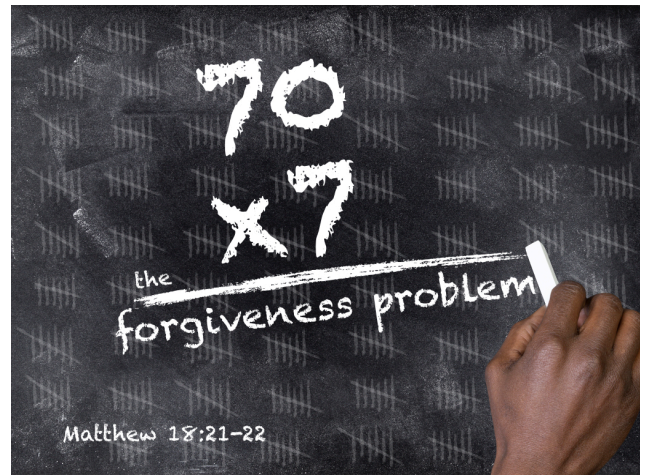


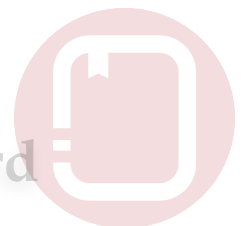
“70 X 7: the forgiveness problem

Question & Answer Sunday
July 2, 2017



Questions with Corresponding Page Numbers

1. If someone is unwilling to forgive a person...is it a sin? **(page 3)**
2. Does Eph 4:32 mean to forgive...“because” or “like” God...forgave us? **(page 4)**
3. In order for forgiveness to take place, does one have to make..contact with offender? **(page 5)**
4. In every case does the offendeD have to take the initial step....? **(page 6)**
5. Does giving forgiveness of those outside the body of Christ have separate commandments...? **(page 8)**
6. Isn't forgiveness...all about our relationship and walk with Christ? **(page 9)**
7. Is reconciliation always possible for the forgiver? **(page 10)**
8. Can you forgive when you don't "feel" forgiving? **(page 11)**
9. Have I really forgiven if I continue to be reminded...? **(page 12)**
10. Is there an inverse relationship between...spiritual maturity and the need to forgive others? **(page 13)**
11. When Jesus...prayed.... “*forgive them for they know not what they do.*” Do you believe that Jesus' prayer was answered...? **(page 14)**
12. How does forgiveness cost us everything? **(page 16)**
13. What is the relationship between forgiveness and justice? **(page 17)**
14. Resources **(page 19)**



Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture verses listed below come from the English Standard Version (ESV). The Holy Bible: English Standard Version. (2016). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

“He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. 13 As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.” - **Psalms 103:10-13**

There was a total of 17 questions submitted in advance by email. Some came from individuals. Most came from our Community Groups. I attempted to organize the questions into categories as there was overlap with many questions and some were essentially the same. I also tried to organize them into a logical progression so that we don't go back and forth between ideas.

One issue probably needs to be addressed before we attempt to answer the questions about forgiveness. This issue comes up in the midst of many sermon series. You might know someone who does this, or you might be the one who does this. Or you might do this, but not be aware that you do this. But there is always someone who will try to push back and basically say, “I hear what you're saying preacher, but I don't think it really applies to me.” There is always someone who thinks that they don't have to do what's been addressed in a sermon series. They are somehow able to rationalize their behavior so that they are exempt.

As an example of this, I remember one Sunday after I preached a message on the sin of complaining, a person approached me complaining about the sermon on complaining. They were looking for some sort of loophole that enabled them to continue to complain. I graciously pointed out to them that they were in fact complaining at that moment. Complaining is a sin and should not be a behavior in which God's people participate. So it is with this subject of forgiveness.

There are people who think there must be some loophole that will enable them to not have to be forgiving, to not have to extend forgiveness towards those who have caused hurt. My prayer, is that I hope I have demonstrated throughout this series—and I hope to demonstrate with these questions and answers—that no one is given a loophole to escape the responsibility of forgiveness. Unforgiveness on the part of a Christ-follower is, in fact, a sin.

And this leads to the first question that someone raised for this Q&A session.

1. If someone is unwilling to forgive a person who has continually hurt them, is it a sin?

The simple answer to this question is “yes.” Unforgiveness on the part of a Christ-follower is a sin. If God has called us to forgive as He has forgiven us, then to withhold forgiveness from someone is to violate what God has stated His people should do.

