



# CAPITOL COMMISSION™

## A Word About Forgiveness

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### **Weekly Bible Study Schedule**

- **Tuesday, April 30, 7 AM in HHR #5**  
**-Breakfast Provided**
- **Tuesday, April 30, 8:30 PM in Office #301**  
**(Speaker Pro-Tem's office)**

In our last study, which covered 1 John 3:11-18, I wrote:

*Before moving to the third section, let me say this: My friends, I know that many who are reading this have some great scars from past hurts. Some of you have been hurt deeply by others: someone lied to or about you; a spouse cheated on you, maybe a divorce has occurred; a business partner has deceived you; a friend has stabbed you in the back. For some, these things may have recently taken place.*

*My encouragement to you today is this: We can all look back and see people who deserve our hatred and grudges. But if you claim to be a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, bitterness and hatred has no part in your life. No amount of hurt to you is comparable to what you or I have done to God, but He showed the greatest of love by offering forgiveness to us rebels. What does 'forgiveness' mean? That is a whole other lesson, but the gist of it is simply 'not holding it against someone'. We must forgive others. That is one mark of agape love which is to be seen in God's children. {Please feel free to contact me, if there is something you want to discuss further}*

In today's study, we will do that "whole other lesson" covering the command, meaning and purposes of forgiveness. This will not be an exhaustive discussion (I only have 4 pages), and it may take a couple of weeks to walk through this important topic—a topic that is quite clouded with questionable teaching and one filled with much emotion.

I strongly encourage you to join us for the discussion which we will use to flesh out what is written; and use to answer questions that will arise.

## INTRODUCTION

In his book "A Theology of Christian Counseling", Jay E. Adams stated, "Man's greatest need is forgiveness." On the next page, he followed up by quoting Jack Winslow, the head of a large mental institution in Great Britain,

who said, "**I could dismiss half of my patients tomorrow if they could be assured of forgiveness.**"<sup>1</sup>

One of the glories of the gospel message is that forgiveness is granted to those who repent. This is accomplished through the terrible, gruesome work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Therefore, Christians are a forgiven people. Christians are also to be known as a forgiving people.

But what is forgiveness? How do we forgive someone who has horribly hurt us? Are we actually called to "forgive and forget"—which seems quite impossible? What if I don't feel like forgiving? What if there is no repentance? What does forgiveness really look like?

We hope to answer these and other questions in this study. We will look at the command, meaning and purpose of forgiveness. Much attention will be given to the meaning of forgiveness for this seems to be where the biggest misconceptions lie. It also seems to that which poses the greatest difficulties in carrying it out.

## THE COMMAND TO FORGIVE

The New Testament is quite clear in its command to the follower of Jesus to be a person of forgiveness.

*Ephesians 4:32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*

*Matthew 18:21-22 Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.*

*Colossians 3:12-13 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.*

*Galatians 6:1 Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness;*

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### CAPITOL COMMISSION BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS & STAFF: TUESDAYS @ 7AM, HEARING ROOM #5

LEGISLATORS: TUESDAYS @ 8:30PM, OFFICE #301

TRUMAN BUILDING: THURSDAYS @ 7AM, 4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR CAFETERIA

PROCLAIMING THE GREATNESS AND GLORY OF GOD IN THE MISSOURI STATE CAPITOL

# Missouri

## A Word About Forgiveness

*each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.*

*Luke 17:3-4 "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him."*

*Mark 11:25 "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions."*

There is no real need to elaborate. If you are a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, you have been commanded to forgive when others wrong you.

### THE MEANING OF FORGIVENESS

Now what does forgiveness mean?

In both the Old and New Testaments, the principal word pictures painted by the words used for forgiveness is one in which a load is lifted. Mankind is burdened with sin and guilt. God "lightens by lifting" or "takes away by lifting up."<sup>2</sup> It is also the picture of what a person does when he or she forgives another person—he or she lifts the load and takes away. In the New Testament, it also carries the idea of cancelling a debt owed or a dismissal.

