

How Do I Know If I Have Really Forgiven Someone?

Matthew 6:14: (NASB) *For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.*



We have all been wronged by someone. Sometimes the wrong is especially deep and hurtful and we are debilitated by it. We have all also heard the saying “forgive and forget.” The forgiving part sounds like a really magnanimous Christian thing to do. However, it can be deeply challenging, depending upon the hurt we have suffered. The “forgetting” part? Well, that can be overwhelmingly difficult and in many cases it may not even be possible. So, what is a Christian to do? How do we know who and when to forgive? Are the biblical “rules” for forgiving always the same? What if I forgive and really mean it then begin to feel like I want to change my mind?

These are big questions! First, we need to establish a biblical perspective of forgiveness.

There are several words translated as *forgive* or *forgiveness* in the New Testament. Many of us have preconceived ideas on what forgiveness means because we use the word all the time. But is it used the same way today as it is in the New Testament?

We will focus on only two of these New Testament Greek words today. The first word shows us the most comprehensive type of forgiveness in Scripture:

Forgiveness: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #859 *aphesis*; from #863; freedom; (figuratively) pardon

The King James Version translates this as “remission” 9 times, “forgiveness” 6 times, “deliverance” once, “liberty” once

Greek-English Lexicon: 1) release from bondage or imprisonment; 2) forgiveness or pardon of sins (letting them go as if they had never been committed), remission of the penalty

This is a very definitive forgiveness and clearly is fulfilled by the sacrifice of Jesus.

This forgiveness is not applied to everyone all at once. Its first application is for those who are “called-out” to follow Jesus.



This is on the day of Pentecost when the holy spirit, God's power and influence, was given to the apostles. Devout Jewish men witnessed what happened and Peter gives them a long explanation of their national history, prophecy and the resurrection of Christ.

Acts 2:36-39: (NASB) ³⁶Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified. ³⁷Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do? ³⁸Peter said to them, Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for **the forgiveness <859>** (pardon or remission) of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the holy spirit. ³⁹For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.



This is a big deal because previously for the Jews, the only way to have any standing before God was to follow the Old Testament Law and its detailed Atonement Day sin offering requirements year after year. Now moving forward, the remission of sins would be through Jesus. This was a radical change for this audience.



Who was pardoned? A multitude of Jewish men.

What were they repenting from? What sin was pardoned?

They were told to repent for the nation of Israel having Jesus crucified.

How does this apply to faithful Christians now?



This was the introduction to Christianity. It started with those who were there at the crucifixion of Jesus repenting of the sin for his crucifixion. But there is a broader perspective because Jesus' blood is what takes sins away. That is the important part. This initial beginning of Christianity would expand as the New Testament developed. We will see that in the following scriptures.

The objective of this forgiveness being first given to the “called-out” ones is important to understand. Then we will see what happens to the rest of the world after that. Right now, we are only focusing on the forgiveness, the pardon from Jesus for those who are called to follow Christ.

The objective of this forgiveness being given first to the “called-out” ones (faithful believers) is also revealed:

Ephesians 1:6-10: (NASB) *to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the beloved. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the **forgiveness** ⁸(pardon or remission) of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace ⁹which He lavished on us. In all wisdom and insight ⁹He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in him (Jesus) ¹⁰with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.*

The Apostle Paul is talking to the called-out ones. This letter was written to the Ephesians - a Gentile Christian group - which shows the movement had expanded beyond just those at Pentecost.

God reveals *His will* to us, the believers, so that we can become *an administration suitable to the fullness of the times*. We are called for a purpose, to be reconcilers (2 Corinthians 5:11-21).

We must already be faithfully in position in order to help the rest of the world (*summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth*), to be reconciled to God through Christ. This is why Jesus' forgiveness, his pardon, is given to the called-out ones first.

God, through Jesus, satisfied justice for ALL – a life (Adam) for a life (Jesus) that provided a true pardon - not for just the called-out ones, but for everyone in due time.

1 Corinthians 15:22:
(KJV) *For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.*



Let's set the context for the next text: Jesus is in a synagogue in Nazareth. Visiting Jews were often asked to do the daily reading of the Hebrew scriptures. It "just so happens" to be from Isaiah 61, a prophecy about Jesus himself!

He starts quoting the parts about what he, as the Lamb of God, was fulfilling at that time:

Luke 4:16-18: (NASB) ¹⁶And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and as was his custom, he entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. ¹⁷And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. And he opened the book and found the place where it was written, ¹⁸The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim **release <859>** (pardon) to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to **set free <859>** (pardon) those who are oppressed.

He continues by telling everyone that he was fulfilling this sacred prophecy right in front of them. It was about freedom for the captives – everyone born in Adam is in a prison house of sin and death.

He read this and said, "This is what I am here to do!" This release is not just an opening of the prison door or being released from feeling oppressed. It is a full pardon that brings full freedom. What happened before is no longer relevant. It is an opportunity to go on and live without the previous shackles of sin and death and without Satan's dictatorial rule.

This is what it means to pardon. This is what the blood of Jesus does.

This kind of forgiveness never existed before Jesus. The Old Testament Law did foreshadow it, but it could not accomplish it:

Hebrews 10:11-12, 14, 18: (NASB) ¹¹Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; ¹²but he, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God.

This is huge. The sacrifice of Jesus was once for all time. Unfortunately, some Christian denominations do not seem to accept this.

Next Paul focuses on the called-out ones:

¹⁴For by one offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. ¹⁸Now where there is **forgiveness <859>** (pardon) of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.

Here is the contrast. No one could keep the Old Testament Law perfectly, so to have a standing before God, they had to offer continual sacrifices for sin. The Law allowed for a kind of "renewable forgiveness."



We might compare it to the software protection we buy for our computers. Each year we need pay to renew it to protect against viruses. Now Jesus comes along and says, "I will make it so that no more viruses even exist! I will completely remove those sins you inherited from Adam, allowing you to finally have a permanent relationship with God through me, Jesus."