Ephesians 4:32 - *“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”*

In this verse, “be” is an imperative. That means it is a command. The word “be” itself means to possess certain characteristics, the characteristics a believer is to possess follow the command: Be kind. Be tenderhearted. Be forgiving. So, we are commanded to be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving.

Matthew 18:22 - *“Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.’”*

The question above asks if forgiveness should be granted to those who “continually hurt them.” According to the 70X7 principle, I believe the implication is a continual forgiveness for continual hurts. Remember our mathematical equation from the first sermon in the series,



$$(u)f + (u)k = F^{\infty}$$

unmerited favor + underserved kindness = Forgiveness forever
grace **mercy**

Matt. 6:14-15 - *“14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”*

Matt. 18:35 - *“So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”*

Luke 6:37 - *“Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven...”*

Matt. 7:2 - *“For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.”*

The verses that follow **Matthew 6:14-15** seem to indicate there are consequences for an unforgiving spirit. When we spoke of this in the series, there is debate as to whether or not the forgiveness here is related to salvation or our daily fellowship with God, or possibly even both. I believe it is true for both, but I lean towards the former. If forgiveness is a characteristic of Christ, for someone to not also demonstrate this character quality may indicate that person is not truly born-again. In any case, unforgiveness does not just affect our relationship with people, it also affects our relationship with God.

James 4:17 - *“So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.”*

2. Does Eph 4:32 mean to forgive others “because” or “like” God in Christ forgave us? If the latter, then is this support for requiring repentance before forgiveness?

There are two questions here, so let’s answer the first one first. The correct understanding of that verse is to look at the word “**as**.” The English translates the Greek word (καθώς) which means, “marker of similarity in events and states, with the possible implication of something being in accordance with something else—‘just as, in comparison to.’”¹

It is the same word in **Colossians 3:13** where it says, *“...as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”* So, the meaning of the verse is to forgive in the same manner as God has forgiven us. Now in Matthew 18 and the parable of the “unforgiving servant,” the implication could be to forgive “because” we have been forgiven. But the meaning of Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:13 is “like”.

Based on that answer, the follow-up question is a valid question. If we are to forgive “as” God forgives us, or “like” God forgive us, does this require repentance before forgiveness?

Some would say yes to that because our forgiveness from God comes with our repentance (**Luke 24:47; Acts 3:19**). Add to this what Jesus says in **Luke 17:3-4**, *“Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, 4 and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.”*

¹ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 618). New York: United Bible Societies.

This seems to imply that repentance is a requirement for forgiveness.

However, also notice what Jesus said in **Mark 11:25** - *“And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”* So here, it seems Jesus does not require repentance from the offender in order for the offended to offer forgiveness. Because the offender is not even there.

So, if we come back to **Ephesians 4:32** and the imperative to forgive “as” God has forgiven us, I don’t think the “as” refers to the process of forgiveness but to the product. In other words, we are to forgive as God forgiven us with the results of what that forgiveness brings. How does God forgive?

- He forgives “all our trespasses.” (**Colossians 2:14**)
- He absorbed the cost of forgiveness. (**Ephesians 1:7**)
- He willingly forgives. (**Jeremiah 31:34**)
- He sent His Son to give up His life to provide it. (**Matthew 26:28**)
- He does not deal with us according to our sins (**Psalms 103:12**)
- He blots out our sins. (**Isaiah 44:22**)
- He restores our relationship with Himself. (**2 Corinthians 5:18**)

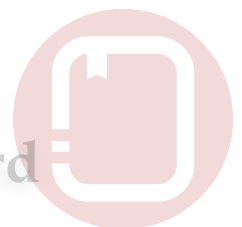
This list just names a few of the results of God’s forgiveness towards us. So, the result or product of our forgiveness towards others should be similar.

- We forgive them for all their trespasses.
- We absorb the cost by cancelling their debt.
- We forgive willingly.
- We give up our life & rights in our forgiving.
- We must not then deal with people according to their sins against us.
- We must blot out those sins.
- We must seek to restore the relationship.

3. In order for forgiveness to take place, does one have to make some kind of contact with the offender?

Not necessarily. But yes, probably, if possible. How’s that for an answer? The “no” portion of the answer seems to be supported by Jesus’ words in Mark chapter 11 that we looked at previously.

