

FORGIVEN

TO

FORGIVE,

FORGIVE

TO BE

FORGIVEN

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GOD FORGIVES YOU, I FORGIVE YOU, WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE? (PART 1)

Throughout the Bible there are dozens of references to sins and forgiveness, but they are not all the same. Sins can be against God alone, against God and another person, or even against God and self. There are several different types of sin described and several different words used for those sins. Forgiveness is sometimes offered from God to man and sometimes it is offered from one person to another. Sin and forgiveness is different under each age (Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian), but the eternal consequences of a sin that is not forgiven by God have not changed.

Before we can understand forgiveness, we need to understand sin, what it is and what it does. Let's look quickly at some basics about sin so that we will have a good foundation to build on.

1) How would you define sin? _____

2) Why do you think some of the things God calls sin are different in the three ages? _____

3) Has God changed His mind about what He calls sin since the church began? _____

4) Why do you think God punished some sins immediately or without mercy offered? _____

5) Are all sins equal? _____ Explain. _____

6) Why do you think that under Moses' Law there were different ways for atoning for different sins, but under Christ's Law there is only one? _____

7) What are some different words used to describe sin in the Bible? _____

8) When you sin and know you have sinned, how does it make you feel? _____

9) Why do you think some sins don't seem to bother some people as much as others? _____

When we understand that sin is breaking one of God's laws and that if it is not forgiven we will spend an eternity separated from Him in perpetual torment, then we should want to do whatever is necessary to obtain forgiveness. We will examine how more in lesson three. The quest to be relieved of the guilt of sin has been ongoing since Adam's and Eve's first sin in the garden. In fact, the entire Bible is a record of God's plan to restore the relationship that mankind had with Him before that first sin. Sin has a powerful influence in the lives of many people, but forgiveness can be even more powerful.

One of the things that we have to recognize about forgiveness is that it comes from God. It was His idea not ours. Many cultures have developed all kinds of rituals to try to atone for their sins, but if we are following God's plan we are following the only real path to forgiveness that there is. Since forgiveness flows from God we need to understand that our ability and any right that we have to forgive another comes from Him as well. We did not originate the idea; we are only imitating Him.

Let's turn our attention to God's forgiveness. There are many things about God that are unique and that also makes His forgiveness quite unique. Probably the most obvious is that because He is perfect and cannot sin He never needs to be forgiven by anyone else. One of the things that we often appeal to with other human beings when seeking forgiveness is that they know what it is like because they have done wrong as well. With God this line of reasoning is out the window because He hasn't ever done wrong. He doesn't forgive us based on that equality. There is the old adage: 'To err is human, to forgive is divine'. What makes God's forgiveness so incredible is that in spite of His perfection He is merciful. Let's notice some scriptures that speak of God's forgiveness and see what we learn. Write what you learn about God's forgiveness in the blanks.

10) Exodus 34:5-7: _____

11) Leviticus 4:1-35: _____

12) Leviticus 5:10-18: _____

13) Numbers 15:27-31: _____

14) Joshua 24:19-21: _____

15) 1 Kings 8:30-40 - _____

16) 2 Chronicles 7:14 - _____

17) Psalm 32:1,5 - _____

18) Psalm 86:5 - _____

19) Psalms 103:10-14 - _____

20) Psalm 130:4 & Romans 2:4-6 - _____

21) Jeremiah 31:34 & Hebrews 8:12 - _____

22) Daniel 9:9 - _____

23) Mat 12:31-32 - _____

24) Mark 2:5-12 - _____

25) Luke 7:39-50 - _____

What did we learn about God's forgiveness in these verses? Some of the things that we see are things we have heard before about how merciful and gracious God is toward us. However, we also see these passages telling us that God will not clear the guilty and that there is a sin God will not forgive. These seemingly contradictory ideas are taught sometimes even in the same section of scripture as in Exodus 34:5-7.

26) How can God be forgiving and merciful and yet not clear the guilty at the same time? _____

Another thing that is clear in the Bible is that forgiveness from God is conditional. He does not just God knows what our sins are, in fact, because of His omniscience he knows we will commit those sins before we have even been tempted. He also knows who will obey Him and who will have the right kind of heart. With that knowledge some might think that He could just go ahead and forgive us without us having to pray and confess and repent of those sins.

27) Why do you think God's forgiveness is conditional? _____

We also see that it seems to make no difference to God whether a person has a little bit of sin or a large amount of sin, He can easily forgive each person. How different are we? If someone said something mean to us we could forgive that, but what if someone beat us up or robbed us would we be able to forgive that as easily? What if there were two people and one called us some cruel name once while the other had robbed us every week for the past 10 years, which one would be harder to forgive? It doesn't matter to God if we only ever committed one sin or 100 sins every day of our adult life. He can forgive them all. When we say that the forgiveness of God is conditional it does not mean that it is conditional upon the number or kinds of sins committed, rather the conditions are on our ability to accept and receive the forgiveness not His ability to give it. He has enough grace and mercy for every sinner that is or ever has been living on the earth.

28) Do you personally find it more difficult to forgive someone that has done something that you consider to be a worse sin? _____ Why or why not? _____

Finally, we want to notice from Jesus' healing in Mark 2:5-12 that He claimed the power to forgive sins. The Jewish leaders believe that only God can forgive sins.

29) Is what the scribes are thinking (that only God can forgive sin) true or false? _____

Jesus heals the man, which is much more evident, in order to prove that He could forgive the man of his sins.

30) Did Jesus argue with or refute their belief that only God can forgive sins? _____ How can we say that we forgive someone since we are not God? _____

Exodus 34:5-7 And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. (6) And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, (7) Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.

Leviticus 4:1-35

Leviticus 5:10-18 And he shall offer the second for a burnt offering, according to the manner: and the priest shall make an atonement for him for his sin which he hath sinned, and it shall be forgiven him. 11 But if he be not able to bring two turtledoves, or two young pigeons, then he that sinned shall bring for his offering the tenth part of an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering; he shall put no oil upon it, neither shall he put any frankincense thereon: for it is a sin offering. 12 Then shall he bring it to the priest, and the priest shall take his handful of it, even a memorial thereof, and burn it on the altar, according to the offerings made by fire unto the Lord: it is a sin offering. 13 And the priest shall make an atonement for him as touching his sin that he hath sinned in one of these, and it shall be forgiven him: and the remnant shall be the priest's, as a meat offering. 14 And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 15 If a soul commit a trespass, and sin through ignorance, in the holy things of the Lord; then he shall bring for his trespass unto the Lord a ram without blemish out of the flocks, with thy estimation by shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary, for a trespass offering: 16 And he shall make amends for the harm that he hath done in the holy thing, and shall add the fifth part thereto, and give it unto the priest: and the priest shall make an atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering, and it shall be forgiven him. 17 And if a soul sin, and commit any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the Lord; though he wist it not, yet is he guilty, and shall bear his iniquity. 18 And he shall bring a ram without blemish out of the flock, with thy estimation, for a trespass offering, unto the priest: and the priest shall make an atonement for him concerning his ignorance wherein he erred and wist it not, and it shall be forgiven him.

Numbers 15:27-31 And if any soul sin through ignorance, then he shall bring a she goat of the first year for a sin offering. 28 And the priest shall make an atonement for the soul that sinneth ignorantly, when he sinneth by ignorance before the Lord, to make an atonement for him; and it shall be forgiven him. 29 Ye shall have one law for him that sinneth through ignorance, both for him that is born among the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them. 30 But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people. 31 Because he hath despised the word of the Lord, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him.

Joshua 24:19-21 And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the Lord: for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. 20 If ye forsake the Lord, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he hath done you good. 21 And the people said unto Joshua, Nay; but we will serve the Lord.

1 Kings 8:30-40 And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place: and hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place: and when thou hearest, forgive. 31 If any man trespass against his neighbour, and an oath be laid upon him to cause him to swear, and the oath come before thine altar in this house: 32 Then hear thou in heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, condemning the wicked, to bring his way upon his head; and justifying the righteous, to give him according to his righteousness. 33 When thy people Israel be smitten down before the enemy, because they have sinned against thee, and shall turn again to thee, and confess thy name, and pray, and make supplication unto thee in this house: 34 Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy people Israel, and bring them again unto the land which thou gavest unto their fathers. 35 When heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee; if they pray toward this place, and confess thy name, and turn from their sin, when thou afflictest them: 36 Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, that thou teach them the good way wherein they should walk, and give rain upon thy land, which thou hast given to thy people for an inheritance. 37 If there be in the land famine, if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew, locust, or if there be caterpillar; if their enemy besiege them in the land of their cities; whatsoever plague, whatsoever sickness there be; 38 What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house: 39 Then hear thou in heaven thy

dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men;)

2Ch 7:14 If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

Psa 32:1,5 A Psalm of David, Maschil. Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. (5) I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah.

Psa 86:5 For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee.

Psalms 103:10-14 He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. 11 For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. 12 As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. 13 Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. 14 For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.

Psa 130:4 But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared.

Romans 2:4-6 Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? 5 But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; 6 Who will render to every man according to his deeds:

Jer 31:34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Hebrews 8:12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

Dan 9:9 To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him;

Mat 12:31-32 Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. 32 And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

Mark 2:5-12 When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee. 6 But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts, 7 Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only? 8 And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? 9 Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? 10 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) 11 I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house. 12 And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.