We realize that full application of forgiveness has not happened yet for the world. We will see that in the future kingdom resurrection of the dead. That is where it will be applied fully for all of mankind.

We won't need "antivirus software" anymore because Jesus will have put the viruses away forever. That is a great illustration.

This highest form of forgiveness in the Bible is ONLY available from God through the blood of Jesus. This is an IMPORTANT POINT:



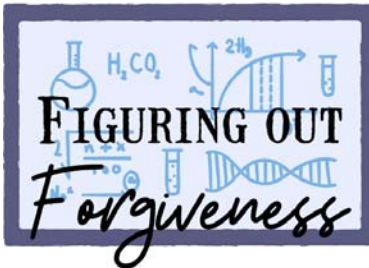
Romans 5:18: (NASB) *So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification (acquittal) of life to all men.*



What role does humanity play when it comes to this type of forgiveness?



The role is immense but limited. All of humanity has the amazing privilege of receiving this kind of forgiveness, but we are not capable in God's eyes of giving this kind of forgiveness. This is an important point of demarcation. This is something we all can receive, but it is beyond our capacity to give because we are in an imperfect state. We cannot "pardon" someone else if we ourselves are imperfect. We are focusing on the role that Jesus' blood plays – it is specific to him and very dramatic.



This comprehensive word for forgiveness means "to pardon."

In the Bible, it is never used in connection with us forgiving one another; rather, it is **only related to the pardon granted through Jesus' ransom sacrifice** which was given on behalf of ALL humanity. We only ever receive this forgiveness through Jesus, and we are never in a position to give it to anyone!

This will help us understand our role in being forgiven and our forgiving others.

It is inspiring to think that the Greek word for *forgiveness* meaning "pardon" is exclusively used to relay the power of Jesus' sacrifice.

So, if we as Christians are not capable of pardoning other's sins, what kind of forgiveness can we give?

Understanding what we are not capable of forgiving is a key for our comprehension of what we are capable of forgiving. Because the pardon we receive through the sacrifice of Jesus is related to our inherited sin in Adam, it is absolutely beyond our ability to offer a pardon to others, as though their sin did not occur. Our ability to forgive one another lies in a less potent but still powerful kind of forgiveness.

We can't erase what happened, but we can still forgive. We can't erase, but we can replace!



One sacrifice was made for Adamic sin for all time. But how do we receive forgiveness for the sins we commit as a result of our own thoughts, words and actions – not just our inherited sin?



Receiving forgiveness for those sins is by going to the *throne of grace* (Hebrews 4:16), as a follower of Christ, to ask for forgiveness.

It is not like Jesus wiped out all our sins so now we can do whatever we want and it is all automatically forgiven. We need to be constantly aware of our need for continual forgiveness, a “sending away” of our sin that we will review next.



We are talking about two Greek words for *forgiveness* in the New Testament. The first word means “pardon” or “remission” and refers only to Jesus. The second word we will talk about is the most broadly used word for forgiveness in the New Testament. This word has MANY shades of meaning.

Forgive: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #863 *aphiemi*; to send forth

Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon: 1) to send away, 1a) to bid going away or depart, 1a1) of a husband divorcing his wife, 1b) to send forth, yield up, to expire, 1c) to let go, let alone, let be, 1c1) to disregard, 1c2) to leave, not to discuss now, (a topic) 1c2a) of teachers, writers and speakers, 1c3) to omit, neglect, 1d) to let go, give up a debt, forgive, to remit; 1e) to give up, keep no longer, 2) to permit, allow, not to hinder, to give up a thing to a person

While the word is used in a lot of different ways, it generally means the act of sending something away from you. It is surprising that all of these meanings can be translated into the same English word! *Aphiemi* has a strong sense of pushing something off our radar, beyond where it affects our life.

Next, we review two scriptures that contrast the word for “pardon” we looked at in the previous segment, showing the forgiveness of Jesus, with this particular word for “sending away.” Both texts include the words of Jesus.

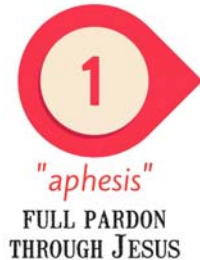
We will first look at Paul (formerly known as Saul) telling the story of his conversion on the road to Damascus to King Agrippa. You may recall how Paul's story was told three different times in the book of Acts to three different audiences:

	Acts 9:3-7	Acts 22:6-9	Acts 26:13-16
Who is speaking?	Luke	Saul	Saul
Who is the audience?	Those hearing or reading the book of Acts	A Jewish mob who physically attacked Saul	King Agrippa

Paul explains how he was walking along and saw a bright light and heard a voice from heaven identifying himself as Jesus, who asks why Paul is persecuting him. He was doing this, of course, by attacking Christians. Jesus tells Paul that he (Paul) had been appointed as *a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you.*

We are picking up with Paul telling us what Jesus said to him:

Acts 26:15-18: (NASB) ¹⁵*And I said, Who are you, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; ¹⁷rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, ¹⁸to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive **forgiveness <859>** of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in me.*



Paul was given the mission to go to the Gentiles to explain that the blood of Jesus applied to them just like it applied to the Christian Jews. That was his mission –to get them to understand what that meant and what freedom this was for Christians during the age of the gospel message going out, and then for the rest of the world in the next age of resurrection. *Forgiveness of sins*, as it is used here, is the full pardon that comes from Jesus' ransom sacrifice.

Let's next look at how Jesus used this second word for *forgiveness*, meaning "to send away." One day he was teaching people in a crowded room and even the scribes and Pharisees were there listening. Men brought over a paralyzed man on a bed, but the crowd was so big they couldn't get him through the large group to see Jesus in order to heal him.

They lowered his bed through a portion of the roof and interrupted Jesus' teaching:

Luke 5:20-21: (NASB) ²⁰*Seeing their faith, he said, Friend, your sins are **forgiven <863>** (sent away) you. ²¹The scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can **forgive <863>** (send away) sins, but God alone?*



The forgiveness here is different. Jesus is not talking about the redemption from Adam's original sin through Jesus' blood.