Mark 11:25 - *“And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”*



It seems that forgiveness starts with the offendeD and that it begins before he goes to speak to the offendeR. I think there are situations in which it is impossible for a person to go to the offendeR to offer forgiveness. Sometimes the offendeR has died, sometimes they might be in jail, or they might be separated geographically.

But even in the cases where there is separation by geographical location or incarceration, the offendeD can contact them by way of a letter, electronic communication, or telephone call. Remember, also what Jesus stated in Matthew 18:15...

Matt. 18:15 - *“If your brother sins against you, **go** and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.”* Jesus seemed to indicate there are times when contact with the offender does not need to take place and times when it does need to take place. In either case, forgiveness begins with the offendeD.

4. In every case does the offendeD have to take the initial step or is there instances where the offendeR takes the first step?

Again, let's look to Matthew 18:15. It seems to be pretty clear.

Matt. 18:15 - *“If your brother sins against you, **go** and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.”*

Jesus says the offendeD takes the initial step. In many cases, this is necessary as the offendeR may not know they have sinned against the person. In those situations they will not know unless the offendeD tells them. In those cases, the offendeR would never make the first move because they are unaware of the offense.

But there might be some situations where the offendeR, if they are a Christ-follower, may be convicted by the Holy Spirit that they have offendeD a brother or sister. In those cases, the offendeR does not need to wait on the offendeD to come to them. They know they've done wrong and they know they need to seek forgiveness. Matthew 5 might speak to this a bit.

Matthew 5:23-24 - *“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”*

The emphasis here in Matthew 5 is the offendeR going to the offendeD.

Luke 17:3-4 - *“Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.”*

In Luke 17, Jesus says when our brother sins, we are to rebuke them. Rebuke cannot take place without going to the person. When you combine Luke 17 and Matthew 18, Jesus Himself tells the offendeD to go to the offendeR.

Another submitted question was similar to this one. I want to include it too.

There was great emphasis on the offendeD going to the offendeR, but why does the offendeR not have the greater responsibility to ask for forgiveness? Is that not our responsibility when we sin against God?

As we looked at in **Matthew 5:23-24**, the offendeR does have a responsibility to seek amends when they have sinned against someone. However, the offendeD has been commanded to “forgive those who trespass against them.”

We need to remember that our obedience to God is never dependent upon the actions of others. If the offendeD waits for the offendeR to come and ask for forgiveness, the offendeD could be waiting their entire life. That means if the offendeD does not forgive, they will be consciously sinning against the Lord for their entire life. I don’t want to stand before Christ one day and say, “I know you told me to forgive people, but I was waiting for them to come to me and confess. They didn’t come, so that is why I disobeyed you.” I don’t think Christ will be impressed with that.

I want to address the last part of that question above: “Is that not our responsibility when we sin against God?” I believe there is an important question we need to ask and answer first. That question is this:

How do we come to the point of confessing our sin to God?

The answer to that question is that we do not come to God of our own accord. We do not voluntarily come to Him when we have sinned against Him. We come to Him through the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who comes to us. He pokes us and knocks on the door and says, “Hey, what you did was wrong. You need to seek forgiveness.” We do not do that naturally ourselves. It is God, the offendeD one, who comes and confronts the offendeR and seeks to restore the relationship.

That is the pattern that we see throughout Scripture beginning in Genesis 3. When Adam and Eve sinned, they hid themselves from God. They did not run to God and say, “Lord, remember that command you gave us about the tree? Yeah, well we broke it. Will you forgive us?” That did not happen. Instead, we

see God calling to them, “Where are you?” He knew what they had done. But He sought them out from their hiding and confronted. We see this in the Gospel with Christ. God, the offended One, comes to the offenders to offer forgiveness. If that is the Biblical pattern we see with God forgiving us, then that is the pattern we should follow in our forgiving others.

Romans 5:8 - *“...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

5. Does giving forgiveness of those outside the body of Christ have separate commandments placed on us as believers?

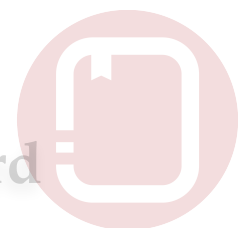
I have two ways to approach this question. Both of course start with Scripture. The first way is to understand forgiveness as the standard of behavior that God expects us to demonstrate toward others. I believe we have established that already as God commands us to forgive. Many of the verses we have examined look at forgiveness amongst God’s people.