Luke 7:39-50 Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner. 40 And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. 41 There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. 42 And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? 43 Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. 44 And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. 45 Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. 46 My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. 47 Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. 48 And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. 49 And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? 50 And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.

God Forgives You, I Forgive You, What's the Difference? (Part 2)

When God forgives a sin it is gone and will never be considered again (Jer 31:34; Hebrews 8:12). It is as though it had never existed. That doesn't mean that it didn't happen, however. After Saul/Paul consented to Stephen's death he became a Christian and was forgiven. His forgiveness did not mean that Stephen wasn't dead. Stephen's wife was still a widow, his children were still orphans. There are some things that cannot be undone no matter how much someone might want to undo them.

1) What does Job say about his sin in Job 14:16-17? _____

2) Does having the sin completely obliterated mean that the consequences of that sin are gone as well? _____

3) What is the difference in natural / physical consequences and spiritual consequences? _____

4) How does 2 Samuel 11 & 12 especially 2 Samuel 12:11-15 help our understanding of the consequences of sin, even sin that has been forgiven? _____

When we forgive sin it is different. We already established that we are not God, therefore, we can't forgive sin like God does. There are certainly passages that teach us to forgive, but we must understand that we do not have the power that God does to permanently and completely dispose of another person's sin. Let's illustrate. If I murdered someone you could tell me it was okay, a lawyer could get me off on a technicality or a court could even proclaim me not guilty or say that it was justifiable. None of those things make any difference to God and His determination of my guilt or innocence. The fact that another person says you are forgiven doesn't make it so. We as human beings are not the final judge. It is certainly true that we can point people to the scriptures and what they teach about sin, guilt, consequences, and forgiveness. The problem that we have is that we are not able to know the sincerity of another's heart and soul, but God can. If it were left up to us we might forgive some of the wrong people and not forgive some that we should. That is why God simply gives us the command to forgive. Jesus Himself gave us the example to follow as He was dying on the cross. He asked the Father to forgive the very people who were guilty of putting Him on the cross (Luke 23:34). We need to have that same attitude of forgiveness toward those who sin against us. Stephen did the same as he was being stoned to death (Acts 7:60).

5) Were the people who killed Jesus and Stephen forgiven at the time of these two prayers asking the Father to forgive? _____ Why or why not? _____

6) Did either Jesus or Stephen wait for others to ask them for forgiveness before going to the Father on their behalf? _____ Why do we? _____

Jesus said that they did not know what they were doing. He obviously didn't mean they didn't know they were executing Him, but that they did not know He was God in the flesh.

7) Is it possible that someone might sin against us or someone else and not realize what they had done ? _____

How do you think 1 John 5:16-17 might apply in a situation like that? _____

8) When you became a Christian did you have to remember and confess to God every sin you had ever committed in order to get forgiveness from Him? _____ Why or Why not? _____

9) If as a Christian you commit a sin and do not realize it, and therefore do not confess it or repent of it specifically, but you are living a godly life (walking in the light). Will God forgive you of that sin? _____

How does 1 John 1:7-8 apply to this situation? _____

We often spend too much time trying to decide whether God is going to forgive someone of a particular sin they have committed against us instead of forgiving them ourselves and leaving Him to decide the rest. We are not talking about whether someone has obeyed the gospel or not, that can often be easily known. At least we can know if someone has been baptized by immersion in water for the forgiveness of their sins based on their confession of Christ. We do not always know if they "obeyed from the heart" (Romans 6:17-18) or not, but can sometimes see obvious signs that some are still living in sin. It is also fairly simple to determine if someone was sprinkled instead of immersed, baptized as an infant, or not baptized at all. We know that if someone is not a Christian God has not forgiven any of their sins and will not forgive any of them until they do obey the gospel, but that doesn't have anything to do with whether we forgive them. We should also know that if someone is a Christian God has forgiven him of all the sins he committed before he became a Christian and will forgive or refuse to forgive him of current and future sins based on his relationship with and obedience to God, not based on what we think He should or shouldn't do.

God commands us as his children to forgive others when they sin against us. If we refuse to do what He has commanded then we are in sin ourselves. Let us consider Jonah.

10) Were the people of Nineveh wicked and deserving of punishment? _____ Was Jonah? _____

11) Were the people of Nineveh Jonah's enemies? _____ God's enemies? _____

12) Did Jonah want God to forgive the people of Nineveh? _____

13) Did Jonah want God to forgive him? _____

14) Did Jonah forgive the people of Nineveh? _____ Did God? _____

15) Are we more like God or more like Jonah? _____

16) Who is there in your life that you don't want God to forgive? _____

We often hear and say that we are supposed to “be ready to forgive” or “have an attitude of forgiveness”. I would like to challenge anyone to find either of these two phrases or similar phrases taught anywhere in the New Testament. The only time the phrase “ready to forgive” is mentioned it is speaking of God. He is ready and waiting for us to respond to Him, and He will not forgive until we do. He can do that because of who He is, but we don’t have that right. Is it true that if someone comes to us asking for forgiveness we should forgive? Absolutely. But is that the end of our responsibility as Christians? Not at all. Even though the phrases above are not mentioned in the Bible, there is another command that is given over and over again. That command is “forgive”. Not be ready to forgive, but actually forgive. To understand clearly the difference let us use the financial arena which is where some of these words originated and is in some of the examples Jesus gives us as well.

Consider this situation: Sam borrowed \$100,000 from Henry to start a business that failed and he can’t pay it back. Henry is wealthy and doesn’t need the money, and he is easily able and willing to forgive the debt (ready to forgive, attitude of forgiveness). Henry knows Sam can’t pay the money back. Sam is afraid to admit that he can’t pay the money back and avoids being around Henry even though they used to be good friends. Sam worries about the debt constantly, and it is starting to affect his physical, emotional and mental health and other relationships. What would happen to Sam and Henry if . . .

17a) . . . Sam gets up the courage to go talk to Henry and admit that he can’t pay it? _____

17b) . . . Henry waits “ready to forgive” the debt if Sam asks? _____

17c) . . . Henry considers the debt forgiven, but never tells Sam? _____

17d) . . . Henry tells Sam that the debt is forgiven, and keeps bringing up how he forgave Sam all the time? _____

17e) . . . Henry tells Sam it is forgiven and it never comes up again? _____

17f) ... Sam goes to extremes (check cashing, Title pawn, gambling, etc.) to try to get the money to pay it back? _____

17g) . . . Henry says it is forgiven, but gripes to everyone else about it every time Sam spends \$1? _____

17h) . . . Sam files for bankruptcy and includes this debt in the bankruptcy? _____

18) Which was best for Sam? _____ For Henry? _____ For all concerned? _____

19) Why wouldn't that be the best way to deal with a person who has sinned against us as well? _____

20) How do you think Matthew 6:12-15 and Mark 11:25-26 apply to a time when someone wronged us, but has not tried to make it right? _____

21) How do you think the golden rule might apply to this kind of situation (How would you want someone you had sinned against to treat you)? _____

22) Are you ever guilty of a double standard (one for you and a different one for others) in this area? _____

23) What does Jesus think of differing standards according to Matthew 7:1-5? _____

24) As you think about all the hurtful, unkind, sinful things you remember having said or done since you became a Christian, can you honestly say that you have gone to everyone that you sinned against and repented and tried

to make it right? _____

25a) Would you want those you have sinned against to be ready to forgive or to forgive? _____

25b) What difference does it make? _____

We saw earlier that the command given to us by Jesus and the Father is for us to forgive. We must understand that only God (Father, Son, and Spirit) has the power to remove the eternal consequences of sin. The command to us as individuals to forgive others has nothing to do with their eternal destination and everything to do with our own eternal destination. Only God has the right to make conditions for forgiveness. The only time Jesus addresses the idea of a condition for us to forgive is in the case of a brother (fellow Christian). In Luke 17:1-5 He says that we are to rebuke the Christian who sinned and if he repents, forgive him, even up to 7 times a day. The responsibility is not on the brother to come to us, but on us to go rebuke him. In Matthew 18:15-17 Jesus expounds on this topic by saying that we should try to work it out alone first and then if needed we have two or three witnesses, and then finally take that brother who won't repent before the church. If all of these steps fail to bring repentance then and only then are we to all treat that rebellious sinner as a heathen. Even at this point, however, 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 tells us that we are not to treat him as an enemy, but continue to make attempts to bring him back.

26) What should our attitude be toward a Christian who has sinned against us? _____

27) Should we be more concerned over the hurt we experienced or the soul of the one who sinned against us? _____

Jer 31:34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

Hebrews 8:12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

Job 14:16-17 For now thou numberest my steps: dost thou not watch over my sin? {17} My transgression is sealed up in a bag, and thou sewest up mine iniquity.

2 Samuel 12:11-15 Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. {12} For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun. {13} And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. {14} Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die. {15} And Nathan departed unto his house. And the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick.

Luk 23:34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.

Acts 7:60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

1 John 5:16-17 If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. {17} All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death.

1 John 1:7-8 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. {8} If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

Romans 6:17-18 But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. {18} Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.

Mar 11:25-26 And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. {26} But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

Mat 6:12-15 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. {14} For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: {15} But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Matthew 7:1-5 Judge not, that ye be not judged. {2} For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. {3} And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? {4} Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? {5} Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

Luke 17:1-5 Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come! {2} It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. {3} Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. {4} And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him. {5} And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.

