

Paradise Lost and Restored: What is Forgiveness? (Part 1)

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I. Introduction

So you're born-again and God is your Father. But what if you offend Him, what happens then? Does He forgive you, if so, how? Or what if you offend a fellow Christian, how do you fix your relationship with them? Do you have to forgive them or can you hold a grudge? If you have to forgive, do you have to hang out with them afterwards?

II. What Does Forgiveness Mean: Why? When? How?

Why is forgiveness necessary?

Because we are relational creatures: God is a relational being. That is, God the Father is in constant relationship with God the Son and God the Holy Spirit—He has been for all eternity, John 1:1-2; 15:26; 17:5. And when God made us, He made us like Him, which means that we are relational creatures from beginning to end. Thus, we're constantly surrounded by relationship, with parents, siblings, extended family, loved ones (i.e., spouses, boyfriends, girlfriends), friends, neighbors, coworkers, employers, strangers, even pets. We're creatures who constantly crave relationship. We're made to *relate*, i.e., have a connection or association with everyone around us.

Because we are imperfect relational creatures who sin against God: the moment we believed in Jesus, God becomes our Father, John 1:12, and this forever brings us into relationship with Him. But there's a problem, He's perfect and we're not. Therefore, we will inevitably offend Him. And in order to repair our relationship with Him we need His forgiveness.

Because we are imperfect relational creatures who sin against each other: God is not the only One we offend, we also offend each other (Luke 17:1). This is because we are creatures who possess a sinful nature; therefore, we inevitably sin against each other and damage our relationships. Forgiveness is necessary to restore those relationships.

Love must be the driving force behind your forgiveness, without it, forgiveness is impossible: if love for the person is not present, then it will be difficult, nay, impossible, to forgive them. All you will be able to think about is the hurt they caused you. But if you see them the way God saw Adam and Eve, then you'll be able to see them, not only as perpetrators, but victims of the real enemy: Satan. But to do this, it takes love, self-sacrificing love.

There's a cost to forgiveness: for forgiveness to be given and accepted, someone MUST pay for the sin. Either you pay for what they did to you or they pay, which means that:

1. There's an emotional cost that must be paid (by you or by you and them). Sins against us hurt, the worse the sin, the worse the pain. We can choose to ignore the sin, which leaves us absorbing all the pain and with a constant sore spot because the proper steps of forgiveness were never applied to the wound (1. Repent, 2. Confess, 3. Make restitution if any, 4. Ask for forgiveness, and 5. Restoration of fellowship). If you address their sin, then they will bear the emotional pain with you. If the sin includes a financial cost, then this too must be paid for (by you, them, or both of you).

2. If You pay, then you wipe the slate clean and never bring it up again, e.g., as a bargaining chip.
3. If They pay, then they wipe the slate clean and never bring it up again, e.g., as a bargaining chip.
4. You cannot avoid the cost of forgiveness. That is, not addressing a sin against you will cost you (and perhaps them). Whether you like it or not, you will be emotionally affected. The only way it wouldn't affect you, is if you were a robot. But you are made in God's emotional image, so count on it, it will bother you. However, this is not a problem; it's normal and expected. The question is, "What will you do with that pain/frustration/disappointment you feel?" Will you let it eat you alive or will you step into God's forgiveness and address it?

How does forgiveness work?

1. How does God forgive....Adam and Eve?
 - a. What drove God's forgiveness? God's forgiveness stems from His utterly selfless love. He's willing to pay for our sin, to die for us, in order to forgive us, Genesis 3:15, 22.
 - b. When did God extend forgiveness regarding the cordial "How's the weather?" part of their relationship? There are two sides to forgiveness. One is more on the surface; it's the "How's the weather?" part of forgiveness. It is what allows us to be cordial to one another regardless of how badly someone has sinned against us. So, when did God restore this part of forgiveness for Adam and Eve? Immediately AND with no strings attached: they ran away from God, but He immediately ran towards them, signifying His immediate forgiveness and restoration of this part of their relationship, i.e., God was willing to be around them again even though they had sinned terribly, Genesis 3:8.
 - c. When did God extend forgiveness regarding the deeper "How's your cancer?" part of their relationship? The other part of forgiveness runs much deeper. It's what allows us to relate to one another on a deeper level; it allows us to ask questions like, "How's your cancer?" When Adam and Eve repented and confessed their sin, God restored this deeper, intimate part of their relationship, Genesis 3:9-21.
 - d. Who paid for the sin? You might think that Adam and Eve paid since, 1) they now had troubles in their relationship, 2) Eve had terrible pain every time she gave birth, and 3) Adam had to work five times as hard. But it was actually God who paid for their sin: the penalty was death (Romans 6:23) not hard labor (for him or her) and God paid it, Genesis 3:15, 21; John 1:29; 19:1-42 (cf. Colossians 1:14; 2:13).
 - e. What was the purpose of God's forgiveness? To restore Adam and Eve's oneness with Him, to reaffirm His love for them (to take them out of death and put them back into life).
 - f. This is exactly how God deals with us, as a father watching his child injure herself, God hates it when we sin. It rips us out of His arms and causes us pain. Instead of being an angry Father, He runs to our aid seeking to restore not only the cordial part of our relationship, but the deeper one, 1 John 1:1-10.

III. Conclusion

Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.