However, I do believe the example prayer that Jesus shared with His disciples in **Matthew 6**, applies towards all people whether believers or unbelievers. You will remember **verse 12** says, *“and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors...”* There does not seem to be anything in the text that indicates this is limited specifically to believers. In fact, **verses 14-15** goes on to say, *“For if you forgive **others** their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive **others** their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”*

The word “**others**” is translated from the Greek word **ἄνθρωπος** (*anthropos*) which means “human being.” This is a general term used to identify all mankind. In **Matthew 18:15**, the term is **ἀδελφός** (*adelphos*) which means “brother.” So it seems, forgiveness should be extended to both unbelievers and believers.

Another dimension to God’s standard of behavior is related to how we are supposed to treat our enemies. I have included several Scriptures here that speak to that.

Matthew 5:43-48 - *“43 You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and*



on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Luke 6:27 - *“But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. 29 To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either.”*

Rom. 12:19-21 - *“19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” 20 To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”*

When you consider that we are to love our enemies and do them good even when they curse us, abuse us, strike us on the cheek, and taken our tunic, does not doing them good demonstrate grace and mercy? Is not the demonstration of grace and mercy uniquely tied to forgiveness? Even though these verses do not use the word forgiveness the actions demonstrate it. Just like the book of Philemon does not use the word forgiveness even the whole book is about that.

But the second way I approach this question is to understand our testimony and witness to unbelievers. If we say we are Christ-followers and we serve a gracious God who forgives, how terrible is our witness to unbelievers if we don't extend forgiveness to them when they wrong us. How will we lead them to a God who forgives when we are unwilling to forgive them? Jesus said we are to let our light so shine before others, that they may see our good works (**Matthew 5:16**).

6. Isn't forgiveness for the most part all about our relationship and walk with Christ? We understand there is a horizontal relationship that is important too.

I am not certain about the angle from which this question is coming. At first glance, it seems to have a “me” focus. “As long as ‘me’ is good with God, that's the most important thing. Oh, and the relationships with people are important too, but only secondarily. Maybe my understanding of the question is lacking, but here is how I would respond.

It is very difficult to separate the vertical from the horizontal. It is difficult to think of these in terms of distinctions. Although Jesus emphasized that loving God is the first great commandment and loving your neighbor as yourself is the second

(**Matthew 22:36-40**), they are so intricately connected it is difficult to separate the two.

Our relationship with God affects our relationship with man. If our relationship with God is off kilter, then our relationship with people will be off kilter. And, if our relationship with people is off kilter, that is usually an indicator that our relationship with God is off kilter too. I cannot be right in my relationship with God and not extend forgiveness to others.

In a similar way, James says that we cannot bless God with our tongue and then turn and use it to curse men who are made in the image of God. It is not possible for blessing and cursing to come from the same source.

Matthew 22:36-40 - *“36 “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” 37 And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”*

James 3:8-11 - *“8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. 11 Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water?”*

7. Is reconciliation always possible for the forgiver? What if the other party is not willing? Isn't reconciliation always a two-way street?

I wish the answer to this first question was “yes.” But unfortunately it is not always possible. It is always the goal. However, there are at least three situations where it cannot take place. The first is when the offendeR is not willing to be reconciled. As stated in the question, reconciliation is a two-way street. If only one party is walking on that street and the other is unwilling, then it does not happen.

The second situation is when the offendeR dies before the offendeD sought reconciliation. In this case, the offendeD can still cancel the debt and extend forgiveness, but the relationship cannot be restored. But in the same vein, sometimes the offendeR comes to the one they have offendeD seeking forgiveness and reconciliation. And sometimes the offendeD does not extend forgiveness nor has any desire to reconcile. So, we need to be careful that we don't assume the offendeD is always on the correct side of the street.

The third situation where reconciliation is difficult to take place is in the case of abuse. This leads to a similar question...

Is reconciliation always the goal? for example--as in a child abuser--can't we forgive and still need to stay safe or keep our children safe from said abuser?

In cases where there is physical, sexual, or emotional abuse the offended needs to immediately get to a place of safety to ensure that abuse does not continue. The offended can and should still offer forgiveness according to all that has been said before. But their offer of forgiveness does not mean that all consequences for the offender are removed. The offender may still face a court of law and may still face jail time for their abuse.

The best example in Scripture where forgiveness was granted but consequences were not removed is the story of King David and Bathsheba. David committed adultery with her and murdered her husband. She became pregnant with David's son. When Nathan the prophet confronted David, he confessed his sin to God (**2 Samuel 12**). But the consequence of his sin, Bathsheba's pregnancy was not removed. The ensuing death of her child was not removed.