Matthew 18:15-17 Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. {16} But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. {17} And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

2 Thes. 3:14-15 And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. {15} Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

How Can I Get Forgiveness from God?

There are dozens if not hundreds of different ideas about the process by which someone is forgiven by God, but God's description is the only one that matters since He is doing the forgiving. We have already acknowledged that during the Patriarchal and Mosaic ages God had different procedures than He does in the Christian age. Primarily the reason for that was that Christ had not come to give his life in those times. They were looking forward to Christ and we are looking back to Christ and His cross. We are living in the Christian age so we need to focus on what needs to be done now. Studying the Old Testament and God's forgiveness in that time could certainly be educational and enlightening, but this lesson is concerned with our forgiveness and salvation from sin.

God has planned for the redemption of man since before man even sinned (1 Peter 1:19-20). He knew that we would sin and knew how He would deal with that sin before even creating us. God had to do the lion's share of the work in redemption, and we do very little in comparison.

- 1) Who came up with the plan or scheme of redemption? _____
- 2) Who worked tirelessly through 4000 years of history to bring that plan into effect? _____
- 3) Who had to make countless sacrifices including sending His only son to live and die on Earth? _____
- 4) Who had to leave Heaven, give up equality with God to become lower than the angels, face things never faced before including temptation and death, be separated from and forsaken by God for the first time in eternity, and suffer ridicule and torture at the hands of the very creation that He was trying to save? _____
- 5) Who has had to work for an additional 2000 years to record, preserve, distribute the record of that plan working initially miraculously, but for the past 1900 years only through His providence to ensure the integrity and availability of that plan? _____

After all of that, all we have to do is learn His plan and follow it. It certainly couldn't be reasonable to conclude that we either earn or deserve forgiveness, yet some say that. God has done everything divinely possible to forgive us and has told us what is humanly possible and necessary to complete the process.

The first thing that is essential is the hearing of the gospel (good news) of Jesus coming so that we can have forgiveness.

- 6) What is one passage that teaches that we must hear the gospel before we can be saved? _____

Hearing must also carry with it the idea of understanding what is said. If I heard someone teaching the gospel in Arabic I would not even know what they were teaching because I don't understand Arabic. This concept is one of the fundamental reasons for the speaking in tongues (languages) in the first century and has also been the driving force behind translating the Bible into so many of the world's languages (Wikipedia reports that the Bible is translated in part or completely into the languages of 98% of the world's people, In all, part or all of the Bible has been translated into 2454 different languages according to United Bible Society, 2007). Beyond being able to hear/read and understand the reader/hearer must also accept and believe the facts of God's plan for their salvation.

- 7) What is one passage that teaches something that we must believe to be forgiven and what does it say must be believed? _____

There are many things that we must accept and believe before our sins can be forgiven. These things begin with a belief in the existence of the one true and living God of the Bible and continue (with a multitude of facts along the way) to the point of believing that we are sinners in need of a savior and that Christ is that savior. At this point we have to act upon what we have heard, understood, accepted, and believed by responding with a godly sorrow that leads us to repentance. This is where the rubber meets the road. If you believe, then action must follow. This is not an intellectual exercise regardless of how many people treat it as one. Many of the people that we meet each day would say that they believe in God and even Christ. Some of them would even claim to be Christians, but almost all of them (and possibly some of us) have failed to truly feel sorrow for the individual sinful actions caused Christ's death on the cross hurting God deeply. Because of the failure to recognize personal responsibility and feel godly sorrow the step of true repentance is never taken. True repentance is not saying you are sorry or feeling bad, rather it involves: (1) Godly Sorrow - (a) knowing you have hurt God with your sins and are separated from Him by them, (b) hurting over the loss of that relationship and the pain you caused another who did not deserve it; Mental Changes - (a) hating the sin, (b) deciding to turn away from it, (c) deciding to turn toward God, (d) determining to do what is right; Changes in Action - (a) eliminating the practice of sinful behaviors, (b) replacing those sinful behaviors with righteous ones, (c) beginning the practice of new righteous behaviors. This process of repentance is not just a one time action, but a change in mind-set that causes a reoccurring process of learning and putting the new knowledge into action. The process should continue till death or mental incapacity, however, it must be started before forgiveness will be granted by God. (Scriptures to consider: Hebrews 6:1, 2 Corinthians 7:9-11, Matthew 27:3-5, Mark 14:72, Matthew 26:75, Romans 2:4, Acts 26:20, Matthew 3:8)

8a) What stage in this process were the people in Acts 2:36? _____

8b) in Acts 2:37? _____

9) Why are some people in Acts told to believe while others like those here in Acts 2 are told to repent? _____

Repentance is one of the most misunderstood concepts in God's scheme of redemption. We often confuse repentance with: apologizing, praying/asking for forgiveness, admitting we have sinned/confessing our sin, feeling bad, stopping because we got caught, or slowing down/ lessening the severity of our sins. We often put a great deal of emphasis on baptism, and rightly so because it is another poorly understood aspect of forgiveness, but we often neglect repentance even though it is coupled with baptism in Acts 2:38 and is required just as surely as belief or baptism.

10) Other than Acts 2 what is a passage that teaches the essentiality of repentance? _____

In addition to the things already mentioned we must acknowledge or confess that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of God. This is clearly more than just saying, "I believe in Jesus". Rational people really have no choice but to admit that Jesus lived. In fact, the Jews generally don't deny that He lived. The Muslims believe He was a prophet. Even Atheists can't deny the impact and historical evidence of His life. God demands more than accepting the obvious, instead He calls for a deeper examination of who Jesus is and demands that to be forgiven we must confess our faith in Him as the prophesied Messiah and Son of God.

11a) What do Matthew 10:32-33 and Luke 12:8-9 tell us will happen if we confess Jesus? _____

11b) What if we don't? _____

Various different denominations teach a variety of combinations of these steps usually in connection with a “sinner’s prayer” or “religious experience” to prove that someone has been saved. The problem is that they have neglected the point at which we are actually clothed with Christ (we put Christ on in baptism, Gal. 3:27). Can you imagine someone getting up one morning showering, brushing his teeth, shaving, and after finishing in the bathroom running through the kitchen to grab his coffee and a biscuit or bagel on his way out the door to work without getting dressed (I believe I have seen some people out and about who had done that). How embarrassing! That, however, is exactly what people are doing spiritually when they stop before baptism.

I can’t believe it is an accident that God specifically mentioned baptism in every conversion in the book of Acts even though none of the other steps is specifically included in every recorded conversion. I believe that God did this because of His foreknowledge, knowing that this would be the one aspect of salvation from sin that would be neglected and forgotten by many. Not only did He mention it every time, but He also described the action in several different ways to make it obvious what He meant by it. Beginning with the word itself which means ‘to immerse, dip, or plunge’ and was used outside the Bible to describe a ship that had sunk (not one that had been rained on, sprinkling, or had a wave crash into it, pouring), God continues by describing the process in Acts 8:38 “. . . and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him”. As if that were not enough He also uses terms like buried and planted (Romans 6:3-5). There should be no doubt about what baptism is, in fact, as a teacher I had used to say, “I takes years of expert help to misunderstand that.” Of course many people do misunderstand it because they have been told the wrong thing for so long. It is our responsibility to help others know what God really says about forgiveness and how to obtain it.

In addition to the problems of how to be baptized, even those who do it in the way the Bible describes often are baptized for all sorts of wrong reasons. The ‘why’ of baptism is just as important as the ‘how’ and the ‘in what’. Just ask people if someone needs to be baptized to be saved, or ask if they were saved before, during, or after their own “baptism” if they say they have been baptized. Let’s notice what the Bible says about baptism.

12) In each of the following passages the sinner is separated from something until he has been baptized what is it in each scripture:

A) Mark 16:16 - _____

B) Acts 2:38 - _____

C) Romans 6:4 - _____

D) Romans 6:6 - _____

E) Acts 22:16 - _____

F) Acts 22:16 - _____

G) John 3:5 - _____

H) Ephesians 5:26 - _____

I) Romans 6:7-12 - _____

J) Romans 6:18 - _____

K) 1 Peter 3:21 - _____

L) Colossians 2:11-12 - _____

M) Romans 6:3 - _____

N) Galatians 3:26-27 - _____

O) Romans 6:3 - _____

P) Romans 6:4-5 - _____

Q) 1 Peter 3:21 - _____

R) Galatians 3:26-27 - _____

S) Romans 6:4 - _____

T) Colossians 2:11-12 - _____

U) Ephesians 5:26 - _____

V) 1 Corinthians 12:13 - _____

As significant as baptism is we must understand that it does not stand alone. If we did not follow the path of hearing and believing the gospel, repenting of our sins and confessing Christ, then all we do when we go under the water is get wet. Baptism is more than just a physical action of going under water or people would be baptized thousands of times all summer long in pools, rivers, lakes, and oceans. Instead baptism is the physical action that when combined with the proper knowledge, understanding, and submission of will to God, and following (not preceding or interrupting) the steps mentioned earlier allows Christ's blood to come in contact with our souls and wash them clean of their sins. God is not in the dry-cleaning business. Our sins are not dusted off, blown off, or brushed off. They are washed off and that requires liquid. The liquid that does the actual work is the blood, but the only place to contact it is in the waters of baptism.

These are the God-given steps in the necessary order that we must all take if we want our sins to be forgiven. You can't believe if you haven't heard, can't repent or confess what you don't believe, and can't wash away sins that you won't repent of or take the name of one you won't confess.

