



"Everyone thinks forgiveness is wonderful idea until they actually have something to forgive."

—C.S. Lewis

03-Feb-23

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

The sequence of petitions in the second half of the Lord's Prayer ([Matthew 6: 11-12](#)) tells us that we should pray daily for the food we need for that day. The next request is for God's forgiveness of our sins, followed by what can be a threatening, disturbing statement: Forgiveness from [God](#) is directly tied to our forgiving those who have sinned against us! We must reciprocate God's forgiveness by forgiving others' [offenses](#) committed against us.

God created the human need for food each day. We, however, have created the need for forgiveness each day through [sin](#). Sin obligates us to seek forgiveness from God because our sins are ultimately against Him. However, a person cannot [seek God](#) for forgiveness until he is first aware of his indebtedness. One cannot truly forgive until he is aware of his shortcomings because it is from a sensitive awareness of one's own weaknesses that sympathetic feelings for others' weaknesses are born.

To impress this principle on every hearer of His Word, after completing His instruction on prayer, [Jesus](#) returns to the subject of forgiveness in [Matthew 6:14-15](#): "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will

your Father forgive your trespasses." When such teaching follows so closely after identical teaching, God is attempting to press its importance home to us.

Jesus' Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector exposes the self-righteous as critical and unforgiving people because they are blind to their own weaknesses. They have difficulty putting themselves in another person's shoes. [Luke 18:9](#), 14 records, "Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others. . . . 'I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other, for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.'"

How can a person forgive when he has an exalted opinion of himself and despises others? How can one who, in his own eyes, never does anything wrong consider himself guilty of offending someone else? This person is set up for being easily aggrieved over insignificant offenses that he perceives as having been deliberately committed against him and, at the same time, being unable to forgive because it is beneath him to excuse a person he despises. To scorn the offender and speak evil of him are far more likely reactions.

Notice the scornful comment of the self-righteous Pharisee in [Luke 7:39](#): "Now when the Pharisee who had invited [Jesus] saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, 'This man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner.'" Yet, notice that Jesus does not forgive the disdainful Pharisee, but the sinful woman: "Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little" (verse 47).

The Pharisee loved neither God nor the woman. If he had loved God, he would have served Jesus and been more sympathetic and tolerant toward her. This leads us to a critical understanding: Beginning to [love](#) God triggers the seeking of His forgiveness, and from that relationship flows the [merciful](#) attitude and the ability to forgive as God forgives because it induces consideration of one's own failings.

Self-exalting, self-righteous people hold such a high opinion of themselves that they are essentially ignorant of the need to grant forgiveness, especially

to those they judge as beneath them. We are often guilty of setting limits on our granting of forgiveness because we believe that it merely opens the door for the offender to abuse us further. Jesus addresses this in [Matthew 18:21-22](#) and [Luke 17:3-5](#). His instruction helps us to understand God's expectations of us as His children. His standards are exceedingly high.

When Peter asks Jesus how often he should forgive his brother, he apparently understood his estimation to be relatively high and sufficient. He asks, "Up to seven times?" ([Luke 17:4](#) adds "in a day"). No, Jesus replies, "but up to seventy times seven"! Jesus uses a figure of speech that implies "without limits" or "without number." His answer so shocks the disciples that they reply, "Lord, increase our [faith](#)" ([Luke 17:5](#))!

Offenses against one another within the church are inevitable. To God, pardoning these offenses is so important to the creation of Christ's image in us and to the [peace](#) and spiritual well-being of the church that it must be done regardless of what we fear the outcome will be. Our trust in God's oversight of the well-being of all concerned must be strong enough to place the outcome in His hands. He is well aware of all the offense's facets and all the hurts it has inflicted. Do we believe He knows who did what and why, as well as the correct balance of innocence and cause in every case?

What is forgiveness on our part? It is to lay aside all claims of getting even. Paul writes in [Romans 12:14](#), "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse." He adds in verse 17, "Repay no one evil for evil," and in verse 19, "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the LORD."

Rising to defend ourselves is a natural but carnal reaction, yet we must trust God to bring things to light in His own order and timeframe. We must not allow ourselves to resort to counter-offenses, as did brethren in Corinth, who took one another to court before unbelievers. Paul corrects them for not letting go of their vengeful spirit: "Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated?" ([1 Corinthians 6:7](#)).

Sometimes we must be reminded of how important God considers our responsibility to forgive. Jesus' [Parable of the Unforgiving Servant \(Matthew 18:22-35\)](#) covers this. It follows Peter's question in verse 21, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus' conclusion is found in verses 32-35:

Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?" And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.

This is truly a weighty responsibility. Only through much prayer can our resentment be dissolved and any breach healed. God is the God of peace. He can and will respond to our honest and sincere requests for the reconciliation of a damaged relationship between brethren.

- John W. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Forgiveness and the Perpetual Covenant of Peace](#)

by Mark Schindler

It is commonly thought that we pay no price for forgiveness, yet Scripture shows that God gives us responsibilities to be a part of His family. He calls us to be living sacrifices (Romans 12), imitating Our Elder Brother, walking in God's statutes, including forgiving those who have wronged us. Following Christ's and Stephen's examples of forgiving their enemies, we can realize that our enemies, blinded by hatred inspired by Satan, are woefully ignorant of the depth of their spiritual depravity, just as was Saul before his conversion. Because Jesus bore the sins of Israel in meekness and humility, we must also exercise humility, meekness, and forbearance for our fellow

humans. As we make the covenant of peace (Hebrews 8:10, 10:16, Jeremiah 31:31), having God's Laws firmly implanted in our hearts, our obligation is to imitate Christ as He has forgiven us rather than to adopt the ways of the unjust servant, who refused to forgive a diminutive debt in comparison to the horrendous debt which was forgiven him. If we have anything against anyone, we need to soberly reflect on our own massive debt that Christ generously forgave. We need to forgive in the same measure Christ has forgiven us or we run the fearful risk of treading on the blood of Jesus Christ.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Parable of the Unforgiving Servant](#)

by Martin G. Collins

Offenses and sins against us are unfortunately common. Jesus teaches us how to deal with them in this parable, focusing on our attitude of forgiveness because of being forgiven ourselves.

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G. Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email Subscriptions page](#).