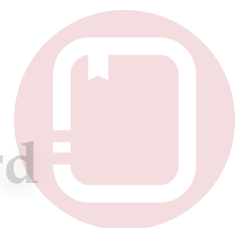
I believe it is helpful for us to understand that forgiveness does not mean that consequences are automatically removed. The consequence of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse involve separation of the offended and the offender. By the miracle of God's grace those situations can be overcome, but reconciliation in such cases will take some time.

8. Can you forgive when you don't "feel" forgiving? Isn't it an act of the will, which God then enables?

I believe the second question here answers the first question. So, the short answer to both is, "yes." Yes you can forgive when you don't feel like it. Yes, forgiving is an act of the will which God enables.

Forgiveness is a command. Therefore, it needs to be followed whether we feel like forgiving or not. It never worked with my children when I told them to do something and their response was, "I didn't feel like doing it, Dad." That doesn't work with God either. God commands and then requires our obedience.

But we must remember that God also gives us the ability to obey His commands. That ability comes through the risen Christ living in



us through His Holy Spirit. Walking with the Spirit enables our obedience. Our obedience is also the proof of our relationship with Christ.

Galatians 2:20 - *“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”*

Galatians 5:16, 25 - *“...walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh...If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.”*

1 John 2:3-4 - *“And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says ‘I know him’ but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”*

9. Have I really forgiven if I continue to be reminded of what that person did to me?

I think it depends on what you do when you are reminded. Do you allow your thoughts to move towards anger, bitterness, and a desire for revenge? Or do you remember that you released the person from the debt they owe you?

Do you wish them well or do you want terrible things to happen to them? Do you desire to see them hurt or suffer? Or do you have a desire to pour out grace and mercy upon them? Answering those questions might help to determine if you have really forgiven them.

The reality is that we never forget the deep hurts that have been done to us. Some people preach the mantra, “forgive and forget.” But that’s not even a biblical concept. They use the verse in **Jeremiah 31:34** where God tells Israel he will forgive their iniquity and will remember their sin no more. However, the context of that verse is the New Covenant that God is going to establish with Israel (**Jeremiah 31:31**).

God is omniscient. He knows everything. He cannot not know something. So, it is inaccurate to say He does not remember our sins in that way. What the Scriptures affirm, as attested by **Psalms 103:10-13**, is that God does not deal with us according to our sins. Instead, He removes them.

I shared in the first message in the series, that I believe one of the reasons that Jesus said to forgive 70X7 is that we will find ourselves needing to forgive the same offense over and over again whenever we think of it. But each time we do that, we remind ourselves: “I cancelled that debt. I forgave that offense. But I’m forgiving it again.”

It might be a healthy exercise to write down on paper the offense, the sin, or the hurt that was committed against you. Recognize it as a sinful atrocity that violated both you and God. Then spend some time in prayer asking God to give you the grace to extend grace to your offender. The list of offenses on the paper would represent the debt that is owed to you. Then take a big red marker and write “cancelled” across the offenses. Tear the paper up and throw it in the trash to symbolize the debt is no longer owed.

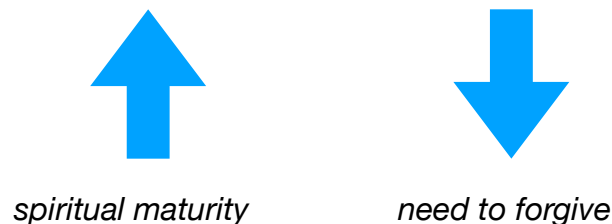
Jeremiah 31:34 - *“...For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”*

Psalms 103:10-13 - *“He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. 13 As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.”*

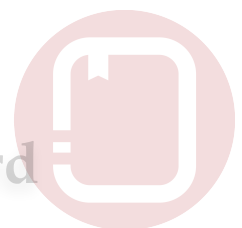
Matthew 18:21-22 - *“21 Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” 22 Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.”*

10. Is there an inverse relationship between a Christian’s level of spiritual maturity and the need to forgive others? In other words, are spiritually mature people more resistant to offense?

