

## Paradise Lost and Restored: What is Forgiveness? (Part 2)

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### I. Introduction

So I have to forgive my fellow Christians. But shouldn't they have to make it right before I allow them back into my life? And why can't I just forgive them and then have nothing to do with them, what's wrong with that? Or what if they did something so terrible that there's just no forgiveness for it? Aren't some things unforgivable?

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

#### How Does Forgiveness Work?

#### 2. How are we supposed to forgive?

- a. We must be willing to love them enough to forgive them, forgiveness is not about a confrontation that leads to shouting, screaming, and a worse relationship than before. It's about whether or not we're willing to die for our brother/sister, to love them enough to save them from Satan's darkness and bring them back into the Kingdom of Light, Luke 23:34. That's what's at stake.
- b. Both parties are obligated to address the sin: God calls the offended to go restore the relationship with the one who offended them, Matthew 18:15-17. But He also calls the *offender* to repent, confess, and ask for forgiveness of the one they wronged, Matthew 5:23-26. Why does God mandate this of both? Because He cannot have His house divided; His children must be united.
- c. How many times must you forgive? Our initial tendency may be to hold a grudge, to harbor our anger or pain, but God wants us to forgive always, not once, twice or 490 times, but always, Matthew 18:21-35—if you refuse to forgive, then your Heavenly Father won't forgive you.
- d. For the cordial "How's the weather?" part of the relationship, you must forgive with no conditions attached, Colossians 3:13 (see 1:14; 2:13), which means that:
  - i. You demand nothing before you forgive them.
  - ii. You don't hold a grudge.
  - iii. You don't wish them harm.
  - iv. You don't avoid them—but what if it's a BIG sin?!.....the danger of nursing anger.
  - v. You don't rejoice when something bad happens to them.

\* To restore this part of the relationship, you have to forgive like Jesus did, Luke 23:34.

- e. For the deeper “How’s your cancer?” part of the relationship, they must repent before you grant them access to your life again, Matthew 18:15-17 (Luke 17:3-4), which means that:
- i. They repent, confess the specific sin they committed against you, and ask for your forgiveness. You must not treat this lightly, thus, it’s not enough for them to say, “Sorry” and you to say, “That’s OK.” When we treat sin this way, it’s like putting a band-aid on a gaping wound. The specific offense must be acknowledged by you and them to truly address it.
  - ii. You must forgive them and reestablish the deeper part of the relationship. To refuse them access to your life after they’ve repented is to choose a house divided and not to follow the example of your Heavenly Father who forgave you, cf. Luke 15:25-32.
  - iii. Is it OK to reestablish the deeper part of the relationship without them repenting, confessing their sin, and asking for our forgiveness? Yes. But this is an option; it’s not mandatory. Why should we let them back into our lives without them repenting? Because God is this merciful with us. He often allows us back into His life even though we may be harboring sin, e.g., Moses, Exodus 4:24-26 (cf. Genesis 17:9-14). This means that we can reestablish the relationship without their repentance. However, it will depend on the offense, the greater the offense the more difficult (if not impossible) it will be for us to reestablish fellowship without their repentance.

This also means that you will be paying the cost of their sin. Now you may not always be able to, or want to, or should pay for the sin yourself, but it should be an option you consider. Why? Because we are made in the image of a *self-sacrificing* God, who died for us, thus, He wants us to do die for each other. But there’s a caveat to all this: if they see your forgiveness as weakness and they continue to mistreat you or others, then don’t forgive them until they repent, Matthew 18:21-35.

**What about “Judge not, that you be not judged”?** Since we’re talking about addressing someone’s sin against us, it means that we’re judging them guilty. But doesn’t Matthew 7:1 say that we shouldn’t judge? First, what behavior is Jesus warning against in the Sermon on the Mount? He’s warning us not to be like the scribes and Pharisees, who at times were hypocrites, Matthew 5:20; 6:2, 5, 16. Second, in Matthew 7:1-6 does Jesus say that we shouldn’t judge or that we shouldn’t judge hypocritically? Jesus does NOT say that we can’t judge; He says that we shouldn’t judge like a hypocrite, 7:5.

**What is the goal of Forgiveness?** To heal/repair/restore the relationship, which means that:

1. You love them enough to confront them and to be as severe as you need to be, 1 Corinthians 5:1-5.
2. The confrontation is not to get revenge, vent your anger, or any such thing; it is to reaffirm your love for them and restore the relationship, 2 Corinthians 2:5-11.

### III. Conclusion

*This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him.*