

*Should I forgive?*



*Or not forgive?*

# Living Water Resources

Come to the River

## **Forgiveness**

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## *Forgive, or not forgive?*

*Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times." Matt 18:21-22*

Luke adds repentance before forgiveness.

*'Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him.'* Luke 17:3-4

Even the repeat offenders are continually forgiven by us according to the Lord.

Forgive others first, and then we can be forgiven as we show we know the value of forgiveness.

*"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."* Matt 6:12

Our forgiveness for others as commanded by the Lord demonstrates our humility in the face of injustice, and our obedience in the light of eternal life. Only the humble and obedient can be forgiven, and only the humble and obedient know how to forgive.

Jesus was humble and obedient unto death on a cross. He was unjustly accused, spat upon, beaten, denied justice and mercy; but the Lord did not open His mouth to complain, instead He said, "*Father, forgive them.*"

There are three possible positions in considering forgiveness.

1. The forgiveness of obedience.
2. Requiring repentance first.
3. Trusting God that His way is right.

We can take the view that forgiveness must be only possible after repentance, or that we need to forgive sometimes even when repentance is missing, trusting in God that His plan is the right way. It is clear that Jesus taught there are in fact two faces to forgiveness we need to

consider. One is in the way we show mercy and grace from our perspective handing the offence over to God, and the other is the one that leads to eternal life. Sometimes the situation will mean we need to forgive because repentance is not forthcoming, or indeed because it is impossible under the circumstances.

### **Forgiveness as obedience**

*“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.”*  
Matt 6:12

Others first, and then us as we show we know the value of forgiveness.

*“For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.”*  
Matt 6:14

Again, others first, and then we will be forgiven.

*“But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”*  
Matt 6:15

Forgiveness may be required of us time after time. Even the repeat offenders are continually forgiven by us according to the Lord.

Then Peter came up and said to him, *“Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times? Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.”* Matt 18:21-22

**Our forgiveness must a genuine decision of the heart.**

*“So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”* Matt 18:35

*“And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”* Mark 11:25

*‘But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.’* Matt 5:44

One of Jesus' main teachings was that we love our enemies, pray for them, and do good to those who have hurt us. It is curious how some of us read the Gospels over and again and miss this. We may get the idea of what is needed, but not the graciousness that Jesus taught and exemplified.

While love and forgiveness are not synonymous, love is an act of grace to those who hurt us and persecute us. This love for those who don't love us opens the way for them to see the grace of God through the hidden person of the heart having the imperishable beauty of a gently quiet spirit which is precious in the sight of God. This love assumes forgiveness.

*"Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing"*                      Luke 23:34

Had Jesus adopted the position that he should wait until they repent, he would have shown himself to be as lost as those for whom he was dying. Furthermore, he did not shout at them,

"I forgive you." He prayed, Father you *forgive them*. His request was in the aorist imperative form, as in the way He often gave a command, not expecting a refusal.

How much repentance do you suppose there was at the Cross while Jesus hung there?

Our forgiveness for others as commanded by the Lord demonstrates our humility in the face of injustice, and our obedience in the light of eternal life. Only the humble and obedient can be forgiven, and only the humble and obedient know how to forgive.

Jesus was humble and obedient unto death on a cross. He was unjustly accused, spat upon, beaten, denied justice and mercy; but the Lord did not open His mouth to complain, instead He said, "*Father, forgive them.*" Entrusting Himself to God.

*'For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found*

*in his mouth. When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.’* 1 Pet 2:21-24

If we wait for those who have hurt us to repent before we are prepared to forgive, we will almost certainly wait for a long, long time. We also give ourselves justification to stay bitter the rest of our lives.

It is very likely that those who hurt us don't even think they have done anything wrong. Nine out of ten people I have to forgive don't think they have done anything wrong to me; which suggests that I, too, have probably hurt people without knowing, and without repenting.

When Jesus showed up behind their closed doors after His resurrection, He did not say to them, "How could you do this to me?" He merely said, "*Peace be with you! As the*

*Father has sent me, I am sending you."*  
(John 20:21) He affirmed them as if nothing had happened; He let them save face; forgiveness was assumed.

So let us answer the question "How are we able to forgive them?" The answer: because God has forgiven us. Are we perfect? We may say, "I haven't done what they did," but we have done other things that in God's sight are likely to be just as harmful. Not only that; we have the Holy Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is love. (Gal. 5:22) Therefore we can do it.

The signs to know we have forgiven can be summarized this way: (1) We do not try to continually intimidate them; (2) we do not insist on them feeling guilty; (3) we accept the matter of total forgiveness as a "life sentence"—we have to keep doing it, indefinitely; (4) we pray that they will gain sight of God's will and come to walk with God in righteousness and truth.

## **Forgiveness requiring repentance first**

There are a number of places in the Bible which call for repentance. *'Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him.'* Luke 17:3-4

God requires repentance, and God forgives us when we repent. (Mark 1:15, Luke 13:3, 5) He does not grant forgiveness to those of us who are stiff-necked and refuse to repent. We must recognize our sin and repent to receive and enjoy God's merciful forgiveness and salvation for our souls. Consequently the argument goes, if God requires repentance, so also must we.

## **Forgiveness is for God alone to give**

God's divine will, will not be denied. Everyone will be called to give account for every careless word and everything they have done on earth. To insist on taking God's place

in forgiveness is to say God is in fact not God. Is this not a case of the kettle calling the pot black?

It is true that repentance to God is important and necessary because it's a person's only hope for real change. (Matt 18:3; Acts 26:20) If we don't admit our sin to God, it's impossible to be changed. If we aren't keenly aware of the sinful direction our lives are going, we will not see a need to alter our ways. Repentance demonstrates that we know we need God to help us change our thinking, attitudes, and behavior. When it comes to the sins of others against us we can remember God will not be denied. *'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?'* Gen 18:25

Instead of giving in to revenge, we soften our hearts toward those who have hurt us when we humbly admit that we, too, have hurt others. We too are guilty of carrying around a log in our eye we still fail to acknowledge. It is only by God's grace that we can enjoy His

goodness toward us at all. Just as importantly; we can have faith that God will avenge if it is necessary (Lev 19:18, Rom 12:19-21) and that He will hold each of us accountable. (Rom14:12; Heb 4:13 ) We don't need to worry because our pain doesn't go unnoticed by our Lord. (Psalm 147:3) With that in mind, we can demonstrate a deeper trust in God and be led to pray for those who've hurt us.

In many difficult situations, forgiveness is giving over to God the wrong done to us. It's saying to God, "Okay, Lord, I'm not going to hold onto this offense any more. I'm surrendering it to you." Our forgiveness is a choice, not a feeling. When we forgive like this, say to the Lord, "God, this person really hurt me. But I'm giving it all to you. I do not want this offense to be a breach in relationship any further. I will not harbor it my soul. Here you go, Lord, here's the hurt."

## **We forgive as we've been forgiven**

Our willingness to forgive is not to be without wisdom to understand that change only comes with repentance. Forgiveness does not mean we act as if no wrong has been done; but it does mean we recognise that grace has been abundantly given to us. So we must take care not to expect what they have not accepted responsibility for doing. We need to be wise for without true repentance the offender may very well offend again. If repentance is absent, and personal safety is involved, restoration of the relationship would not be a wise thing to contemplate at the time.

It's important to recognise to forgive is not to downplay wrongdoing. When we choose to forgive, we release a person to God's economy of justice. We relinquish the right to seek personal revenge. But we act according to current realities.

If we truly love the Lord we will do as He commands, and He will give us the ability to follow through in doing His will.

Abide in His love

# *Forgiven*



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