Your sins are forgiven –what did he mean? The man's individual sins he himself was responsible for committing were "sent away." This provides a clearer path to God. God and Jesus would now see him - not through the lens of what he had done - but through the lens of what his faith in Jesus opened for him.

It is as if Jesus told him (and all those who are Jesus' followers), "I am not going to look at your sin right now. I am pushing that aside so I can see you and you can see me. Now, go and live a life of greater righteousness."

Because of this man's faith, his sins were sent away so he could grow and learn not to commit those sins again.

This does not dissolve every consequence for every sin. This "moves the sin out of the way," meaning the sin no longer has to stifle our progress. We must continue, however, to take responsibility for what we have done.

We remember the example of Zacchaeus, the tax collector, who Jesus proclaimed salvation had come to him and his household (Luke 19:1-10).

What did Zacchaeus do? He restored four times the money he overcharged. He self-imposed his consequences and took personal responsibility.

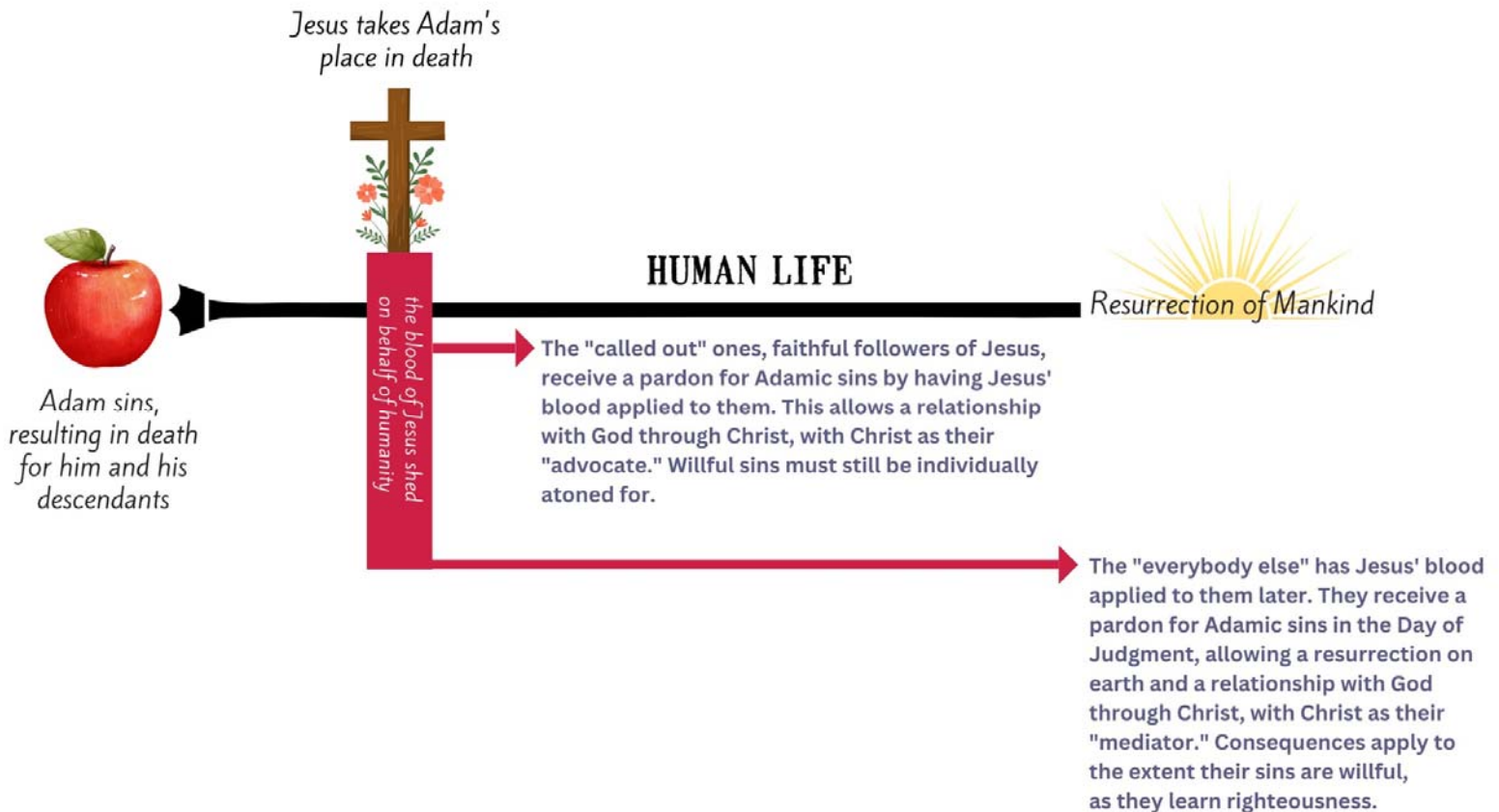
Even though we as Jesus' disciples have been pardoned for inherited sin through the ransom sacrifice of Jesus, we still need this second kind of forgiveness.

It does not mean we are above sinning:

1 John 1:8-9: (NASB) ⁸*If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.* ⁹*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to **forgive <863>** (set them aside) us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Understanding the difference between pardon and the act of sending someone's sins away puts us in a position to learn how to be forgiving as we are forgiven. We are granted that pardon once we begin following Christ and are given God's spirit - that pardon is in place –but it does not lift us above the capacity to still be a sinful human being.

God will, when we go to Him, push those sins aside. Because we go to God through Christ Jesus, our advocate, God can continue to deal with us. We are "covered." Our sins are pushed out of the way so we can work on our characters, trying to be righteous and continuing to grow.





