, denotes, besides its other meanings, to remit or forgive...” Vine, p. 462.
 - b. “cancel, remit, pardon” A & G, pg. 125.
 - c. “to let go, give up, a debt, by not demanding it, i.e. to remit, forgive:” Thayer, pg. 89.
 - d. “1. to give up claim to requital from (an offender); to pardon; as to forgive one's enemies. 2. to give up resentment or claim to requital on account of (an offense); to remit the penalty of; as to forgive a wrong.” Webster, pg. 393-4 “forgive”
 - 2. Forgiveness, then, is an act in which the offended sets the offender free of the sin; releases the offender from the guilt of the sin.
 - a. This is the sense in which God “forgets” when He forgives (Hebrews 8:12).
 - b. We can release an offender from the guilt of sin without forgetting that they committed the sin.
- B. There is a sense in which all sin represents a debt against God, but often sin also involves a debt against other men (see Matthew 6:12; “our debtors”). When are we obligated to cancel another debt?

II. Forgiveness Is Conditional

- A. Illustration: the Gethsemane prayers of Jesus (Matthew 26:39, 42)
 - 1. Jesus’ request concerning the “cup” wasn’t granted; it was the Father’s will He drink it.
 - 2. Jesus recognized the condition (the Father’s will must be done).
- B. The prayer of Jesus upon the cross was likewise conditional, although Jesus did not express

- the condition in the prayer.
1. Luke 17:3-4
 2. Acts 2:22-23
- C. Note that Stephen's prayer was different. He prayed that God would not charge them with the sin, not that they should be forgiven.
- D. If we "release" the sinner from his guilt without repentance on his part, we act in defiance of the Lord's statement.
1. Repentance is always a condition of forgiveness, human or divine..
 2. Confession is a manifestation of repentance (see Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9)
- E. Does this mean that we may be bitter or hateful against the sinner? (Note that this is the common conclusion of those who argue that we must forgive under any circumstances).

III. When Forgiveness Is Needed...

- A. We must look at sin and forgiveness on more than one level. What happens when one person sins against another?
1. Level One: The sinner incurs guilt because he violated God's law.
 - a. The person sinned against now considers the offender as guilty.
 - b. Sin, of course, has the capacity to separate man from God.
 2. Level Two: The person sinned against may have been greatly hurt emotionally.
 - a. When someone sins against us, frequently we are hurt emotionally.
 - b. It is also not unusual to feel anger at first, anger at the unfairness of the sin.
 - c. We are at a dangerous stage. That anger can turn into malice, bitterness or hatred (Ephesians 4:26).
 3. The relationship between the two people has been affected.
 - a. Just as man's sin comes between him and God, so sin damages the relationships between people.
 - b. The depth of the fracture in the relationship depends on a number of things (e.g., length of the relationship; nature of the sin), but sin hurts the relationship.
- B. People "short-circuit" forgiveness in several ways.
1. Forgiveness is not ignoring the sin
 - a. Some people "forget" sins committed against them because they dare not remember the pain/hurt caused by the sin. The sin and its hurt are consigned to a "black hole" in our subconscious, where it awaits opportunity to rise up and bite us!
 - b. Matthew 18:15-17; Luke 17:3
 2. Forgiveness is not excusing the sin.
 - a. Some people are continually smothering conflict by excusing sin so that it is difficult for forgiveness to take place. They give the sinner a pass!
 3. Forgiveness is not a refusal to take vengeance (Romans 12:19).
 4. Forgiveness should not be confused with tolerance.
 - a. Forgiveness frequently does not remove the temporal consequences of sin.
 - b. Example: the innocent party may forgive the "guilty" party, but still divorce them for their unfaithfulness.
- C. Forgiveness is necessary for the spiritual healing of the relationship.
1. However, not only the relationship has been hurt.
 2. We prepare for forgiveness by dealing with our own personal hurt and/or anger.

III. Preparing Ourselves

- A. The prayers of Jesus and Stephen certainly manifested their attitude: a willingness to forgive
- B. The responsibility of the one who has been sinned against:
 - 1. Rebuke the sinner (Luke 17:3)
 - a. Often the sinner does not realize that he has sinned.
 - b. If the sinner does not agree that he has sinned, it may take extended study of the Scriptures with him.
 - 2. Get my attitude right! Until I deal with my own hurt, I am not inclined to release someone from their sin.
 - a. "I'll never forgive him for as long as I live!"
 - b. Others mouth the words of forgiveness, but actually harbor anger and bitterness in their hearts.
 - c. Forgiveness bypasses a strict system of justice and instead extends mercy. We must prepare our hearts to be able to do this.
 - 3. If the sinner repents, we must forgive (Luke 17:3-4). There is no such thing as probational forgiveness. We either forgive or we don't! Note that the sinner can be forgiven by God and we can jeopardize our salvation by NOT forgiving (Matthew 6:14-15)!!
- C. Do this mean that we can continue to feel anger, hatred or bitterness toward the sinner who does not repent?
 - 1. Absolutely not. We must not confuse the acceptance and healing of our own hurt with forgiveness.
 - 2. We can accept the injustice of the hurt; the unfairness of the sin against us without releasing the offender of the guilt of the sin--they retain the status of a lawbreaker, but their action no longer controls my emotional state.

IV. How Can I Prepare To Forgive?

- A. Realize that an unforgiving attitude hurts us, not the sinner!
 - 1. Spiritually - bitterness and hatred are sins (Galatians 5:20; Ephesians 4:31)!
 - 2. Physically - makes me an emotional hostage of the sinner
- B. We make the task of forgiving much more difficult when we rehearse the sins of another, either to ourselves or to others.
 - 1. Illustration: Keep opening afresh a wound and it may eventually heal, but it leaves a scar!
 - 2. Perhaps if we remember our own sins more, we could avoid the sinful attitude of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:23-35).

Conclusion:

- A. We are not permitted to forgive if the sinner does not repent.
- B. Even in cases in which we are not permitted by God to forgive, we must prepare ourselves by avoiding malice, hatred and bitterness.
- C. If the sinner repents, we must forgive--or be cut off from forgiveness ourselves (Matthew 6:12, 14-15).

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*Resentment is like
drinking poison and
then hoping it will kill
your enemies.*

NELSON MANDELA,
anti-apartheid activist and politician

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**FORGIVENESS DOES
NOT CHANGE THE
PAST BUT IT DOES
ENLARGE THE
FUTURE.**

PAUL LEWIS BOESE,
business executive

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when you finally
learn that a
person's behavior
has more to do
with their internal
struggle than it
ever did with you...
you learn grace.



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