Another New Testament term is *charizomai*, meaning literally to show favor or grace. When used in reference to sin (i.e. Colossians 2:13; 3:13), it means "to bestow forgiveness freely or unconditionally". But, as Jay Adams writes, "The forgiveness is always undeserved by the one who receives it (he deserves to pay the penalty or debt). The gift of forgiveness cost the giver, not the receiver."<sup>3</sup>

When God forgives, He lifts the burden of guilt and debt from the repentant. He cancels the debt owed (Colossians 3:13-14). He cleanses or wipes the slate clean (1 John 1:9). He removes and covers; *How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit!* (Psalm 32:1-2)

But this covering and cleansing is not free; in fact, it is quite costly. Not paid by the one who is being forgiven, but by the one who is offering the

forgiveness. One's certificate of debt was nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:13-14; cf. Romans 3:21-26; 5:6-10). God is just. The penalty and punishment for sin must be paid. For those who are God's children, that payment was made by God Himself through the heinous murder of His sinless Son on the cross.

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*My sin, O the bliss of this glorious thought, my sin, not in part but the whole is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord praise the Lord, O my soul.*

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The command to forgive is clear. The biblical word pictures and a quick look at God's forgiveness give us an understanding of forgiveness. But what does forgiveness look like on a practical day-to-day basis? John MacArthur is helpful when he states, "When we manifest forgiveness, we're essentially saying that no matter what someone else has done, we will not remain angry or desire vengeance. We will not blame the other person or feel self-pity because we've been offended. Rather, we are prepared to pass by that sin and fully extend love to that person."<sup>4</sup>

Another author, Dr. Jay Adams, whom we have quoted already, stated it in another way, which I want to use throughout the rest of this study. Adams teaches that "Forgiveness is a promise." When one person forgives another, he is making "a formal declaration to lift the burden of one's guilt and a promise to remember another's wrong against him no more. It is a promise that involves three elements: I won't bring it up to you, to others or to myself."<sup>5</sup>

These three elements are not hard to understand.

1. ***I will not bring this matter up to you again.*** This simply means that when one sees the other party, it will not be brought up. It will not be something to throw back in the face of the offender during a future discussion.

# Missouri

## A Word About Forgiveness

2. ***I will not bring it up to others.*** The offense will not be the topic of conversation with other people. It will not be fodder for gossip or a means to bring down the offender.
3. ***I will not bring it up to myself.*** This may be the most difficult. It is a promise that one will not dwell on it in his or her mind. One will not wallow around in self-pity or sit and brood over it.

With all these things put together, Adams defines forgiveness as “a lifting of the charge of guilt from another, a formal declaration of that fact and a promise (made and kept) never to remember the wrong against him in the future.”<sup>6</sup>

Now the questions:

- a. Doesn't the Bible teach “forgive and forget”? Doesn't God “forgive and forget”? The shortest possible answer: NO!

In discussing the new covenant with His people, God said, “...for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:34). But this does not teach “divine amnesia” nor does it undermine God's omniscience (God knows all). It does teach us that when God forgives, He does not keep a record of the wrongs and thus will not bring them up in the future. Does He still have a knowledge of them (as do we when we are wronged)? Yes. Does He hold it against the person after He forgives? No.

Some of the sins that others have committed against us will never be “forgotten” in the sense that they will be erased from our memory. The scars run deep and the sins were horrible. So to “forgive and forget” is an impossible task; and one that is not biblical.

We are called, though, to not “remember” the sins and hold them against the offender. Adams says that we must “forgive *in order to* forget”. The person who keeps the promise to not bring up the offense will eventually “forget”; or in other words, the offense will not be the first thing they think of when they think of that person.

- b. What if I do not feel like forgiving? Is not the promise “hypocrisy”?

There are many instances where one may not feel like obeying a command of God, but one still obeys. Are those instances “hypocritical”? Many times,

they are not. Temptations pull us one direction and our fleshly worldly natures tug at us, as well. But the Holy Spirit gives us the ability to resist.

The main problem here is equating “hypocrisy” with feelings. Hypocrisy would be the lie that promised to not bring the offense up and then bringing it up in future opportunities. Hypocrisy is saying one thing and doing another—that is the life of the “play-actor”, the hypocrite.

