

On Forgiving Others

- A. Definitions.
1. Forgive: “*trans.* To give, grant. Obs.”
 2. Forgiveness: “The action of forgiving; pardon of a fault, remission of a debt, etc. †In OE. also: Indulgent permission.”
- B. A popular position on forgiveness says that we should automatically forgive *unconditionally* those who have committed offenses against our persons or our society.
1. This has led some to conclude that we should not hold it against the killers at the schools in Columbine or Paducah, or the killer of the Amish schoolchildren.
 2. Sometimes people who have been greatly wronged are impressed that they must unconditionally forgive their offender in EVERY circumstance lest God not forgive them in kind.
 - a. “Jesus taught in **MAT 6:12-15** that God won't forgive us unless we forgive others who have wronged us.”
 - b. “Jesus forgave His persecutors without regard to their repentance while He hung on the cross.”
 - c. “We are supposed to requite good for evil and walk the extra mile.”
- C. Only God can forgive someone in the sense of actually absolving that person of sin.
1. Sin demands a payment. **NAH 1:3; ROM 6:23.**
 2. Sinners are forgiven on the basis of a substitute payment by sacrifice. **HEB 9:22.**
 3. Christ's detractors were in this sense correct when they said, “...who can forgive sins but God only?” (**MAR 2:7**).
- D. N.T. instruction on forgiveness shows that humility/repentance on the part of an offender is an important consideration.
1. Our personal forgiveness of the *temporal* punishments for our sins are dependent upon our humble confession and contrition. **1JO 1:9 c/w PRO 28:13; ACT 3:19.**
 2. **MAT 18:35** affirms a forgiveness of others being a prerequisite to God's forgiveness of ourselves.
 - a. The context (**MAT 18:21-35**) is not speaking of an *unconditional* forgiveness granted seven times or seven times seventy times.
 - b. Jesus answered Peter's question about “...how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?” by a parable about a *humbled* debtor seeking mercy.
 - c. Mercy/forgiveness denied to such a penitent would merit the censure of **v.35**.
 - d. Peter's question in **v.21** is based upon Christ's statement in **v.15** which again implies a humbled/repentant offender.
 - e. **LUK 17:3-4** confirms this by parallel. A repeat offender is repeatedly forgiven IF he is repeatedly repentant.
 3. The context of the creditor who *frankly forgave* two debtors (**LUK 7:37-48**) is that of a humbled sinner which implies a forgiveness of someone who has demonstrated remorse and repentance.
 4. The pattern of humility/repentance before forgiveness is particularly important for fellowship amongst brethren.
 - a. In **MAT 18:15-17**, the trespassing brother who “hears” the offended brother's plea is gained.
 - b. But if the trespassing brother does not “hear,” the offended brother is directed to the next step in the process; he is not held accountable to forgive the unrepentant brother.
 - c. We are to forgive brethren *as Christ has forgiven us*. **EPH 4:32; COL 3:13.**

- (1) Christ has forgiven us *unconditionally* in an *eternal* sense. **TIT 3:5.**
- (2) But Christ only forgives us *temporally* when we *repent and seek mercy* by the rule of **1JO 1:9.**
- (3) The forgiveness of the fornicator at Corinth was only ordered AFTER he was obviously swallowed up with sorrow for his deed. **2CO 2:6-7.**
- (4) To deny forgiveness to a humbled offender who is seeking forgiveness, mercy and restoration would be to invoke the censures of **MAT 18:35; MAR 11:25-26; GAL 6:1; JAM 2:13.**
- (5) *Personally* extending forgiveness to an unrepentant disciplined brother whose unrepentance forbids *the church* from forgiving him would be sending mixed signals.
- (6) If an unconditional forgiveness of an offending brother is always appropriate, then the order of **MAT 18:15-17** is useless.

E. We may choose to overlook an offense after the order of **PRO 19:11; ECC 7:21-22.**

1. It is not necessary to make a federal case out of every offense. We ought to remember that “in many things we offend all...” (**JAM 3:2**) and we will be judged by the same measure we judge others. **MAT 7:2.**
2. Jesus taught us to overlook minor offenses whereas the Pharisees rigorously applied the rule of “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.” **MAT 5:38-42.**
3. There are times when the godly thing to do is suffer wrong rather than demanding remedy. **1CO 6:6-7.**
4. Unjustified wrath against us as individuals may be handled by *giving place* to it. **ROM 12:19.**
 - a. To *give place* means “to give ground, yield to pressure or force...”
 - b. This action stands in contrast to avenging ourselves, retaliating in kind.
 - c. This is part of overcoming evil with good. **ROM 12:20-21.**
5. By such means, charity can cover a multitude of sins. **1PE 4:8.**
6. Such charitable forgiveness needs to be extended with *discretion*, per **PRO 19:11.**
 - a. Continual overlooking of someone's offending actions or words could embolden that person in his sin and so invite his own destruction. **LEV 19:17.**
 - b. We do not want to hinder someone from godly sorrow which works repentance unto salvation. **2CO 7:10.**
 - c. Scripture warns about the tendency of a hardened heart to hold in contempt a received favor. **ROM 2:4-5; ISA 26:10.**
 - d. Scripture warns about sinners exploiting a lack of judgment. **ECC 8:11.**
 - e. We are told, “...of SOME have compassion, MAKING A DIFFERENCE; And others save with fear...” (**JUDE 1:22-23**).
 - f. Godly love includes necessary rebukes and reproofs.
7. Requiring good for evil is indeed a good way of heaping coals of fire upon an offender's head.
 - a. If your offender should be found lying by the roadside half-dead or suddenly unable to feed his family, the godly thing to do would be to extend help as you have such opportunity. **GAL 6:10.**
 - b. But if an offender is obstinately unmoved by his error being passed over, or by being rebuked for it,
 - (1) if a brother, the successive order of **MAT 18:15-17** should be put in play.
 - (2) if not a brother, the offended person might need to defer the matter to God and put some distance between himself and the offender.

F. Someone who has been offended could conceivably in his heart's relationship to God forgive his

offender unconditionally even though fellowship with that person may be permanently scarred.

1. Stephen pleaded with God to forgive his attackers. **ACT 7:60.**
2. Part of suffering for doing well demands that we be as Jesus and commit the matter and ourselves to God. **1PE 2:23; 4:16, 19.**
3. We only wound ourselves when we harbor bitterness or a grudge which hollows out the soul.

G. Forgiveness, when granted, must be from the heart. **MAT 18:35.**

1. We have not truly forgiven when we only do so with our mouths while our hearts are still holding a malicious grudge against an offender. c/w **PSA 62:4.**
2. All aspects of our religion must be heart-oriented to be valid. **ROM 10:10; 6:17.**