To help our understanding of forgiveness, we sum up some points from:

The Science of Forgiveness, Everett L. Worthington, Jr., Ph.D. Department of Psychology, Virginia Commonwealth University

Studies on forgiveness give us many models for how it works. In general, forgiveness can be seen through two lenses:

- *First is a decision to forgive that “turns on a light” to reveal how it can be done.*
- *The second lens is emotional forgiveness that seeks to replace unforgiving emotions with more positive ones.*

In other words, we make a decision and then follow through.



But why is this a big deal? Why do we even have to forgive each other? Why can't we just stew in it for a little while?



Truthfully and honestly, when we stew in it for a little while, do we ever feel better?

(Maybe a little bit.)

Does it change anything for the good?

(No.)

Do you grow?

(Probably not.)

Do you change?

(I probably shrink a little.)

That is the point! We need to forgive, first of all, **because Jesus did**. We walk in his footsteps –therefore we must forgive! It is really that simple:

- He had that forgiving attitude toward those who yelled, “Crucify him!”
- He had that forgiving attitude toward the soldiers who beat him and ridiculed him.
- He had that forgiving attitude toward those people who spit on him.

And if he did –we must. We need to follow our Master. It is an important, powerful, life-changing approach because as we will see, it releases us in a way not possible otherwise.

The following words of Jesus show us how important it is to have a forgiving attitude with everyone. This is the beginning of the Lord's prayer:

Matthew 6:9-15: (NASB) ⁹Pray, then, in this way: Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. ¹⁰Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us this day our daily bread. ¹²And **forgive <863>** us our debts, as we also have **forgiven <863>** our debtors. ¹³And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil... ¹⁴For if you **forgive <863>** others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also **forgive <863>** you. ¹⁵But if you do not **forgive <863>** others, then your Father will not **forgive <863>** your transgressions.

We count six *for*gives!



It is talking about the example of God forgiving us. We do not deserve the forgiveness, but He gives it to us anyway. We need to have that same kind of attitude.

Forgive us our debts—that which we owe—not money, but our sins and transgressions committed that take us out of balance with God. Sn always brings imbalance. This promised forgiveness is applied to us as we apply it to others.

If we want to be in balance with God, we need to keep others in balance with us. Our forgiving attitude towards others will influence God's forgiveness towards us.

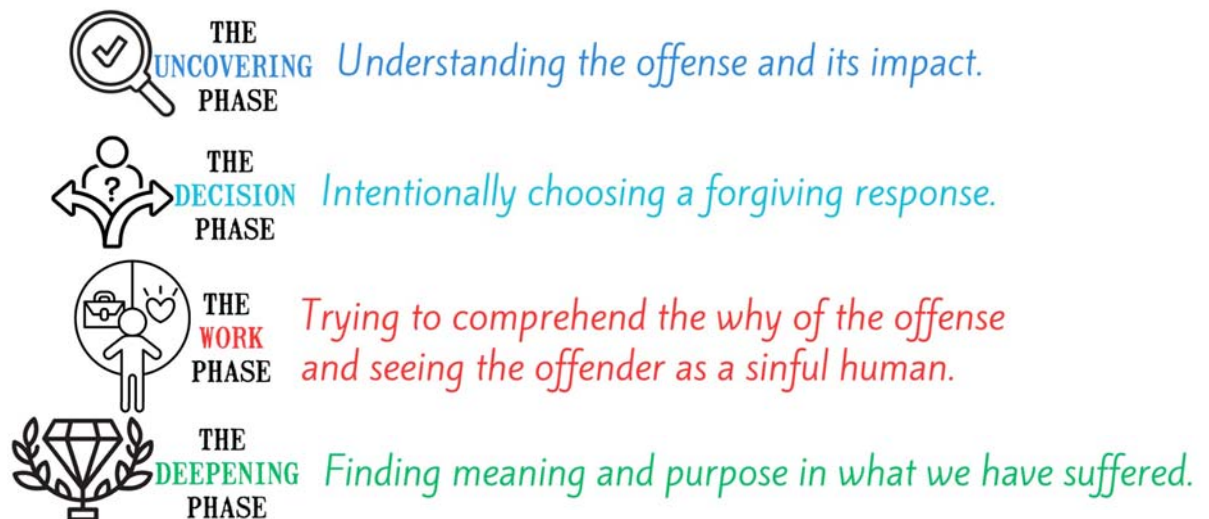
Q. What if I forgive and really mean it, then begin to feel like I want to change my mind? Sometimes people don't act the way we expect. Maybe we "let them off the hook" just a little too soon.



When we forgive others, it's not necessarily about them; it's about us. It is about us maintaining our balance before our heavenly Father, as we now have that forgiving attitude. Whether they respond or not, we should not change our forgiving attitude. If we start letting that forgiveness slip, we ask, why is that happening? Would God let it slip for me? Then why do I let it slip for my brother or sister?

My attitude of forgiveness is about me, not the person I am forgiving.

There are several models for forgiveness and all kinds of studies. We want to introduce one model of forgiveness with four phases:



Twenty-one years ago, I went through a very hard, traumatic experience that taught me these phases, though I didn't know I was learning them. And that experience, which I'll get into a little bit later, is my youngest daughter, when she was only 15, was raped. To be able to manage and deal with the person who perpetrated that upon her was a tremendous, tremendous challenge and learning experience for me. We will unfold these phases in my own experience a little bit later in the podcast.



Understanding Christian forgiveness means realizing we cannot truly “pardon” someone before God, but **we can send their sins against us away from us.** This is usually a very difficult process that requires dedication and discipline. The New Testament clearly teaches us that **being forgiving is a major part of our Christian character.**

As we see our responsibility to have a forgiving attitude develop, it can be both a scary proposition as well as an exciting challenge.

**Do our responsibilities towards forgiveness work the same with everybody?
Should we be forgiving others no matter what?**

The Bible does show us different applications of forgiveness that are directly related to the parties involved. As Christians, our responsibilities and interactions with fellow Christians are on a very different level than with those who are unbelievers. As we unfold this, we will begin with scriptural guidance regarding forgiveness involving fellow believers. Let's look at our responsibilities to our fellow believers.

