



TRINITY CHURCH ROCKY HILL

Bible Study – November 19, 2020

“And Forgive Us Our Trespasses As We Forgive Those Who Trespass Against Us”

Is forgiveness a conscious choice, or an emotional state?

How do we forgive when we don't feel like it?

How do we translate our decision to forgive into a change of heart?

How will we know if we have truly forgiven?

What if the person we need to forgive is not a believer?

Is it okay to feel anger and want justice for the person we need to forgive?

Why must we forgive?

What does the Bible say about forgiveness? Quite a bit. In fact, forgiveness is a dominant theme throughout the Bible. But it's not uncommon for Christians to have many questions about forgiveness. The act of forgiving does not come easy for most of us. Our natural instinct is to recoil in self-protection when we've been injured. We don't naturally overflow with mercy, grace, and understanding when we've been wronged.

Is Christian forgiveness a conscious choice, a physical act involving the will, or is it a feeling, an emotional state of being? The Bible offers insight and answers to our questions about forgiveness. Let's take a look at some of the most frequently asked questions and find out what the Bible says about forgiveness.

Is Forgiveness a Conscious Choice, or an Emotional State?

Forgiveness is a choice we make. It is a decision of our will, motivated by obedience to God and his command to forgive. The Bible instructs us to forgive as the Lord forgave us:

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. (Colossians 3:13, NIV)

How Do We Forgive When We Don't Feel Like It?

We forgive by faith, out of obedience. Since forgiveness goes against our nature, we must forgive by faith, whether we feel like it or not. We must trust God to do the work in us that needs to be done so that our forgiveness will be complete. Our faith brings us confidence in God's promise to help us forgive and shows that we trust in his character:

Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see. (Hebrews 11:1, NLT)

How Do We Translate Our Decision to Forgive into a Change of Heart?

God honors our commitment to obey him and our desire to please him when we choose to forgive. He completes the work in his time. We must continue to forgive by faith (our job) until the work of forgiveness (the Lord's job) is done in our hearts.

And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns. (Philippians 1:6, NLT)

How Will We Know if We Have Truly Forgiven?

Lewis B. Smedes wrote in his book, *Forgive and Forget*: "When you release the wrongdoer from the wrong, you cut a malignant tumor out of your inner life. You set a prisoner free, but you discover that the real prisoner was yourself."

We will know the work of forgiveness is complete when we experience the freedom that comes as a result. We are the ones who suffer most when we choose not to forgive. When we do forgive, the Lord sets our hearts free from the anger, bitterness, resentment, and hurt that previously imprisoned us.

Most of the time forgiveness is a slow process:

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." (Matthew 18:21-22, NIV)

Jesus' answer to Peter makes it clear that forgiveness is not easy for us. It's not a one-time choice, and then we automatically live in a state of forgiveness. Essentially, Jesus was saying, keep on forgiving until you experience the freedom of forgiveness. Forgiveness may require a lifetime of forgiving, but it is important to the Lord. We must continue forgiving until the matter has been settled in our heart.

What if the Person We Need to Forgive is Not a Believer?

We are called to love our neighbors and our enemies and pray for those who hurt us:

"You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." (Matthew 5:43-48, NLT)

We learn a secret about forgiveness in this verse. That secret is prayer. Prayer is one of the best ways to break down the wall of unforgiveness in our hearts. When we begin to pray for the person who has wronged us, God gives us new eyes to see and a new heart to care for that person.

As we pray, we start to see that person as God sees them, and we realize that he or she is precious to the Lord. We also see ourselves in a new light, just as guilty of sin

and failure as the other person. We too are in need of forgiveness. If God did not withhold his forgiveness from us, why should we withhold forgiveness from another?

Is it Okay to Feel Anger and Want Justice for the Person We Need to Forgive?

This question presents another reason to pray for the person we need to forgive. We can pray and ask God to deal with the injustices. We can trust God to judge that person's life, and then we ought to leave that prayer at the altar. We no longer have to carry the anger. Although it is normal for us to feel anger toward sin and injustice, it is not our job to judge the other person in their sin.

Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. (Luke 6:37, (NIV))

Why Must We Forgive?

The best reason to forgive is simple: Jesus commanded us to forgive. We learn from scripture in context to forgiveness that if we don't forgive, neither will we be forgiven:

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.
(Matthew 6:14-16, NIV)

We also forgive so that our prayers will not be hindered:

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins. (Mark 11:25, NIV)

In summary, we forgive out of obedience to the Lord. It is a choice, a decision we make. However, as we do our part "forgiving," we discover the command to forgive is in place for our own good, and we receive the reward of our forgiveness, which is spiritual freedom.

The Bible's Answer

Forgiveness is the act of pardoning an offender. In the Bible, the Greek word translated "forgiveness" literally means "to let go", as when a person does not demand payment for a debt. Jesus used this comparison when he taught his followers to pray: "*Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is in debt to us.*" (Luke 11:4) Likewise, in his parable of the unmerciful slave, Jesus equated forgiveness with canceling a debt. - Matthew 18:23-35.

We forgive others when we let go of resentment and give up any claim to be compensated for the hurt or loss we have suffered. The Bible teaches that unselfish love is the basis for true forgiveness, since love "*does not keep account of the injury.*" – 1 Corinthians 13:4, 5.

What Forgiveness Does Not Mean:

- **Condoning the offense.** The Bible actually condemns those who claim that bad actions are harmless or acceptable. - Isaiah 5:20.
- **Pretending that the offense never happened.** God forgave King David of serious sins, but he did not shield David from the consequences of his actions. God even had David's sins recorded so that they are remembered today. – 2 Samuel 12:9-13.
- **Allowing others to take advantage of you.** Suppose, for example, that you loan money to someone, but he wastes it and then cannot repay you as he had promised. He is very sorry and apologizes to you. You could choose to forgive him by not harboring resentment, not rehashing the matter with him continually, and perhaps even canceling the debt altogether. However, you might also choose not to loan him any more money. - Psalm 37:21; Proverbs 14:15; 22:3; Galatians 6:7.
- **Pardoning with no valid basis.** God does not forgive people who are guilty of willful, malicious sin and who refuse to acknowledge their mistakes, change their ways, and apologize to those whom they have hurt. (Proverbs 28:13; Acts 26:20; Hebrews 10:26) Such unrepentant ones become God's enemies, and he does not require us to forgive those whom he has not forgiven. - Psalm 139:21, 22.

What if you are the victim of cruel mistreatment by someone who refuses to apologize or even admit to what he has done? The Bible advises: *"Let go of anger and abandon rage."* (Psalm 37:8) While not excusing the error, you can refuse to be consumed with anger. Trust that God will bring the person to account. (Hebrews 10:30, 31) You can also take comfort in knowing that God will bring a time when we will no longer feel the deep pain or hurt that may burden us now. - Isaiah 65:17; Revelation 21:4.

- **"Forgiving" every perceived slight.** Sometimes, rather than pardoning a so-called offender, we may need to admit that we had no valid cause for being offended in the first place. The Bible says: "Do not be quick to take offense, for the taking of offense is the mark of a fool." - Ecclesiastes 7:9, footnote.

How to Forgive Someone:

1. **Remember what forgiveness involves.** You are not condoning the wrong or acting as if it never happened - you are simply letting it go.
2. **Recognize the benefits of forgiving.** Letting go of anger and resentment can help you to keep calm, improve your health, and increase your happiness. (Proverbs 14:30; Matthew 5:9) Even more important, forgiving others is a key to receiving God's forgiveness for your own sins. - Matthew 6:14, 15.

3. **Be empathetic.** All of us are imperfect. (James 3:2) Just as we appreciate being forgiven, we should likewise forgive the mistakes of others. - Matthew 7:12.
4. **Be reasonable.** When we have a minor cause for complaint, we can apply the Bible's counsel: "*Continue putting up with one another.*" - Colossians 3:13.
5. **Act quickly.** Work to forgive as soon as you can rather than letting your anger fester. - Ephesians 4:26, 27.