13) Some leave steps out. The most common one left out is baptism and there are many reasons that people might leave it out. What reason(s) do people give for leaving it off? _____

14) Some change the order of the steps. This is most common with people who baptize babies. They will then teach them what to believe later and "confirm" them when they are old enough. Why do some religious groups do things out of order? _____

15) Some try to change one of the steps. The step most commonly changed is baptism. It may be changed to sprinkling or pouring, or it may be changed from water to Holy Spirit, or the reason may be changed from 'in order to be' to 'because you have been' forgiven. Why do you think people change this step most often? _____

16) Many just ignore them altogether. These people think that they can do things on their own or just don't believe in God and the Bible. They may follow some other religious teaching that they think is better. Regardless of which of these four choices one makes what is the common result of all of them? _____

1 Peter 1:19-20 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: {20} Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,

Romans 10:14-18 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? {15} And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! {16} But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? {17} So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. {18} But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.

John 8:23-24 And he said unto them, Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world. {24} I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.

Matthew 3:8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:

Acts 26:20 But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

Romans 2:4 Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?

2 Corinthians 7:9-11 Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. {10} For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. {11} For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

Hebrews 6:1 Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,

Matthew 27:3-5 Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, {4} Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. {5} And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.

Mark 14:72 And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept.

Matthew 26:75 And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.

Matthew 10:32-33 Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. {33} But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.

Luke 12:8-9 Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: {9} But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God.

TITLE: BAPTISM STANDS BETWEEN

AUTHOR: UNKNOWN

BAPTISM STANDS BETWEEN!

SINNER-----BAPTISM-----Salvation (Mark 16:16)
SINNER-----BAPTISM-----Remission of Sins (Acts 2:38)
SINNER-----BAPTISM-----The New Life (Rom 6:4)
SINNER-----BAPTISM-----Sin Being Destroyed (Rom 6:6)
SINNER-----BAPTISM-----Washing (Acts 22:16)
SINNER-----BAPTISM-----Calling (Acts 22:16)
SINNER-----BAPTISM-----Kingdom (John 3:5)
SINNER-----BAPTISM-----Cleansing (Eph 5:26)
SINNER-----BAPTISM-----Being Dead to Sin (Rom 6:7-12)
SINNER-----BAPTISM-----Being Free from Sin (Rom 6:18)
SINNER-----BAPTISM-----Salvation (1 Pet 3:21)
SINNER-----BAPTISM-----Forgiveness (Col 2:11-12)
SINNER-----BAPTISM-----Christ's Blood (Rom 6:3)
SINNER-----BAPTISM-----Being a Child of God (Gal 3:26-27)
SINNER-----BAPTISM-----Death of Christ (Rom 6:3)
SINNER-----BAPTISM-----Being a New Creature (Rom 6:4-5)
SINNER-----BAPTISM-----Good Conscience (1 Pet 3:21)
SINNER-----BAPTISM-----Putting on Christ (Gal 3:26-27)
SINNER-----BAPTISM-----Being Raised with Christ (Rom 6:4)
SINNER-----BAPTISM-----Putting off Sins (Col 2:11-12)
SINNER-----BAPTISM-----Sanctification (Eph 5:26)
SINNER-----BAPTISM-----Being part of the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13)

Another aspect that we must grasp is that these steps bring us to Christ and the new birth process makes us Christians, but that is only the beginning. Being a Christian is a lifelong, daily following of Jesus Christ, not a one time act. Many people study and learn in order to become Christians and then stop, but Christianity involves continuing education. Perhaps the following is not a perfect analogy, but hopefully it will be close enough to get the point across. When asked, "Are you a Christian?" People will often answer, "I was baptized." Now imagine going in for surgery and asking the person who was to do the surgery, "Are you a surgeon?" How would you feel if his response was, "I was born." I'd feel better if he said staying at the Holiday Inn Express qualified him. Even if he said, "I went to school.", it would not fill us with great confidence because he may have failed or quit. The fact that someone once believe in Jesus enough to be baptized 30 years ago doesn't mean that person is a Christian today.

We need to also get past this strange terminology that we use in talking about "faithful Christians" and "unfaithful Christians". Christians are those who are faithful followers of Christ. Christians are faithful and the faithful are Christians, but it is not possible to have an unfaithful Christian. Saying someone is an unfaithful Christian is like saying that he/she is an unfaithful faithful follower of Christ. It is not a scriptural term. It is possible for someone who is faithful to become unfaithful, and it is possible for a follower of Christ to turn back to follow the world, and it is possible that someone that was a Christian to stop being a Christian. When one stops following Christ and ceases living by His teachings that person is no longer worthy to wear the name of Christ.

After having become a Christian through the steps mentioned above, we have a new relationship with Christ and the Father. Because of this new relationship sins are forgiven in a new way and there are different requirements for forgiveness. Let's look at how things have changed.

17) If we were properly baptized is there ever a need to be baptized again? _____ Why or Why not? _____

18) If we repented of our sins before baptism do we ever need to repent of sins again? _____ Why or Why not?

19) If we believed in Jesus Christ and confessed him before baptism should we ever stop believing in him and confessing him? _____ What if we do? _____

20) Does the Bible teach that confessing our sins will help us gain forgiveness if we are: not Christians, Christians, both, or neither? _____

21) To whom should we confess our sins? _____

22) What difference is there in what one who is faithful should do to be forgiven and what one who is unfaithful should do? _____

23) What do you think most often causes someone to become unfaithful? _____

24) How can we guard ourselves against becoming unfaithful? _____

Do I Need to Forgive God for Being Perfect?

The title of this lesson may sound ridiculous at first, I mean, really, how could someone perfect need forgiveness? The fact of the matter is that many people blame God for all kinds of things in their lives. One of the problems is that since none of us have ever met someone who is perfect, some of us can't believe that God REALLY is perfect. Have you ever known someone who was condescending and acted like they thought they were perfect? Probably all of us have, if you haven't count yourself lucky. A person like that grates on others around because everyone knows that person is not perfect. The problem is sometimes we may become offended by God's true perfection because we don't recognize the difference in it and the fake, putting on airs of perfection that we have seen in some hypocrites.

Many of the religious people in Jesus day had the same problem with Him. They thought that He must have sin. In fact, they went out of their way to prove He was a sinner and even claimed to know that He was. They manufactured all kinds of lies and twisted God's law to try to say that Jesus had broken it when He had really only broken their man-made traditions(John 9:24). They were constantly finding fault with the people around Him as well supposing that if He was among sinners, then He must be one(guilt by association). When they had failed miserably in their attempts to find sin in Him they simply went out at night and arrested Him, got false witnesses to lie about Him, put Him through several monkey trials in kangaroo courts(violating their own law and the Law of Moses), and finally manipulating someone with enough authority to execute Him in order to get him killed. Seems like they needed to forgive Jesus for being perfect.

What I am really saying though is that we need accept that perfection and instead of being jealous and envious we should be striving to follow the example given. It is not only God that we treat this way.

1) Did you or one of your siblings or even one of you children ever become jealous because another who did not do wrong escaped punishment? _____ Did you or that other person take it out on the "perfect" child? _____

What was done to that kid that didn't get into trouble? _____

How did that work out in the end? _____

When we look at the Bible we find examples of this kind of behavior. Adam subtly blamed God for his sin in the Garden of Eden by blaming, "the woman YOU gave me" for his own choice to disobey. Cain blamed Abel when his offering was rejected while Abel's was accepted and even killed Abel. When God turned against the Children of Israel because of their sin they became angry at Him and served other gods more. When Ahab and Jezebel had become so wicked that God punished them with a 3&1/2 year drought Ahab blamed Elijah and called him the troubler of Israel.

2) What other Bible examples can you think of where the innocent person was blamed or persecuted by the sinner? _____

God is not to blame for our sins or for the problems that come upon us because of those sins. He is not unfair or unjust in the way He punishes us for those sins, either. The sooner we come to understand these things and stop blaming Him for our faults or accusing Him of playing favorites, etc. the better off we will be. God is perfect. Believe it, accept it, stop being jealous, and start imitating Him. The same goes for those that are living a better Christian life than we are. Follow them as they follow Christ. Don't help the Devil tear them down!

Who Should I Forgive?

As we ask this question, maybe the real question we should be asking is “Is there anyone we should not forgive?”. As Christians we should be the most forgiving people in the world. We have already established that only God can forgive someone’s sin. The problem often comes in that we think some things are sins, because “he hurt my feelings”, “she wouldn’t help me when I needed it” or something similar, when in reality we have the wrong definition of what a sin is. Jesus said and did some things that in our politically correct world would certainly be considered “sins” and some of the religious leaders of His day thought they were sins even though they were not. Paul asked, “Am I become your enemy, because I tell you the truth.” (Galatians 4:16). I’m sure some of those people thought he was mean and never forgave him. Of course that was absurd, Paul was speaking by inspiration and had not said anything sinful. The first thing that we have to do is learn what is a sin and what is not.

1) How will we face God on judgment day if we are holding people responsible for ‘sins’ that are not really sins?