How do we handle forgiveness interactions with those who have the same kind of faith we do?



THE
UNCOVERING
PHASE

Understanding the offense and its impact.

We can be hurt by our fellow disciples. As we uncover those hurts, let us do so with godliness in our hearts and minds, remembering:

Matthew 5:3-9: (KJV) ³Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. ⁵Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. ⁶Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. ⁷Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. ⁸Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. ⁹Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

While forgiveness is not mentioned in these verses, we are called to this level of light. Seeing our hurt or anger through the lens of the Beatitudes can help us stay in a forgiving attitude.

Philippians 4:8: (NASB) Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.



We do not just acknowledge these things; we want to *dwell* on them –not on how much someone has infuriated us. We do not want to approach forgiveness with anger or indifference. Jesus more than tolerated those who offended him. He died for them. If we keep this in the front of our minds, it can help us get over the hurt.



Think about how the one we are upset with is blessed by God. They deserve mercy like we do; they are a son of God. How do we approach one of the Lord's dearest? Think of who we are dealing with. While it doesn't lessen the wrong; it reframes how we approach the wrong.

And then look at the Beatitudes from the other perspective. If we say so-and-so is blessed because they are poor in spirit, because they mourn, because they are meek, because they hunger after righteousness, it puts them in a whole different light, doesn't it? This is how we want to begin to uncover the difficulty of the sins that we have to deal with. We are imperfect. We do not treat each other well all the time, and sometimes we say and do things that are just plain wrong. We need to learn how to deal with these experiences.



THE
DECISION
PHASE

Intentionally choosing a forgiving response.

This decision should not be selfishly-driven, but instead driven by *agape* love, which changes everything.

We have talked before about needing to have forbearance; meaning to hold back on collecting that which is rightfully owed to us. It is part of Christian development. It is a defining characteristic of discipleship and of selfless love.

Let's read from what is often called the "Love Chapter":

1 Corinthians 13:4-7: (NASB) ⁴*Love is patient (meaning forbearance), love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, ⁵does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, ⁶does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; ⁷bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

When we looked at the Uncovering Phase, we suggested having the Beatitudes in our hearts and minds. Now we are at the critical Decision Phase. Are we really going to forgive? Let's look again at 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 and its description of selfless love and forbearance as driving forces in our forgiveness. We forgive not because God made us do it, but because this is what we do as disciples of Christ. We do what he did.

With selfless love and forbearance as driving forces, let us decide to be forgiving in spirit and in action:

Luke 17:3-4: (NASB) ³*Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents (to think differently), **forgive <863>** him. ⁴And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, I repent, **forgive <863>** him.*

Our *agape* love decision to pursue forgiveness with those of the brotherhood should be most highly driven by the need to regain our relationship, and only secondarily by our need to display our hurt. While it is important to be able to say, "That hurt me," the primary motivation needs to be reestablishing our relationship. We must cherish that relationship and want to maintain and preserve it. This is done by being honest and forthright in communication.



THE
WORK
PHASE

*Trying to comprehend the why of the offense
and seeing the offender as a sinful human.*

With *agape* love in place, we want to completely respect our fellow disciples by bringing the wrong to them quietly and honorably. This work phase is hard!

Confrontation is uncomfortable but necessary, and better than letting resentment build:

Matthew 18:15-17: (NASB) *¹⁵If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.*

That is such a profound statement. *If your brother sins* and this has negatively affected us, we are to go directly to our brother without telling someone else instead.

If we go to our brother and he listens – *you have won your brother*. We have accomplished the Jesus-like response to sin. How beautiful is that? Unfortunately, this doesn't always work that simply.

The rest of the verses help us understand the importance of communicating and following through with appropriateness and spiritual wisdom:

¹⁶But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. ¹⁷If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

What if our brother's sin is such that they refuse to listen, even after our private discussion?

We must approach them with appropriateness and spirituality. This requires deep wisdom. We are careful not to expose our brothers, as our desire is to win them back and maintain that communication.

Jesus illustrated the magnitude of God's forbearance and forgiveness as an example of what ours should look like:

Matthew 18:21-22: (NASB) *²¹Then Peter came and said to him, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times? ²²Jesus said to him, I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.*

Incidentally, if you are actually counting how many times you are offended by your brother, that isn't *agape* love – that's resentment!

We have to be careful. The whole point of going to our brother is to reestablish our relationship. Our brother should know better, and we should know better. We are at a higher level than the world of unbelievers – we are “in Christ.” We should be able to do this. We say “should” because sometimes we get stuck in our own immaturity and our own insecurity and avoid the necessary communication.

Jesus is telling us that forgiveness is a commitment of magnitude and patience! It is for the purpose of reestablishing relationships one with another.



Jesus gave us the Parable of the Ungrateful Servant that shows how a servant who owed much to his master pleaded for mercy.



The context of this parable is a servant owes a great deal to his master, and he could not pay. The master's response was to put the debtor and his whole family into servitude until the debt was paid in full.

The master represents God, and this shows us His forbearance:

Matthew 18:26-27: (NASB) ²⁶*So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, Have **patience** <3114> with me and I will repay you everything.* ²⁷*And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt.*

Patience or long-suffering is a willingness to be non-reactive and appropriate. We can't get to really sincere forgiveness (sending away) without being non-reactive and appropriate. It also tells us to be willing to wait for a situation to completely unfold, to be disciplined in holding back.

This "patience" gives the benefit of the doubt and can only truly be displayed by humanity through a humble spirit. It always comes back to the same thing; we need to get out of our own way! We need to see our brother or sister as the child of God through Christ. Then approach them with the intent of bringing things back together.

Back to the parable: things go wrong when that same servant who was forgiven his debt went out and mercilessly demanded repayment of a tiny, little debt from a fellow servant. The unforgiving servant threatens his debtor with jail and shows no mercy. The master hears of this and immediately gave him serious consequences.

What's the lesson?

Matthew 18:35: (YLT) *So also my heavenly Father will do to you, if ye may not forgive each one his brother from your hearts their trespasses.*

The work of forgiveness from a perspective of *agape* love is challenging but necessary!



