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“Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him” (Luke 17:3).

## Forgive and Forget

**Central Truth:** God’s plan for forgiving an offender gives both parties a fresh start toward a better life.

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**Topic:** Forgiveness: Of Others.

Watch two little children at play. They may disagree, become angry, turn away from each other, and cry. But soon they are playing together again as if nothing had happened. No wonder Jesus said we must be converted and “*become as little children*” in order to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:3).

Forgiveness is a blessed grace. Why is it so easy for little children and so demanding for adults? Is it because we adults do not forget offenses as quickly as the children?

This study is entitled “Forgive and Forget.” One may say, “I can forgive, but I cannot forget.” The meaning is not that the offense never comes to mind again. (How can one forget either a good or a bad thing that has happened?) It means, rather, that one does not repeatedly bring it to mind. It means, further, that when it comes to mind it is remembered without a spirit of bitterness or hurt, but with praise to God that the thing has been reconciled. God demands forgiveness from us, but He does not demand forgetfulness.

In practical terms, forgiveness means to surrender the right to hold an issue against a person ever again. It is an act of the will, not of the emotions. (The will can settle the emotions after it has taken its stand.) God's plan for forgiving an offender gives both parties a fresh start toward a better life.

## I. THE MEANING OF FORGIVENESS

There are two very significant words in the Greek New Testament to express the idea of forgiveness. They are alike yet different, as the two sides of a coin.

*Aphiemi* means “to send forth; to send away; to remit; to forgive.” It is applied on the one hand to debts completely cancelled, as “*the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him tire debt*” (Matthew 18:27). The person thus forgiven is never liable for the obligation again.

Applied to sins, *aphiemi* means they are totally removed. “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive (totally remove) us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (I John 1:9). That involves remission of the punishment due to sins (the penalty), and to remove the cause of the offense (the guilt). How complete is God's forgiveness!

*Charizomai* means “to bestow a favor unconditionally.” It is related to the Greek word for “grace,” *charis*. Its emphasis is that forgiveness from God is free and unmerited, as when Jesus forgave the poor sinful woman in Simon the Pharisee's house (Luke 7:36-50). That is the way we are to forgive one another, since that is the way God forgave us (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13). All sins are forgiven of God in that same unconditional fashion (Colossians 2:13).

God's forgiveness is the removal of the guilt and penalty of our sins totally apart from any merit in us. Our forgiveness to one another is to be the same. What a challenge!

## II. THE NEED FOR FORGIVENESS

**A. Forgiveness is needed because offenses abound.** Jesus said, “*It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come!*” (Luke 17:1). We give offense and we take offense. That is a common problem in human relations. We offend others by act, attitude, or words (James 3:2). The sincere Christian must be careful not to give offense and not to take offense from the acts of others. That calls for full-time diligence.

**B. Forgiveness is needed because of the command of God.** And He is very emphatic about it. We are to forgive each trespass and we are to forgive repeated trespasses (Luke 17:3, 4). “*As the elect of God, . . . forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye*” (Colossians 3:12, 13). All that is the opposite of the spirit of forgiveness (bitterness, wrath, evil speaking) is to be put away once for all

and supplanted by kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness (Ephesians 4:31, 32). We are either forgiving toward people or rebellious toward God.

**C. Forgiveness is needed because unforgiveness is harmful.** Jesus warned that such a spirit is so serious that God will not forgive a person who refuses to forgive another (Matthew 6:12, 14, 15). Why? Because an unforgiving spirit is sin. It is serious enough that if a person persists in it, he should be excluded from the fellowship of the church (Matthew 18:7-9). A bitter and unforgiving spirit is serious before God, deserving severe discipline.

### III. THE SCOPE OF FORGIVENESS

**A. Forgive all offenses.** Whether the wrong against you was by word, deed, or attitude, forgive it. If the wrong was repeated often, even in the same day, forgive it (Luke 17:4). If the wrong is done “*seventy times seven*,” forgive it (Matthew 18:21, 22).

Truly forgive. Do not let offenses accumulate so that a great burden results. Your forgiveness must remove the offense “*as far as the east is from the west*,” just as God has forgiven you (Psalm 103:12).

**B. Forgive all persons.** It is easier for you to forgive people you like than to forgive those you do not like. Read Matthew 5:22-28 and notice the idea of “*whosoever*.” Verse 23 might be interpreted to mean, “If any of you comes to any altar to offer any gift to God and remembers that any brother has any thing against you. . . .” That is very inclusive, isn't it?

**C. Forgive for all time.** One may say, “I can forgive, but I cannot forget.” God does not command us to forget. He is concerned that our forgiveness be so complete that if we remember the offense it will be to praise Him in forgiveness, not to feel bitterness for the offense.

### IV. THE KEY TO FORGIVENESS

**A. Trust fully in the Lord.** Forgiveness is a spiritual exercise. When Jesus ended His teaching on forgiving one another, the disciples responded, “*Increase our faith*” (Luke 17:5). Forgiveness can be extended to people through faith in God.

**B. Yield totally to the Holy Spirit.** The graces mentioned in Colossians 3:12, 13, relating as they do to forgiveness, are close to the fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22, 23. That indicates that the capacity to truly forgive comes from the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the believer. One who is filled with the Spirit and walks in the Spirit will not grieve the Spirit

by bitterness and unforgiveness.

**C. Follow explicitly the example of Christ.** *“Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye”* (Colossians 3:13). *“Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you”* (Ephesians 4:32). Jesus himself set the example for us to follow in forgiving.

**D. Love selflessly the unworthy person.** *“Above all these things put on charity”* (Colossians 3:14). That spirit will enable you to deal patiently and kindly with the offender. *“Charity suffereth long, and is kind; . . . is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; . . . beareth all things, . . . endureth all things. Charity never faileth”* (I Corinthians 13:4-8). The divine love of God (translated *“charity”* in the King James Version) is the answer to all our bitter, unforgiving feelings.

**E. Rest completely in the peace of God.** If you *“let the peace of God rule in your hearts,”* you will have little problem with unforgiveness (Colossians 3:15). When you *“keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,”* you will have no problem with a spirit of unforgiveness (Ephesians 4:3). The bitterness and hurt that accompanies an unforgiving spirit will destroy peace of heart. The two cannot live together.

If you think, “I cannot have peace with the person who wronged me,” remember that it is the peace *“of God”* which is to rule in your heart. If you cannot love the person, ask God to love him through you. And He will! Loving with the love of God, you will be filled with the peace of God (Ephesians 4:1-3).

In practical terms, forgiveness means to surrender the right to hold an issue against a person ever again. It is an act of the will, not of the emotions. God's plan is that both the offender and the offended take a fresh start toward a better life. Will you cultivate the grace of forgiveness?

## Questions

1. What does it mean to forgive?
2. How do you respond to, “I can forgive, but I cannot forget”?
3. How is grace related to forgiveness?
4. Why does God command us to forgive one another?
5. How is an unforgiving spirit a sin?
6. What does Matthew 18:21, 22 teach about the scope of forgiveness?
7. How is the Holy Spirit related to our forgiving one another?
8. How is the example of Christ related to our forgiving (as in Colossians 3:13)?

9. How does a forgiving spirit promote the peace of God in the heart?
10. How can you put this study into effect this week?