2) Why is it important for Christians to learn not to be oversensitive or politically correct? _____

3) Have you ever not talked to someone about a sin in their life or their salvation because you have bought into the lie that offending people is a sin? _____ Have you ever been on the other side and had someone risk offending you because they loved you enough to tell you the truth you needed to hear? _____ Have you forgiven those people who have said tough things that seemed mean to you? _____

The second area where we fail is in the area of assuming someone’s sin. We have often decided that someone must have done something because of circumstantial evidence or guilt by association or that something appeared to be evil. Probably one of the most abused passages in the New Testament is 1 Thessalonians 5:22. The King James translates it “Abstain from all appearance of evil.” While I might argue that the word translated ‘appearance’ would have been better translated ‘forms’. The real problem is that someone who is looking to find fault or evil will be able to make an innocent situation ‘appear’ evil. Have you ever heard the old trick question, “When did you stop beating your wife?” We need to watch out for appearances because they can be deceiving as the old adage says. Jesus said, “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24). Instead of needing to forgive these people, sometimes we may be the ones that need to be forgiven. But we should beware of this danger and not hold people responsible for sins that they did not commit. What often happens with this kind of situation is that there is a sin involved. We usually hear about these situations from someone who is gossiping, and that is the sin that should really be confronted.

4) How can we avoid condemning someone based on hearsay or appearance? _____

A third time that we should forgive others is when they become a Christian. Before someone is a Christian they have wronged many people (you may be one of them) and often without even realizing all the sinfulness they were involved in. When that person repents and turns to God in obedience, He forgives them.

Why do we think that we don't have to forgive them. There is not anything in scripture that requires the alien sinner to make retribution for all of his sins. We never read of Paul going back to each of the Christians he arrested and trying to make things right with them. The change in his life was accepted (slowly and reluctantly in some cases) as evidence of his repentance. It does not matter how many or how grievous the sins a person committed before becoming a Christian the newborn babe in Christ has committed no sin. He or she is a new creature and the old man is dead and buried, but sometimes we can't forget and won't let them forget the things that are behind them.

5) Can a person rob a bank, become a Christian, and keep the money and still be right with God? _____ Why or Why not?

An additional time that we should forgive is when the other person is not a Christian. Remember that this does not mean their sins are forgiven by God, and it does not mean that we should not continue to make efforts to teach them the gospel. Oddly enough this is often easier for some Christians than any other situation that calls for forgiveness. We seem to find it more noble and Christ-like to forgive the one who "doesn't know any better" or we take pride in loving our enemies and showing them just how forgiving we can be. Of course that is not the right motive for forgiveness and it doesn't help us actually be more Christ-like to be arrogant or showy. The reason we should forgive is because that is what we are taught to do by Jesus. In the sample prayer that He taught His disciples He mentioned this specifically.

6a) What did Jesus teach His disciples to pray in Matthew 6:12? _____

6b) What about Luke 11:4? _____

6c) According to these prayers, who should we forgive? _____

6d) According to these prayers, what are the results of me forgiving others? _____

The last group of people that we should forgive are our brothers and sisters in Christ. This is sometimes the hardest because we feel like they should not sin against us. They are Christians, but the Bible is clear that they will sin and when they do we should forgive them.

7) What does Colossians 3:13 say we should do? _____

8a) How should we forgive? _____

8b) What does that mean to you? _____

This does not mean that we ignore sin or allow sin to run rampant, that was the problem they had in Corinth. They were tolerating someone continuing to live in sin. Paul confronted them and condemned that attitude. We should call sin, sin and not back down, but we must also forgive. We would want our brethren to forgive us when we have done wrong and we should do the same for them. Hopefully, we would also want our brethren to point out sins that endanger our eternal souls, and we should do the same for them.

temptation; but deliver us from evil.

Col 3:13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

What If I Don't Forgive Others?

There are a number of problems that occur when we don't forgive. Because we are created with mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects there are problems in each of these areas. Some problems may be more severe than others, and some people will have more problems in some areas than others, but there are always consequences and ignoring them won't make them go away. Let's look at them grouped according to which aspect of our life they affect in the order they are listed above. Forgiveness or the lack thereof does not affect every one the same, so some of these may not make much sense to some of us, but there are those who will be affected in these ways. Obviously we will not exhaust the problems someone could have. One thing you may notice as you look at these lists is that there are some things that impact more than one part of our lives. Because we are multi-faceted individuals it is nearly impossible for these things not to spill over from one area to another.

MENTAL

Inability to Live in the Present or Prepare for the Future
Inability to Focus on Other Things
Inability to Think on Good Things
OCD Behaviors
Inability to Acknowledge or Accept Forgiveness from Others or God
Suspicion Toward Those We Have Forgiven or Those Who Have Forgiven Us.
Imagining Things Others Have Done to Us - Paranoia
Permanent Victim Mentality

PHYSICAL

Insomnia
Fatigue
Ulcers, High Blood Pressure and Other Stress Related Illnesses
OCD Behaviors
Shorter Longevity
Poorer General Health
Financial Problems Resulting from Lawsuits or Other Attempts to "Get Justice" and from Medicating Pain with Spending.

EMOTIONAL

Depression
Anger (Often Misdirected)
Desire for Vengeance
Difficulty Establishing Positive Relationships
Difficulty Trusting Others
Overwhelming Fear
Pride and Arrogance
Feelings of Inadequacy
Inability to Feel Forgiven
Total Loss of Relationship with the "Offender"
Feelings of Grief
Loss of Other Friends (Often Because They Are Still Friends With or Friendly to the Offender.)
Pessimistic Outlook on Life
Inability to Keep Emotions in Check
Hatred

SPIRITUAL

Pride and Arrogance
Worry and Fear
Estrangement from God and Other Christians
Difficulty Praying or Studying
Inability to Accept Forgiveness from Others or God
Inability to Forgive Even the Smallest of Slights
Hatred of Others
Unwillingness to Enjoy Life
Loss of Forgiveness from God Leading to Hell If Not Corrected
Loss of Christian Influence
Jealousy and Envy
Desire for Vengeance
A Tendency Toward Phariseeism
Hypocrisy
Judging Others Motives Rather than Actions

Again let me reiterate that we are talking about the person who feels that someone has sinned against them (slighted, cheated, abused, mistreated, unappreciated, etc.) in action, word, or thought. In this chapter we are not dealing with the person who is presumed to be at fault. These problems can and do affect the offended party whether there was any real sin involved or not and regardless of whether the “offender” has attempted to reconcile (make things right, apologize, etc.) or not. The fact is that a person’s true guilt or innocence really has little bearing on the consequences of an unforgiving heart. In other words, if I believe you wronged me and refuse to forgive, then my spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional health; as well as our relationship and my relationship with others will be impacted regardless of whether you really did it or not. There are laws that God has put in place and they affect our life whether we believe in them or even know about them.

1) Is an unforgiving heart the only thing that can cause someone to have these problems? _____

2) What other problems can you think of that might be caused by an unforgiving heart? _____

3a) Other than facing eternity in Hell, which is obviously the worst, which of these problems do you think would be the worst to have in your life? _____

3b) Why? _____

4a) Which one is the least destructive? _____

4b) Why? _____

5) Why would someone rather experience these painful problems instead of forgiving someone? _____

Read Matthew 18:21-35. What all happened to this man because he would not forgive? _____

Matthew 18:21-35 Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? {22} Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. {23} Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. {24} And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. {25} But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. {26} The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. {27} Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. {28} But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. {29} And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. {30} And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. {31} So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. {32} Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: {33} Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? {34} And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. {35} So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

Why Can't I Forgive Myself?

Some are saying, "Finally, this is the lesson that I care about, why did it take so long to get here." It is true that this is a struggle for many people and an important topic, but it is here because the things we have studied up to this are some of the reasons that people can't forgive themselves. Some people should not forgive themselves because they have not done what is necessary to receive forgiveness. For example, they may not feel godly sorrow for their sins. Other people can't forgive themselves because they know (sometimes on a subconscious level) that they are guilty of the same thing for which they are refusing to forgive others (even though consciously they deny it). Others have not fully accepted the Bible's teaching on forgiveness even though they intellectually know it. These know the Bible says their sins were forgiven at baptism or when they repented and confessed to God, but for one reason or another they have not accepted that forgiveness. We could go on, but suffice it to say that there are many reasons and this is not a one-size fits all subject. The first step toward healing is always diagnosis. So think about these questions.

1a) Have you ever had difficulty forgiving yourself? _____

1b) Was the difficulty with one specific sin or weakness or is it with a multitude of different sins and weaknesses? _____ How often do you feel unforgiven? _____

As I look at the scriptures I find some who accepted forgiveness joyfully, some who rejected forgiveness, some who thought they didn't need forgiveness, some who did not know about forgiveness, etc. What I have difficulty finding is someone who struggled with forgiving self. Perhaps this was Judas' problem that drove him to betray the Lord and commit suicide. Maybe that is what drove Cain to murder. Certainly a feeling of inadequacy drove Paul to labor more than the others (though there is no indication that he did not feel forgiven nor that he could not forgive himself). Was this why Timothy had to be exhorted not to be fearful? Was it why Peter ran to the empty tomb of Jesus? Was this the reason for the "will worship" and punishment of the physical body that is mentioned in Colossians 2:20-23? We don't know about all of these, but we do know that the Bible does not specifically address this problem. Does the Bible not deal with it because it was not a problem then? Is this just an American problem? Am I the only one who has ever struggled with it? No, Most of us have probably dealt with this Satanic attempt to keep us from reaching our spiritual potential.