What if the person who wronged us doesn't repent? They don't ask for our forgiveness or make any efforts to make things right. Do we still *have to* forgive them? Are we still *supposed to* forgive them?



"Do I have to?" This is where our human reaction inevitably goes. It all comes down to having a forgiving attitude.

I cannot control them, but I can control me, by God's grace. If God's spirit is working in me, I want to focus on something higher. Do I want this person's sin against me to dominate my everyday life? Or do I want to be able to put it far enough away from me, so I can have my thinking focused on sanctified things of God, like God's word, the brotherhood and witnessing the gospel message?



Consider this...

If I continually keep this person's lack of response right in front of me, I have just taken something ungodly and made it my main focus. Is God pleased with this?



We can't control what we can't control! God will judge the specific situation. But we CAN control what we think about. This is why our type of "forgiving" is "sending away."



THE
DEEPENING
PHASE

Finding meaning and purpose in what we have suffered.

Finding meaning means finding spiritual meaning. It does not mean gaining satisfaction! For us it is that higher meaning.

Here is the Apostle Paul lamenting on the human propensity to claim what is mine in dealing with the brotherhood:

1 Corinthians 6:6-8: (NASB) ⁶But brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers? ⁷Actually, then, it is already a defeat for you, that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? ⁸On the contrary, you yourselves wrong and defraud. You do this even to your brethren.

This is similar to the question we asked before about our brother refusing to listen when we privately discussed the wrong. Here the apostle is saying, take the wrong. Why would we make a spectacle between members of the body of Christ before the world? We are supposed to rise above such behavior. Send the wrong away from you and rise above it.

This is a form of that forgiving attitude we have been talking about. This important principle is found throughout the Bible and throughout what Jesus taught us.

All true Christians should have a patience that can be readily observed by anyone:

Philippians 4:4-7: (NASB) ⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! ⁵Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. ⁶Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

We should wear on the outside what *agape* love produces on the inside.

We must see the brotherhood through the eyes of *agape* love.

This reminds us of the Apostle Paul:

1 Corinthians 2:2: (KJV) For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

He would look beyond and over the issues to see only Jesus in their lives. He sent away all the "fleshliness," so he could see the spirituality. A forgiving attitude must permeate every aspect of our Christian life.

Our evenness, like the Apostle Paul stated, depends upon our continual resetting of what we allow our minds to dwell upon:

1 Peter 1:6-7: (NASB) ⁶In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ...

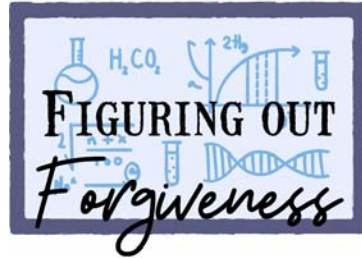


Mirror question: "So that the proof of your faith..."



Am I, in dealing with my issues, working towards being "purified by fire" and removing "impurities" so that my faith is shown to be more precious than gold?
Am I in a place where I need to forgive, or where my brother won't forgive me?

Our eternal purpose is always higher and bigger than the momentary event that is bothering us.



People say, "Forgive and forget." As imperfect humans, the forgiving part is hard enough! Instead of forgetting, what if we look at the forgiveness we are giving as an **exercise in Christlikeness for the purpose of lifting everyone higher** and leaving the judging to God? How about we **FORGIVE, FORBEAR and FORGE ahead?**

Working at practicing forgiveness on this level changes everything. It now truly becomes about me AND my brother growing in Christ!

**What about forgiveness regarding those who are not disciples of Christ?
What should we do? What should we avoid?**

Forgiving in these experiences does have the same basic principles, but it does work differently on some levels. The fundamental difference here is interacting with those who are not spiritually enlightened versus those who are walking the same road as we walk. Our Christian forbearance that is driven by *agape* (selfless) love must be VERY present in all of these circumstances.



How can we decide who are our fellow disciples in Christ? How can we judge the depth of others' devotion to Christ?



We look at their own words. If they profess to be a follower of Christ, they are our brother/ sister in Christ. Even if they are seriously approaching this decision, it is the same type of relationship. If they are casual in their actions and attitude towards God, they are likely outside that relationship of being a follower of Christ.

We can really be shaken up by the legitimate and powerful reactions to being wronged. "He hurt me!" "She betrayed me!" "He took advantage of me!" "She slandered me!" These can all be utterly debilitating. Betrayal is shocking, painful and in many cases, life-altering. What do we do?

There are no scriptures that tell us to require repentance from those who are outside of the brotherhood.

Why? With a higher relationship comes higher expectations and higher accountability.

Matthew 6:14-15: (NASB) ¹⁴For if you **forgive <863>** others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also **forgive <863>** you. ¹⁵But if you do not **forgive <863>** others, then your Father will not **forgive <863>** your transgressions.



Basic Principle

BE FORGIVING BECAUSE GOD IS FORGIVING.



THE

UNCOVERING
PHASE*Understanding the offense and its impact.*

I have a very personal story that applies to understanding an offense and its impact on a family. Twenty-one years ago, my 15-year-old daughter was raped. It feels like it happened yesterday. The man who did this hurt her physically, emotionally and mentally. He damaged our family, and it took us years to put our lives back together. I'm a dad, and when you hurt my child, I get mad. This incident was amazingly traumatic, and in that Uncovering Phase, I was seething with anger. I did not show it to anybody because they did not need to see that, but I was mad and raw during this overwhelming time. This was a gross sin that broke my child and severely damaged our family.

With an experience like that, it seems impossible to have godliness in our hearts and minds, but that is exactly what we are instructed to do.

We can be hurt by our experiences with people in the world. As we uncover those hurts, let us do so with godliness in our hearts and minds:

Romans 5:6-8: (NASB) ⁶For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. ⁸But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.