In other words, are spiritually mature people resistant to offense? These are interesting questions. If I understand the first question, the higher level of spiritual maturity one has, the lower is their need to forgive others. I am a visual learner so I had to draw a graphic for this:



I would say the need to forgive is always present as God has commanded us to forgive. And of course the spiritually mature



should be more quick to forgive than the spiritually immature. As we learn what the Bible teaches about forgiveness, we grow in our understanding and application of it.

However, the second question qualifies what they are really asking. Are spiritually mature people more resistant to taking offense in the first place? The answer to this question is yes. Spiritually mature people are more resistant to taking offense. This is what I believe Paul was getting at with **Colossians 3:12-13**. Not being quick to take offense is what it means to bear with one another.

Colossians 3:12-13 - *"12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."*

When people do petty things, we need to not be so sensitive and take offense at every little thing. Spiritually mature people will not allow the petty things to become big issues.

But when a brother or sister **sins** against the spiritually mature, the person who is spiritually mature will handle the situation biblically and go to the offender and tell them of the sin and seek to restore the relationship. One who is easily offended or who has been seriously sinned against, who refuses to respond biblically should not think that they are spiritually mature.

11. When Jesus was on the cross He prayed to His Heavenly Father: "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." — Do you believe that Jesus' prayer was answered---Yes or No and why or why not?

Before we answer the question, let's first look at the passage where we find this statement. Luke is the only Gospel that records this statement from Jesus.

Luke 23:32-34 - *"32 Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. 33 And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. 34 And Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' And they cast lots to divide his garments."*

A few preliminary questions need to be asked before we can answer our question at hand. 1) What is the context in which this statement appears? and 2) Who is the "them" that do not know what they do?

Verses 32-33 establish the context as the event of the crucifixion. Two criminals along with Jesus were led away to be killed. Who led them away? This text does not answer that question, but we assume it was the Roman soldiers as identified in **Matthew 27:27-44**.

Verse 33 says, *“there they crucified him and the criminals.”* Who crucified Him? The answer would be the Roman soldiers. Jesus then said, *“forgive them for they know not what they do.”* So, the *“them”* Jesus asked the Father to forgive were the Roman soldiers. He prayed for them in their ignorance. They had no idea who they were killing, they were just following orders. They did not understand the ramifications of all that was happening.

However, was Jesus’ prayer answered? Scripture records that His prayer was answered at least partially. Three of the four Gospels identify that one of the Roman Centurions responsible for the crucifixion of Christ seemed to express belief that Jesus surely was the Son of God. We do not have a record that the others did. But we also do not have a record that they did not.

Matt. 27:54 - *“54 When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, ‘Truly this was the Son of God!’”*

Mark 15:37-39 - *“37 And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. 38 And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. 39 And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, ‘Truly this man was the Son of God!’”*

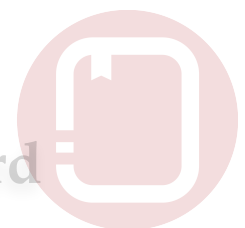
Luke 23:47 - *“Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, ‘Certainly this man was innocent!’”*

Christ’s request that the Father forgives these soldiers did not eliminate their response of faith to the offer. We probably need to view this in the same way that we handle the general tension in the Scriptures that God offers salvation too all (**John 3:16; 2 Peter. 3:9**), but not all respond to it. We also know that the ones who respond are elect of God (**Matthew 22:14**).

John 3:16 - *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”*

2 Peter 3:9 - *“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”*

Matthew 22:14 - *“For many are called, but few are chosen.”*



12. How does forgiveness cost us everything?

In the series, we spoke about the reality that forgiveness is costly. Jesus paid the price for our forgiveness with humility, with discomfort, and with His blood. When we speak of His blood, we are talking about His life. Jesus paid for our forgiveness with His life. He laid down His life by humbling Himself to become a man and to die on the cross. He laid down His life by choosing the discomfort of being a man and enduring the beatings and agony of crucifixion. He laid down His life by literally dying so that our forgiveness could be secured.

When an offense occurs against us, there is a debt to be paid. Offering forgiveness to someone means I absorb or cancel the debt that was incurred against me. So, in order for that one offense to be forgiven, it will cost me everything that is needed to cancel the debt. Sometimes the debt is small, sometimes it is great.

I will use an example from a husband and wife relationship where the wife had multiple adulterous affairs within the first few years of their marriage.² She didn't think she married well and found her husband un-fulfilling. She sought that fulfillment with other men.

A couple months after one of the affairs ended, she and her husband conceived a child and her life changed. She was now happy with her husband and her life. But she kept these affairs hidden from her husband for 17 years. Her husband believed in the sanctity of marriage and made a commitment to stay with her. But what did it cost him to do so?

- It cost him his dream for a model marriage.
- It cost him a marriage free from doubts.
- It cost him his dignity by choosing to stay when everyone thought he should go.
- It cost him a great deal of suffering.
- It cost him a life that will never be the same.

Forgiveness will cost you everything because it is an uncomfortable action of humility whereby we lay our lives down, our rights, our demands, and our desires to offer grace and mercy to the one who has offended us.

² Reynolds, Rick. *Ever associated forgiveness with a big price tag?* <https://www.affairrecovery.com/newsletter/founder/cost-of-forgiving-infidelity>

13. What is the relationship between forgiveness and justice? Is government ever in the business of forgiveness?

Justice demands punishment. Justice requires reparation. But Forgiveness seems to nullify justice as it cancels the debt from the record and sometimes seems to remove punishment. However, I think it is helpful to understand that forgiveness and justice are not mutually exclusive. Forgiveness seeks to cancel the debt, but it does not seek to minimize the offense. It seeks to call sin out for its heinousness, but it does not seek to sweep the offense under the rug as if it were no big deal. In some cases as described in question #7, forgiveness can be given but not all consequences can be removed. In those cases, we see forgiveness and justice coexisting.

Dr. Celestin Musekura is a Rwandan Christian who is helping his country to rebuild and reconcile after the terrible genocide in 1994 in which almost 1 million people executed. His explanation of the relationship between justice and forgiveness is insightful:

"There is no justice without forgiveness, and there is no forgiveness without justice. Before I forgive something, I have to judge it as evil."

"The evil must be punished, but the goal is not just to punish the perpetrator, the goal is to restore the community."

"Justice without forgiveness sets up the process of more revenge."³

Ultimately, forgiveness entrusts justice into the hands of God who is the executor or judge.

Romans 12:19-21 - *"19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' 20 To the contrary, 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.' 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."*

Genesis 18:25 - *"...Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?"*

But entrusting justice into God's hand may not give us immediate results as God's timetable is vastly different from others. In the meantime, God has established that government play a role in administering justice on His behalf (**Romans 13:1-7**). Governing rulers are supposed to be a terror to bad conduct (v3). We are to be in subjection to this authority to avoid God's wrath and have a

³ Dr. Celestin Musekura, President and Founder of the African Leadership And Reconciliation Ministries (ALARM, Inc.) <http://askquestions.tv/celestin-musekura-what-is-the-relationship-between-forgiveness-and-justice/>

good conscience (v5). But if government is responsible for justice, then forgiveness should play key role too because of its relationship to justice.

Romans 13:1-7 - *“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. 2 Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, 4 for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. 5 Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. 6 For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. 7 Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.”*

When government fails to execute justice and forgiveness properly, we need to entrust those failures into God's hands and believe that He will make things right in His timing.

A great resource on this subject that demonstrates how one country (South Africa) sought to provide forgiveness and justice is book entitled, *“No Future Without Forgiveness”* by Desmond Tutu.

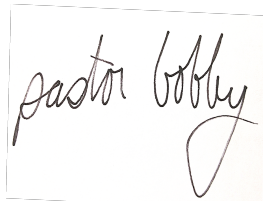
One Final Thought

We must be careful to understand that our granting people forgiveness for the sins they have committed against us does not guarantee that God will forgive them for their sins against us. Ultimately, every sin is against God (**Psalm 51:3-4**). We can forgive because we believe God is just. Vengeance belongs to the Lord. Ultimately, His justice will prevail.

Psalm 51:3-4 - *“3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. 4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight...”*

The goal of every Q&A session at Southgate is to provide Biblical answers. I hope that goal was accomplished. God is a forgiving God, Christ is a forgiving Lord, and one who is like God and like Christ will also be forgiving. I do pray that forgiveness will characterize the people of Southgate. As we pursue Christ, let us pursue forgiveness.

In Christ,



14. Resources on Forgiveness

Total Forgiveness by R.T. Kendall

The Freedom & Power of Forgiveness by John MacArthur

Choosing Forgiveness by Nancy Leigh Demoss

No Future Without Forgiveness by Desmond Tutu

What's So Amazing About Grace? by Philip Yancey

Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace by Miroslav Volf

When You've Been Wronged: Moving from Bitterness to Forgiveness by Erwin Lutzer