2) How is this tactic of Satan successful? _____

3) Why will someone struggling with an inability to forgive themselves not reach their potential? _____

4) How can recognizing this as Satan's tool help overcome it? _____

We have to understand that the Bible does not address every sin, temptation, or challenge that we face in some sort of alphabetized list that we can check (sometimes we wish that it did). What the Bible does do is teach extensively on forgiveness (and many other topics as well) and how it works. We have to study the principles and teachings and apply them to our lives. I am sure that there were people who had this problem in the first century, and I am equally sure that the solution is in God's Word because He promised that He has given us ALL things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3) and His scriptures are for correction (2 Timothy 3:16) so that we can be complete (2 Timothy 3:17). That completeness must include an understanding of not only how forgiveness is given, but also an acceptance of and teaching on how to receive that forgiveness.

5) Why do you think God doesn't give an exhaustive list of righteous actions and sinful actions? _____

6) How long would Luke 6:31 be if it listed all the details of how to fulfill that command and things that violate

it? _____

Think about the most recent time you have struggled with this issue and answer the questions below they may help you determine what the root cause is. We will be posing these questions to one who is assumed to be a Christian. Those who are not Christians cannot receive forgiveness without obedience to God's plan of salvation and should not forgive themselves of those sins in their lives that God has not forgiven. For more information on receiving God's forgiveness look back to Lesson 3: How Can I Get Forgiveness from God.

7) Was it really a sin as defined by God? _____ If so, what verse(s) in the Bible condemn it? _____

If there is no Bible teaching against this thought, attitude, speech, or action this is the source of the problem. Any time we hold ourselves to a standard other than God's we will find problems living up to it. The Bible asks the question this way in Galatians 1:10, "For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." Jesus said that it is impossible to serve two masters. If we are trying to avoid offending everyone we will fail every time, but we can please God.

8) If there was a real sin, do you feel sorry that you hurt God by doing it? _____

It is possible for us to feel bad because someone got hurt, because we got caught, or because of some other reason. We may begin to feel sorry for ourselves or try to excuse and justify what we did. We may even go so far as to deny that it is a sin or deny that we did it. We can become so hardened by sin and our conscience so seared that we don't have godly sorrow. We won't feel forgiven if we know deep down that we said we were sorry when we really were not.

9) Did you repent? Really, fully repent? _____ How do you know if you have repented or just reported? _____

How has your attitude toward that sin changed since you repented or has it? _____

I have heard people say, "I know it was wrong and I hated to do it, but if I had to I would do it again." This is not the way someone who has repented talks about their sin. If we love God and know that sin hurts Him, as well as us, then we will do anything possible to avoid hurting Him with the same sins over and over again. We can't feel forgiven if we know that we really don't hate that sin and would do it again.

10) Have you confessed it? To God? To others you hurt? _____

Have you specifically confessed that sin? Or just prayed a generic prayer for forgiveness of sins? _____

Why does God want us to confess sins when He knows them already? _____

If you have gone through the steps above, have dealt with each question asked, and still can't forgive yourself of something there are a couple more things that we need to understand clearly. Let's be sure that we understand that being tempted is not a sin. Jesus was tempted in all ways like we are yet He was without sin (Hebrews 4:15). Sometimes we feel guilty about being tempted. People will say things like, "I drove past the liquor store and just couldn't help remembering what my favorite drink used to taste like." or "Somebody did or said something mean to me and the first thing I thought was that I should cuss them out." We could go on with other examples of people who were tempted to do something that they used to do. Thoughts will enter our minds and what we do with them will determine whether we sin or not. Imagine what happened when Jesus was tempted after fasting for 40 days. Satan tempted Him to make bread. Jesus knew that He had the power to do it and I would be surprised if His stomach didn't rumble at the thought of having some bread. His mouth might have even watered and even intellectually He knew He had to eat soon. The thought of proving His power to the devil might have been tempting as well as the nourishment of His physical body. If He died like this and not on the cross that would do no good. The temptations were powerful and His hunger made it more difficult to have the strength, energy, and clear mind to fight. He turned to scripture and defeated Satan. In all that desire for food and internal struggle there was no sin. There is an old saying, "You can't stop the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from making a nest in your hair."

11) Do you feel guilty about being tempted even if you did not give in to the sin? _____

12) What does 2 Corinthians 10:3-6 teach us to do to those tempting thoughts that come into our minds? _____

We have looked at some times when we must just accept the fact that there is not a sin to be forgiven and we have looked at what we must do to receive God's forgiveness. Now we come to the final step. It is ironic that this last step will either clear our guilty conscience or give us new guilt. Basically, it all boils down to this: if we have not been forgiven by God we need to do whatever we have not done to be forgiven by Him; if we have not sinned or if we have been forgiven by God we must accept it. If we will not accept God's forgiveness when He has promised it, described the process to get it, and freely given it, then we have a problem trusting Him and taking Him at His word, and that is a real problem.

13) Do you have a problem believing that God will forgive what He said He would? _____

14) Do you think you have done things too bad, too many things, or the same things too often for Him to forgive you? _____ What does 1 Timothy 1:15 say about that idea? _____

Of course part of the problem we have as human beings is that we can't just flip a switch and forget the bad things in our lives no matter how much we want. Sometimes the past will boil up and with it some of the emotions it caused. When that happens we need to remember that is the past, remember that we have been forgiven, and focus on something good in the present to get our thoughts back under control. Paul knew the things he had done in the past, but he did not dwell on them. He kept busy and kept looking forward (Philippians 3:14). If we are busy being and doing what God wants then we won't have time to go down into the valley of Ono with the devil (Nehemiah 6:1-4).

15) What are you doing to keep your thoughts from dwelling on the forgiven sins of the past? _____

I Forgive You, But I'll Never Forget What You Did

1) What is wrong with the statement expressed in the title of this lesson? _____

Many times in our lives our attitude draws the line between what is right and wrong. Two people could say, "Oh, dear God." One of them could be sinfully using God's name in vain while the other could be faithfully uttering a prayer – the difference is attitude. There are probably hundreds of similar examples that we could come up with. In this area of forgiveness the same thing is true. Two people might remember the same wrong that was done to each of them. One of them might have an unforgiving heart that is refusing to forgive and dwelling on the slight even though he or she has said it has been forgiven while the other has forgiven and has not even thought of the event for a long time, but something unexpectedly stirred the memory.

1) What does God say he will do about forgiven sins in Jeremiah 31:34? _____

2) How is that different from forgetting? _____

3) How can we know that God did not forget sins that were committed against Him even though they were forgiven? _____

4) In Revelation 12:9-10 Satan is referred to as the accuser of our brethren. Based on the verse in Jeremiah how do you think God would respond to Satan when he accuses us of sins that have been forgiven? _____

5) Can we make the same decision about wrongs done to us that we have forgiven? _____

6) If we have forgiven someone for something they did to us and are trying to be godly in our attitudes toward them, how should we handle painful memories and thoughts tempting us to vengeance or to holding a grudge? _____

There is a sense in which we do not have control over what memories may flash into our minds. Sometimes the thing we want to remember is irretrievable and the thing that we wish we could never think of again keeps coming back, but we do have control over what we do with those unpleasant memories when they do come up. Just as we learned that we need to take every thought into captivity for Christ, we must also do the same with memories. When a memory of a forgiven misdeed comes we must make the effort to move past it and not dwell on it.

- 1) **F**ace the fact that it is in the past.
- 2) **O**bserve that it has been dealt with.
- 3) **R**emember something positive about that person, or at least something positive (Philippians 4:8).
- 4) **G**o perform some act of kindness for that person.
- 5) **I**ntentionally dwell on God's Word.
- 6) **V**alue the love, grace, forgiveness, and mercy that God has extended to you.
- 7) **E**xpel Satan with his attempt to get you to hold a grudge.

If we do these things we will push the offending memory back out of our conscious mind. There is no guarantee that it will not return again, but we will be able to deal with it again the next time. As we go further from the original event it should be easier to push the memories out and they should come less frequently.

2 Corinthians 10:3-6 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh:

4 (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)

5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

6 And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

1 Timothy 1:15-16 This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

16 Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.

Jer 31:34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

2 Corinthians 2:6-11 Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many.

7 So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.

8 Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him.

9 For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things.

10 To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ;

11 Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

I'll Make You Suffer By Holding a Grudge

Human beings can do some amazingly foolish things to try to hurt each other, and this one is near the top of the list. It falls into the category of cutting off your nose to spite your face. Certainly as Christians our responsibility to our fellow man is to make things better not worse. We should be about relieving suffering, not causing suffering. From that perspective alone the above statement or thought should never be spoken or entertained by the Christian, unfortunately, it is far too many times.

1) Can we make someone suffer by holding a grudge? _____ If so, How? _____

2) What sinful behaviors result from people holding grudges? _____

3) Who can you think of in the Bible that held a grudge or suffered because of a grudge? _____

One of the problems with a sinful attitude like the one expressed in the title is that it leads to more sin and often boils over into actions that hurt everyone involved. The foolish thing about grudges is that unless they do spill out into actions and words the one that is hurt the worst is the one holding the grudge. Many times the person who was supposed to be made to suffer by the grudge has gone on with life and moved past the original problem. In those cases they may not even know that a grudge is being held and certainly are not suffering from it. When someone thinks or says they are going to hold a grudge to hurt someone else they are not thinking clearly. They are really hurting themselves by holding the grudge.

4) If someone is miserable because of the grudge he is holding, why would he not let it go? _____

5) How could you help someone see that their grudge is hurting them? _____

6) What excuses do Christians give for holding grudges even though they know they should forgive? _____

7) How is holding a grudge related to the lesson on forgiving but not forgetting? _____

8a) What does 2 Corinthians 2:6-11 teach us that we should do instead of holding a grudge? _____

8b) What dangers do we face if we don't? _____

2 Corinthians 2:6-11 Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many.

7 So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.

8 Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him.

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We Forgave, Why Is Our Relationship Strained?

There are several possible reasons that a relationship may be changed as a result of sin, even after it has been forgiven. Let's look at a few of them.

There may be a new sin that has been committed. King Saul tried to kill David in 1 Samuel 18:10-11 and even though David might have been willing to forgive him, Saul continued to try to hunt him and kill him all the way to 1 Samuel 24:19-22. After Saul stopped trying to kill David their relationship could have eventually returned to the level that it was before Saul's murderous attempts. However, in chapter 26 Saul was again trying to kill David. This new attempt again destroyed any relationship that might have been building. In 1 Samuel 26:25 Saul again stopped trying to kill David, but David knew that it was best to just stay far away from each other, so he went to the land of the Philistines and stayed until Saul's death, and Saul didn't try to come after him any longer.

1) Would it have to be the same sin committed again to cause a problem in the relationship, or could a different sin cause the same problem? _____

Either or both parties may feel self-conscious around each other. Sometimes we can't control the uncomfortable feelings that we have and we just have to live with them. The offender may not feel forgiven. Whatever the reason might be for this feeling it will make for some discomfort at least on the offender's part and possibly this could spill over into both sides of the relationship. On the other side we have talked about how our thoughts and memories can cause us trouble. The one offended may be reminded of the sin around the offender. It may be difficult for the two to get back to the way things were before because of the things hanging around in their thoughts.

2) How do you suppose Paul and Stephen's family would have felt around the dinner table? _____

3) What about sharing a pew at church? _____

The fact is that we can't just stop being human beings. We can work to improve ourselves and we can try to show godly traits in every area of our lives, but the sin may have destroyed trust and it takes time to restore trust. In the Bible we are told that deacons are to be tested before they receive the office (1 Timothy 3:8-10). If a young man is tested and doesn't pass the test it does not mean that he will never be qualified, but that he is not now qualified. He may be too immature, impulsive, or inexperienced. John Mark quit his first journey with Paul and Barnabas, but later was a great help to Paul. If my child lies to me or disobeys me, I may have to take smaller steps in the responsibilities given them. In business or even the military people may be promoted too soon or given more responsibility than they can handle. They may have to be demoted until later when they can handle it.

4) What can we do to start rebuilding trust once it has been broken? _____

There are some sins that may leave a relationship unsalvageable, or at least permanently altered. There is a reason that Jesus allowed divorce in the case of infidelity. There is no closer bond among humans than marriage and the sexual bond in marriage. It is a sacred intimacy that God designed for that relationship alone. When adultery shatters this delicate connection even though that adultery may be forgiven the relationship often cannot be put back together again.

5) What other situation might make the former relationship difficult or impossible? _____

How Can I Learn to Forgive?

There are many areas of the Christian life in which each of us needs to improve. Doing the things God requires and expects of us often goes against what seems natural to us. The problem is that we were born into and have lived our lives in a fallen world that is full of sin and Satan's lies. The first step we must take is to acknowledge that fact and come to the Bible to find the truth about what we should be thinking, saying, and doing. We can't blindly trust our feelings, what we always thought, what 'they' told us about it, a poll of popular opinion, or even what a preacher said. We must compare those things to God's Word. The Christians in the first century searched the scriptures and we must do if we are going to learn how to do any of the things God wants us to do.

1) According to Proverbs 28:26 and Jeremiah 17:9, why should we not trust our feelings and follow our hearts? _____

2) What does Jeremiah 17:5-6 say about what will happen to those who trust other people? _____

3) What does Jeremiah 17:7-8 teach us about where we should put our trust? _____

Once we know the Bible has the answer, we must actually read it, understand what we read, accept what it says, and then apply it to our lives. The application is the 'How', but most people don't make it that far. Most of the time there is a breakdown in the process. Some don't think the Bible is the place to go for answers. Others never read it even though they claim to believe in it. Some read the words, but don't understand what they are reading. Many read and understand, however, they make excuses (God can't really expect me to be able to do that.) or exceptions(That was a long time ago, things have changed) for themselves and never accept it. Only a few ever really get to the point of trying to do the things taught in scripture and then there are still struggles to overcome. The point is that the know how is really not the hard part. When I was small and learning to tie my shoes, I would often say, "I know how, I just can't do it." Many of us if we are honest already know how to do the things we should, including forgive, we just won't because of sinful attitudes or can't because we have not developed the spiritual muscle and coordination through practice and experience. Think about and answer the following questions based on this example from the Sermon on the Mount.

4(a) In Matthew 5:39 what does Jesus say to do if someone hits you on the cheek? _____

_____ (b) Are those words difficult to read or understand? _____ (c) Do you know how

to use the muscles in your neck to turn your head from side to side? _____ (d) Why is it so difficult for

most of us to do what Jesus said? _____

Now let's turn back to forgiveness. We have studied the fact that we are told to forgive. We have studied forgiveness and what it means to forgive (That a wrong is no longer held against someone). We have looked at examples of others forgiving in scripture. In reality, we ourselves have probably forgiven a number of times in our lives, but there are a few cases that we are having more difficulty with for one reason or another.

5) Why are some things harder to forgive than others? _____

Let's look at some things that can help us learn to forgive.

- 1) Each day read and meditate on at least one verse or passage that discusses forgiveness. These verses can easily be found by looking in a concordance words like: forgive, forgiving, forgiveness, remission, remitted, etc. 'Forgive' is used over 50 times. If you don't have a concordance or need help using one don't be afraid to ask for help.
- 2) Keep a continual focus on God's forgiveness and your desire to be more like Him.
- 3) Go back to the lesson on forgetting and review the list at the end of that lesson. Many of those things will be helpful here as well.
- 4) Make a list of the sins that others have committed against you that you have not yet forgiven. Take a marker and blot out each of them one by one as you determine that you will no longer hold that sin against them. When you have blotted out the whole list destroy the paper. Burning is best, but a paper shredder will suffice as long as you dispose of the pieces so you won't be tempted to tape it back together. In the future if there is a particularly difficult thing for you to forgive do the same thing with it. (Acts 3:19, Isaiah 38:17)
- 5) There is no secret formula. Just like any learning, remember that practice will improve your ability. You must do it over and over again until you get it right. All of the study of verses and looking at examples and everything else will never work unless you just do it.

From a strictly mechanical standpoint there is no difference in jumping off a step-stool that is 6 inches high and jumping out of an airplane at 10,000 feet. I have done the first a number of times, but I am not sure whether I could do the second even if the plane was on fire and I had a parachute. The difference that makes it more difficult is two-fold (1) I have never done it before. It is harder the first time than on subsequent attempts. Each success makes the next time easier. (2) My mind. I have a mental block that keeps me from even wanting to try it. It scares me to death to think about actually doing it. It would take a pretty powerful motivation for me to overcome my fears. I don't know what may be keeping you from forgiving some things when you have forgiven others, but the mechanics, the 'how-to' are the same. You must find something to motivate you that is stronger than what is keeping you from doing it. The problem is that while we could live and die and go to heaven without ever jumping off a step-stool or out of a plane, we can't get to heaven without learning how to forgive and forgiving others. Here are some final questions for you to consider:

- 6) What is keeping you from forgiving? _____
- 7) Consider the 'reason' you gave in #6, How would you like to stand before God on Judgment Day and tell Him that is the reason you did not forgive someone? _____
- 8) Has anyone ever done anything to you that is worse than God having to watch His own son die on the cross and then be separated from each other? _____
- 9) If God can forgive you and me for causing that, what does He think of the things that we will not forgive others? _____
- 10) Is it your job to punish people for their sins? _____
- 11) Will God let the guilty go unpunished?(Exodus 34:7, Numbers 14:18) _____

James says that the one who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it has sinned (James 4:17). If you know that you are to forgive someone and do not do so you sin and remain in sin as long as you refuse to forgive. How long will you continue in sin? Go ahead and get your calendar out and pick the day when you will forgive. Might I suggest a day sooner rather than later?

Proverbs 28:26 He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered.

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

Jeremiah 17:7-8 Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. (8) For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.

Jeremiah 17:5-6 Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD. (6) For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited.

Matthew 5:39 But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

Isaiah 38:17 Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back.

Acts 3:19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

Exodus 34:7 Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.

Numbers 14:18 The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.

Proverbs 30:10 Accuse not a servant unto his master, lest he curse thee, and thou be found guilty.

James 4:17 Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

What If Someone Won't Forgive Me?

We have spent most of this series of lessons looking at our attitudes and responsibilities toward those who have sinned against us, but of course there are times in all of our lives when the shoe is on the other foot and we are the one who has sinned. The Bible is just as clear about what the sinner should do as it is about what the one wronged should do.

1) What does Jesus teach the person that is in the wrong to do in Matthew 5:23-26? _____

2) If you are in a situation where you believe you have not been forgiven, have you done what Mt. 5:23-26 teaches you to do? _____

Of course, we have studied what needs to be done to be forgiven by God. In some cases letting the person you have wronged know that you have repented and confessed to God may help make it easier for them to forgive. As Christians our desire should be to have a good relationship with others as much as we possibly can (Romans 12:18) and part of that is honesty and honestly admitting the mistakes and sins that we have in our lives, as well as what we are doing to correct them and get over them.

Assuming that we have done everything that the Bible teaches us to do to be forgiven by God and to make it right with them including restitution (If I stole a thousand dollars from you and say I'm sorry, but keep your money it might be a little difficult for you to believe me.), then we are ready to deal with what we can do when someone is truly unforgiving.

3) What did Zacchaeus say that he would do if he had wronged anyone, according to Luke 19:7-9? _____

4) In Luke 3:7-14, what did John the immerser tell the people they needed to do? _____

Now we have a bit of a predicament. If we have done all we should do the other person, especially if he is a Christian, is commanded by God to forgive. As we saw at the end of the last lesson, a person who will not forgive is in sin, but it would be totally ineffective for the person that he won't forgive to be the one to call him on his sinful condition. If there is someone who is close to and has some level of influence with him that would be the one to deal with the teaching most effectively. Unfortunately, many don't want to "get in the middle". We will look at how to help best from the outside in our next lesson. What we need to understand is that true love will not leave two brothers at odds if there is anything that we can do to reconcile them and bring peace to the relationship. Jesus said the "peacemakers" are blessed, not those who stick their heads in the sand and pretend there is peace.

5) What limits does Romans 12:18 put on our ability to have peace with someone else? _____

There are some things that we need to keep in mind when dealing with this situation so that we don't wind up falling into sin ourselves by holding a grudge or losing control of our tempers and saying or doing things that we shouldn't. What do the following verses teach that could be applied to this circumstance.

- 6) Romans 12:17-19 - _____
- 7) Romans 12:20-21 - _____
- 8) 1 Corinthians 8:9 - _____
- 9) 1 Corinthians 10:12 - _____
- 10) Galatians 5:14-15 - _____
- 11) 1 Corinthians 4:3-5 - _____
- 12) 1 Peter 2:21-23 - _____
- 13) James 4:11-12 - _____
- 14) James 2:12-13 - _____
- 15) 1 Corinthians 10:32 - _____

When we come to a complete understanding of the fact that no one alive on this planet has a Heaven or a Hell to put us in, then we will realize that we must do what is necessary to please God and let the rest fall where it may. We must face the fact that we cannot please everyone. In fact, there are some people that we could spend an eternity trying to please and they would still not accept our efforts. While it is admirable to make the effort to live at peace with others, as we have already seen, we must accept our limitations. We can't make others like us. We can't make others obey God. We can't make someone forgive us. What we can do is put into practice the things that the Bible teaches and be an example to them of how a Christian should be living and forgiving.

We can pray for them to grow in their knowledge and pray for our relationship with them as well. We need to be careful not to have the attitude that the Pharisee had in Jesus' parable in Luke 18. When someone is not forgiving they have in essence made us their enemy and Jesus tells us to pray for our enemies.

We may eventually find ourselves in the unpleasant position of accepting the complete loss of the relationship. There may be times when two people can't reconcile because one of them is unwilling. If you have made every effort to reconcile and have even tried to get a neutral party to work with the two of you to correct the problems, then you may have to leave it in the Lord's hands. Especially if the other party is a child of God, He works through His providence to discipline those in sin to try to bring them to repentance.

- 16) What does Hebrews 12:5-11 say that God does to His children? _____

- 17) According to 1 Corinthians 11:31-32, why does He do that? _____

Let God be God and be obedient to Him and loving toward each other. If we would all treat each other with love as we want to be treated we won't need the things in this lesson, at least within the church.

Matthew 5:23-26 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; (24) Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. (25) Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. (26) Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

Romans 12:18 If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

Luke 19:7-9 And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. (8) And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. (9) And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.

Luke 3:7-14 Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? (8) Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. (9) And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. (10) And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? (11) He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. (12) Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? (13) And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. (14) And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.

Romans 12:17-21 Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. (18) If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. (19) Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. (20) Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. (21) Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

1 Corinthians 8:9 But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.

1 Corinthians 10:12 Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

Galatians 5:14-15 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. (15) But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.

1 Corinthians 4:3-5 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. (4) For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. (5) Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

1 Peter 2:21-23 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: (22) Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: (23) Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously:

James 4:11-12 Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. (12) There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?

James 2:12-13 So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. (13) For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

1 Corinthians 10:32 Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God:

Hebrews 12:5-11 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: (6) For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. (7) If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? (8) But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. (9) Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? (10) For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. (11) Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

1 Corinthians 11:31-32 For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. (32) But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.

Can I Help Someone Else Be Forgiven?

That is an interesting question and the answer depends on what we mean by the question. Let's look at some of the details. First regarding forgiveness from God, we can teach others what they should do and how they can be forgiven by God. We can always pray for others, however our prayers do not forgive people. Jesus and Stephen both prayed for those that killed them, but those individuals must respond to God in obedience to receive His forgiveness. We can't do any of those steps for them, they must do those things for themselves. We may even feel like Paul did in Romans 9:3, especially with loved ones, but there is nothing we can do beyond teaching and encouraging them to obey God. Of course, we should help through teaching at every opportunity. We are not perfect and we will miss many opportunities, but it is sad how many Christians don't do anything to help anyone else receive the forgiveness from God that they are enjoying.

1) What are you doing to help those who are not Christians become Christians and receive forgiveness from God? _____

2) What more could you do? _____

3) What is keeping you from doing more? _____

When we talk about helping another Christian be forgiven by God, we face some of the same challenges as with nonChristians. We can teach and encourage them. We can pray for them. We can lovingly tell them of their sin and warn them of the consequences. Ultimately, individually we can't make them repent if they aren't interested. As the church, working together, the Bible does teach that there are steps that can be taken to put more pressure on someone to come to their senses and repent (1 Corinthians 5, Matthew 18:17, Romans 16:17, 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 1 Timothy 6:5, etc.). Once we have reached the point where we no longer have fellowship with that person, there is nothing left for us to do except pray for God through His providence to bring some discipline into their lives that will turn them around.

4) What responsibility do you have to a fellow Christian that you know is in sin? _____

5) How should we treat someone who was a Christian, but has refused to do right according to 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15? _____

6) What attitude did Paul have in 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 that we should have toward all who are in sin? _____

What about helping someone be forgiven by another person? At times this can be more complicated and difficult than helping someone get right with God. God's rules are written down and He is always consistent so it is easier to know how to deal with Him. When we are on the outside looking in things look simple many times, but there are emotions and personalities and pride that all get in the way of reconciliation. In addition to those problems is the fact that when a third person gets involved there are more emotions and another personality and more pride.

As much as we might like to help to people get along with each other we have to learn that we can't fix everyone's problems and that there are times when we will wind up causing more trouble than if we had left things alone.

7) What do well intentioned Christians sometimes do that is warned against in 1 Peter 4:15? _____

There are several dangers that we must watch out for if we try to help in a dispute. Here are a few:

1. Becoming meddlesome. If you are not asked to get involved, don't. Getting in the middle of other people's problems unasked is not noble, or being a peacemaker, it is being a trouble-maker. Sometimes even when you are asked it is best not to get involved.
2. Making enemies. If only one person wants you involved the other may be angry at you. If the person who wanted you involved is unhappy with the result that person may become angry at you. Even if both wanted your help initially, they may become angry with the things you say or expect of them in the course of the process.
3. Becoming involved in a co-dependent relationship. The person(s) involved may come to depend on you to solve all of their relationship problems.
4. Becoming a listening ear for gossip.
5. Becoming an enabler. One of the parties may get into relationship problems intentionally thinking you will continue to bail them out.
6. Becoming a gossip or betraying a confidence. The more private, sensitive information you are privy to the easier it is to either accidentally or even intentionally let it slip. It becomes even more likely as time goes by and you forget what was said confidentially and what was public knowledge.
7. Becoming a messenger. Two people who are not talking will often try to communicate using a go-between. It is an awkward position to be in and usually unpleasant.
8. Becoming tainted by one party speaking evil of the other. One party may realize that you have a relationship with the other party and try to destroy it. Some people don't want you to be anyone else's friend.
9. Becoming involved in an unhealthy emotional relationship. Often someone with the best of intentions gets involved in a problem marriage and winds up involved in an adulterous relationship with one spouse. This usually happens when both parties are not working on their problems together and a "counselor" is seeing one of them alone.

8) What other dangers do you face in these situations? _____

So, how can you ever help bring unity, love, forgiveness and peace? The most effective way is to participate only if both parties are willing to accept you as a neutral party. It should be clear at the outset that you are not going to take sides. You are only a moderator to keep them on track. You will not meet with them separately or listen to the complaints of one without the other present. If they are unwilling to talk to each other then there is really nothing that you can do. If you can get the two together, keep the focus on the problem in question. Teach them how to work out their own problem by giving clear rules at the beginning and sticking to them throughout the time together.

9) What kind of people does Jesus say are blessed in Matthew 5:9? _____

10) Can you force people to forgive each other? _____ Can you force them to get along? _____

11a) What did Jesus do in Luke 12:13-21? _____

11b) What can we learn from this example? _____

Romans 9:3 For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:

2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 (14) And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. (15) Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

2 Corinthians 5:18-21 And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; (19) To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. (20) Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. (21) For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

1 Peter 4:15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.

Luke 12:13-21 And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. (14) And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you? (15) And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. (16) And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: (17) And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? (18) And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. (19) And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. (20) But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? (21) So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.