This concept was important for me in that experience because I had to look at the man who did this and say to myself, "Rick, Christ died for him exactly as much as he died for me," because that is the truth! And that realization helped me not to react. It certainly did not change everything immediately, but it was a principle that held me steady. I had to remember that Jesus loves him like he loves me, and died for him like he died for me. This is scriptural, unequivocal truth. I could not challenge it on any level. That helped to balance me in that Uncovering Phase. What was I going to do?



THE

DECISION
PHASE*Intentionally choosing a forgiving response.*

In this experience, God absolutely intervened for me and my family's best benefit. I was pressed into choosing that forgiving response. We had reported the incident to the police, went to the hospital, and then came home and were all sitting around the kitchen table. This was a sad, difficult moment. My son, who was the oldest at 17-years old, got a phone call. I was sitting next to him, by God's providence, and I could hear the voice on the phone.



My son was very sick at the time and so by God's grace, could not do anything in retaliation. But the voice on the phone said, "I understand you have a problem that needs fixing."

I had a choice at that moment, because my gut reaction was, "Good, go fix it." And then I thought to myself, "I can't do that. I can't do that for the sake of my daughter, for the sake of my family, for the sake of my Christianity, for the sake of all that is righteous. I can't do that." So, I looked at my son and I said, "Tim, call off the dogs. NOW! Tell him to back off!" Tim got off the phone, and I told my family we were going to do this the right way. We would go through the legal process and let the law decide what would happen. That was the decision, and because I said it, I had to do it. The LORD gave me the strength in that way to rise to a level of response that I might not have otherwise. For me, the decision was to do it the right way. It was the only righteous and God-honoring way to respond.

During this Decision Phase, we should not make selfishly-driven decisions, as we should instead be driven by *agape* love.

The difference between love based upon principle and any other kind of love is that principled love has no conditions.

It is exhibited under any and all conditions and does not demand repayment:

Luke 6:27-31: (NRSV) ²⁷*But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you.*

So, what does this mean? This is focused on our enemies and those who hurt us in various ways who are "in the world" –not believers. Jesus is telling us to love, bless and be humble. While this text does not say "forgive" it does say to love based on principle –"send away" their sin.



Is it possible to love in this way AND hold a grudge? Jesus never held a grudge against the people who hurt him, but he didn't necessarily go out of his way to favor anyone other than his small, inner circle. He didn't try to get his enemies to love him. He didn't obsess over it like we might.



The measure of the grudge we hold proportionately diminishes the selflessness of the love we give. If we hold a grudge, we are not loving selflessly. By definition, that is not possible. Forgiveness, sending someone's sins away from us, is NOT reconciliation or pardon. Forgiving a worldly, unbelieving person is likely not going to bring trust and reconciliation, but it can free us from their sin if we send them away with righteousness, love and compassion.



Trying to comprehend the why of the offense and seeing the offender as a sinful human.



The work phase is very difficult. Continuing my story, I had told my family that we were going to rely on the legal system for justice. But the man who had done this to my daughter fled the country. He was beyond the legal system! Now what? We were left with knowing we would NOT find justice.

My only choice at that point was in realizing that healing never comes through anger or revenge. It only comes through acceptance of the fact that something happened and the hard work of growing through the trauma. I was trying to manage an unmanageable circumstance, but we focused on the healing of our family. I changed my work schedule and concentrated on spending time with my daughter. I picked her up every day from school.

She was so broken that we almost lost her a couple of times. It was so devastating. But the fact that justice was out of reach did not matter as much as the wellbeing of our family. So, the work stage did not go as I expected because there was no closure, but we learned the lessons we needed in unexpected ways. These lessons included forgiving and sending away.

With *agape* love in place, we want to respect those in the world as individuals for whom Jesus died.

Whether we can or cannot discuss the wrong with them, we need to retain an attitude that is honorable before God, even if we feel like we want to get back at them:

Romans 12:17-19: (NASB) ¹⁷Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. ¹⁸If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. ¹⁹Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord.



What if we don't actually do anything to the person who wronged us, but in our minds, let's just say we wouldn't be sad if something bad happened to them. Is that still paying back evil for evil?



Yes, it is paying back evil for evil.



I entertained those thoughts a lot. I had to say to myself, "Rick, that is not a Jesus-thought process. Those thoughts are not going in a discipleship direction." We must cleanse our hearts and minds. See that person who wronged you as one who Jesus died for, and leave it at that because that's what Jesus did. He died and was raised, and that reconciliation opportunity will come to everyone.

God's forbearance reminds us that we are sinful and that He loved us first:

Romans 2:1-2,4: (NASB) ¹Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. ²And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. ⁴Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and **patience <3115>**, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?



Do we take lightly *the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience* toward us? If not, how could we NOT apply it to someone else? God dramatically shows us His forbearance. His spirit within us will help us rise above our fleshly desires as we face the prospect of letting someone's sins no longer hurt us. That is what forgiveness is! We send it away so it no longer hurts us!



THE
DEEPENING
PHASE

Finding meaning and purpose in what we have suffered.



In the experience of my family, finding meaning and purpose took a long time, but that is exactly what happened. We accomplished it by “evicting” this man from our hearts and minds. He no longer had a place with us; he no longer had influence. When we evicted him - when we sent the sin away - it was the sin we were throwing away. Jesus still died for this man. But when we did this, we were able to see life and growth again.

Time deepens what we focus on. If we are focusing on the wrong things, they get deeper and hold on. But if we focus on growing and maturing and godliness, that gets bigger and stronger within us.

My daughter, Amy, has grown into a tremendously strong individual. She is writing a book now about her experience, in an effort to help others. I would tell her throughout this experience that one day she would not only be a survivor but would become an overcomer, by God's grace. And that is what she has become.

In my mind, even though I know it will never happen, I envision sitting across the table from the man who did this and telling him exactly how much he hurt and destroyed my daughter and our family, and the havoc his greedy, sinful, lustful actions created. But then I tell him that he no longer has an effect on us. We are over it. He, on the other hand, because he ran, has not met justice or suffered the consequences of what he did. He should meet those consequences. I want this to happen not because I am still angry, but because that is what is right.

So, that is how I put forgiveness in place in this incident. The Deepening Phase is a long process, but you can live beyond the sin and on the other side. By God's grace, there is light, fresh air, growth and maturity.

Finding meaning means finding spiritual meaning. It does not mean gaining satisfaction! It is easy to observe someone's sins against us or our frustration over our own poor response to it through the eyes of “should have.”

Jesus did not see sin through the eyes of “should have:”

1 Peter 2:21-24: (NASB) ²¹For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in his steps, ²²who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in his mouth; ²³and while being reviled, he did not revile in return; while suffering, he uttered no threats, but kept entrusting himself to Him who judges righteously; ²⁴and he himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by his wounds you were healed.



Jesus' example was to love without it being returned, to give without receiving, to suffer without retaliating and to rely on God's ultimate judgment.

Let's follow in his footsteps! Send those sins away from you so they do not dominate you.

Let God be the judge, while you grow in grace and strength:

1 Peter 2:12: (NASB) *Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.*

Us following Christ is for the ultimate good of everyone!

*Forgive,
FORBEAR, &
Forge ahead!*

As Christians, our lives are to be guided by standards that are lofty and beyond the understanding of those in the world. We are - **to the best of our ability** - to see with God's eyes, respond with a godly character, and walk where and how Jesus walked. **Let us embrace the profound value of forgiveness not only as a principle, but appropriately applied as an action of godly grace.**



How do I know if I have really forgiven someone? For me, it's when a family member or worldly person hurts me, and what I want is the best for them throughout eternity. That's how I know I have forgiven them.

We want to forgive appropriately, just like Jesus did!

***So, how do I know if I have really forgiven someone?
For Jonathan, Rick, Julie and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!***

All quoted scriptures are from the 1995 version of NASB unless otherwise indicated.



Next episode

Join us next week on July 17, 2023

Episode 1290: Is the Jewish Nation Really God's Chosen Nation?



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Bonus Material and Study Questions

Recommended Additional Study:

The Apostle Paul:

Ep.1111: Does the Apostle Paul Contradict Himself? (Part I): Contradictions Series

Examining several supposed self-contradicting statements by Paul

<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/1111-apostle-paul-contradict/>

Ep.1112: Does the Apostle Paul Contradict Himself? (Part II): Contradictions Series

Continued examination of “self-contradicting” statements by Paul

<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/1112-apostle-paul-contradictions/>

Betrayal:

Ep.1036: How Do I Strike Back at Betrayal?

Facing, coping with and overcoming the devastation of betrayal

<https://christianquestions.com/character/1036-betrayal/>

Loving our enemies:

Ep.1015: Condemned to Death, How Did Jesus Love His Enemies?

Watching “love your enemies” unfold in Jesus’ last days

<https://christianquestions.com/inspiration/1015-love-your-enemies/>

Beatitudes:

Ep.1213: Is God Happy With My Attitude? (Part I)

Uncovering the life-directing principles in the Beatitudes of Jesus

<https://christianquestions.com/character/1213-beatitudes/>



Parents and Bible class teachers, continue your studies on this topic with these short, animated videos for kids at ChristianQuestions.com/YouTube:

- **Why should we forgive others?** <https://youtu.be/fiFonMIBmAY>
- **What happened on the road to Damascus?** <https://youtu.be/i3Q0eVbELUg>

Study QUESTIONS

Ep. 1289: How Do I Know If I Have Really Forgiven Someone?

<https://christianquestions.com/character/1289-forgiving-others/>

See:



1. Define the first New Testament word for “forgiveness” in the podcast. This type of forgiveness always applies to what?
2. How did the remission of sins change from the Old Testament Law to after Jesus’ death? What was necessary for the Jews to do to have a standing before God before Jesus came?
3. Who does this forgiveness apply to first? What is their role? Why is it important that they receive forgiveness, a pardon, before the rest of the world? (Ephesians 1:6-10, 1 Corinthians 15:22, 2 Corinthians 5:11-21)
4. What did Jesus, as the Lamb of God, fulfill relating to “pardon” (Strong’s 859)? How do we know the sacrifices of the Old Testament did not pardon sin? Explain. (Luke 4:16-18, Hebrews 10:11-18, Romans 5:18)
5. Define the second New Testament word for “forgive” addressed in the podcast. What was Paul’s mission regarding forgiveness or pardon? How is this different from what Jesus said about forgiveness to the crippled man? (Acts 26:15-18, Luke 5:20-21)
6. Once the faithful followers of Jesus receive their pardon, what is the procedure for forgiveness of future sins? When does the “everybody else” have Jesus’ blood applied to them? What are the differences in Christ’s job during the two separate ages? Why is it important to be forgiving even if the person we forgive is not grateful? (1 John 1:8-9, Matthew 6:9-15)
7. How do we handle the forgiveness phases presented in interactions with other Christians?
 - a. Uncovering: What should our mindset be? (Matthew 5:3-9, Philippians 4:8)
 - b. Decision: What should drive our response? (1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Luke 17:3-4)
 - c. Work: What should the procedure be for reconciliation? (Matthew 18:15-27, 35)
 - d. Deepening: How do we find meaning and purpose in our suffering?
How is Paul a good example? (1 Corinthians 2:2, 6:6-8, Philippians 4:4-7, 1 Peter 1:6-7)
8. How do we handle forgiveness in interactions with non-believers?
 - a. Uncovering: What should our mindset be? (Romans 5:6-8)
 - b. Decision: What should drive our response? (Luke 6:27-31)
 - c. Work: What is the danger in expressing our hurt? (Romans 2:1-4, 12:17-19)
 - d. Deepening: How does Jesus’ example show us the proper attitude? (1 Peter 2:12, 21-24)
9. How will this thought help you during times of trial: “Our eternal purpose is always higher and bigger than the momentary event that is bothering us.” How can you better forgive others in your life that have wronged you?