- c. What if there is no repentance?

This is a tough one. The Bible clearly teaches that God does not forgive without repentance. He constantly called His people to confess their sins, and turn from them. When they do, He promised to forgive.

But what about us? In Luke 17:3, Jesus said, “Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.” Thus, we forgive when the offender repents. But there is also another statement by Jesus, “Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions” (Mark 11:25). There is no implied qualifier of repentance for this forgiveness. So what are we to do?

If we look back at the three elements of the promise of forgiveness, Mark 11:25, is not addressing the element in which we promise not to bring it up to the offender. We are called to bring it up until repentance occurs (Matthew 18:15; Luke 17:3). It does not address the second element in which we promise not to bring it up to others; others may be needed to call the offender to repentance (Matthew 18:16-17).

Mark 11:25 is focused on the third element of the promise to forgive. Listen to Dr. Jay Adams,

The words in Mark 11 apply to the third element in forgiveness—precisely the matter of self-pity. You must empty the matter from your heart in prayer; you may not dwell on it—you have given it to God. Note, especially, you do this *before God*, not before the *offender*. You must tell God of your *willingness* to grant him forgiveness, that you want to be reconciled and that you won't sit and brood about how you were wronged. In that sense—and that sense alone—you forgive him: *before God*. But Mark 11 *doesn't* require you to *grant* forgiveness to the offender; the passage speaks only about one's own personal attitude. You are not making a formal promise to the offender when you tell God you won't be bitter toward him. This passage speaks of forgiveness of the *heart*.<sup>7</sup>

# Missouri

## A Word About Forgiveness

- d. Are we to forgive simply based on the offender's word of "I am sorry. I was wrong. Please forgive me.?" The shortest possible answer: YES!

Again, we must go back to the idea that forgiveness is a promise. Jesus said, "And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him" (Luke 17:4). We are called to make that promise every time one repents.

There is no place for the follower of Christ to withhold forgiveness when an offender repents. The one who does that is like the merciless servant who, after he was forgiven of a unpayable debt by his master, turned on one of his fellow servants and threw him in jail for a very small debt that he was owed (Matthew 18:23-35). It is incompatible for one forgiven to be unforgiving.

There is a place to observe the fruit of repentance and the possibility of restitution, but this has to do with the relationship going forward from forgiveness. These things have no bearing on the initial promise of not bringing up the offense to the offender, others or oneself.

### THE PURPOSES OF FORGIVENESS

While there are a number of purposes and benefits stemming from forgiveness (proper community among believers, forgiveness extended to those who forgive, following the example of Christ), one reason seems to stand out.

The children of God most resemble their Father when they forgive. God the Father is a God of great grace and forgiveness:

*Psalm 130:3-4 If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared.*

*Exodus 34:6b-7 The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin;*

*Jeremiah 33:8 I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all their iniquities by which they have sinned against Me and by which they have transgressed against Me.*

I am convinced that there is no quality more contrary to the natural man than forgiveness; yet, nothing more "God-like" than when His children extend forgiveness those who have sinned against them.

### CONCLUSION

Friend, much more can be said about this topic. Many questions can flood our minds as we think of past offenses and some offenses currently going on. Much can be taught concerning repentance and confession. Discussion on the future relationship between the offender and offended is also very important.

My prayer is that this will help one to properly extend forgiveness to those who have sinned him or her. God has commanded it of His people. And God has instructed us on what it looks like and why His people should be people of forgiveness.

As always, if you have any questions concerning this study or want to discuss further concerning a situation that you have, please contact me. I desire not only to teach but to be of any other kind of service to assist.

God can truly forgive all your sins--are you interested?

<sup>1</sup> Jay E. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1979), 184-85.

<sup>2</sup> Adams, 186-87.

<sup>3</sup> Adams, 189.

<sup>4</sup> John F. MacArthur, *The Pillars of Christian Character* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1998), 84-85.

<sup>5</sup> Adams, 228.

<sup>6</sup> Adams, 229.

<sup>7</sup> Adams, 230.