

Paradise Lost and Restored: What is Forgiveness? (Part 4)

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I. Introduction

Imagine a more confident you where you had no doubts about your decisions. And if your decisions went terribly wrong, they didn't devastate you because you knew that there was nothing wrong with you. That's what God's forgiveness can do for you. It will set you free....if you live in it.

II. How Do You Know When You're Not Living in God's Forgiveness?

The danger of not entering God's forgiveness: if you refuse to forgive, then Satan will use it to damage/destroy the relationship, which means that:

1. Satan will use it to damage/destroy the relationship between you and the individual(s) who sinned against you or the individual(s) you sinned against, Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15-17—you won't "gain your brother."
2. Satan will use it to damage/destroy the relationships within the Church, which will damage the Church itself, 2 Corinthians 2:3-11.
3. Satan will use it to damage/destroy your relationship with God, Matthew 6:14-15.
4. You'll leave your brother/sister in Satan's darkness, 1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 2:6-11.
5. You'll be separated from God when you need to hear from Him the most, e.g., Adam and Eve, Genesis 3. When we live outside of God's forgiveness, we live under guilt, fear and shame. This distorts our view of ourselves, God, and our lives. God is no longer our Loving Father, but someone to be feared.

How do you know when you're not living in God's forgiveness? When you fail to live in God's forgiveness, you can't see God, yourself, nor your life clearly. Every horrible decision you made in the past haunts you and defines you...today, which leads you to believe that you suck and so does your life...and that God is not coming to your rescue. However, God NEVER treats His children like this. You may make a mistake, but He'll never kick you out of His family or seek to take vengeance on you. Instead, He forgives. How do you know when you're not living in God's forgiveness? Pain, that is, every time you *live*—not just sense momentarily but live—in fear, anxiety, frustration, stress, depression, anger, or any other negative emotion, it means that you're not living in God's forgiveness, that you're not facing God but away from Him.

What does a person look like who is absolutely convinced that they are totally forgiven by God? They're FREE, free of guilt, anxiety, stress, anger, fear, etc....they are totally free. Free to do their best and if their best isn't good enough, that's OK. They don't beat themselves up over it because they know that there is nothing wrong with them. They have 20/20 vision to see themselves (and everyone else around them) clearly, not as they have to look to be accepted by friends, family, coworkers, or anyone else, but as they really are, as someone of whom God has said, "You are My beloved child; there is absolutely nothing wrong with you." Yes, they make mistakes, but their mistakes don't define them, their life, or God.

“Joe” who constantly said, “God will never help a sinner like me.” From a very young age, Satan lured Joe away from God with a very enticing addiction. It became his all in all. If Joe was sad, it made him happy. If he was happy, it was there to celebrate with him. It became his peace, his comfort, his security, ...his god. But there was a horrible downside: it made him terrified of life. He constantly lived in a fantasy world and the more he lived there, the more the real world scared him. He found himself a twenty-something who was deep in debt and afraid of life: of going to the bank, cooking, having a girlfriend, getting a job, and moving out. He was constantly filled with self-doubt. Where was God in all this? Joe thought God was furious with him. Anytime something went wrong, Joe thought, “God’s punishing me for my sin.” Satan had completely convinced Joe that God was angry with him, that He wasn’t going to help Joe. Even when God did help Joe (which happened regularly), Satan convinced Joe that it was only a test to see if Joe would be faithful. Since Joe kept going back to his addiction, the test proved that Joe was unfaithful and therefore unworthy of God’s help much less His love. But God NEVER gave up on Joe. For 15 long years God remained faithful, waiting patiently until Joe finally stepped into His forgiveness and the real life God had waiting for Joe complete with a job, girlfriend, and a place to live!

III. Summary of Forgiveness

What? Forgiveness means to cancel, to wipe it clean. This is how God forgives us; He cleanses us from all sin when we repent and confess, 1 John 1:9.

Why? God made us like Him, thus, we’re relational creatures. But we’re also flawed; therefore, we sin against God and each other. To repair these relationships forgiveness is necessary.

When? Always. Both the offender and the offended are obligated to mend the relationship. And there’s no limit to the number of times you must forgive, Matthew 18:21-35.

How? *First*, you must love them enough to address their sin. Without love you won’t be able to see the offender the way God sees you, as a sinner in need of [your] grace and a victim of the real enemy, Satan (e.g., the way God saw Cain: God disciplined him severely, but His discipline was tempered with mercy because He knew Cain was a victim of Satan, Genesis 4:1-15). *Second*, there’s a cost to forgive. For forgiveness to work, someone must pay the cost of the sin (you, them, or both of you). But once paid, you cannot bring it up again—the sin is wiped clean. *Third*, there are two parts to forgiveness: the part that allows you to be cordial to one another and the part that allows you to participate in the most intimate aspects of a person’s life. The cordial side has no conditions, thus, you must forgive regardless of what they do/don’t do. And you must not hold a grudge, wish them harm, avoid them, or rejoice in their pain. The intimate side of forgiveness has conditions, i.e., the offender must repent, confess, make restitution if any, and ask for your forgiveness. Then you’re obligated to forgive and restore the relationship. You also have the option of restoring the relationship without their repentance but you shouldn’t do it if they continue to sin against you (or others). *Fourth*, the purpose of forgiveness is always to restore the relationship; it’s not revenge or any such thing, 1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 2:6-8. *Fifth*, if you’ve confessed your sin(s) but still *feel* unforgiven, trust God instead of your conscience, 1 John 1:9; 3:20.

If Christ died for our sins, why do we still suffer for them? First, the penalty was death not suffering. Christ died so we wouldn’t have to and one day He will remove death forever. Second, this world is miserable enough with consequences; imagine a world without consequences.

IV. Conclusion

Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice.