

FORGIVENESS, REPENTANCE,
RECONCILIATION, RESTITUTION IN
DISCIPLE-MAKING

NAVIGATORS
— LEAD ON —

WHATEVER HE ASKS. WHEREVER HE LEADS.

FORGIVENESS, REPENTANCE, RECONCILIATION, RESTORATION AND ANGER

“Forgiveness. Nothing is more foreign to sinful human nature. And nothing is more characteristic of divine grace.”

“Everyone says that forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive.”¹²

Forgiveness

In the New Testament, there are three words translated as “forgiveness.”

- a. *Aphiemi* has the meaning of “to let go” or “to allow/leave alone.” This is translated “forgive” in the sense of forgiving or leaving a debt or sins alone. One third of 143 times it is used is for forgiveness in NT; notable examples: Matthew 6:12-15, 18:21-35, 1 John 1:9.
- b. *Aphesis* is a derivative from *aphiemi*, but it is used almost exclusively for forgiveness (16 times out of 17 uses). Ex: Acts 2:38, 5:3, 13:38-39, Hebrews 9:22.
- c. *Charizomai* means to “graciously or freely give” (1 Corinthians 2:12, Galatians 3:18, Philippians.1:29) or more often it means “to forgive debt/sin” (Ephesians 4:32, Colossians 3:13).³

Clearly forgiveness has something to do with letting go or cancelling a debt. Biblical forgiveness is more than a feeling. Tim Keller suggests: “When someone seriously wrongs you, there is an absolutely unavoidable sense that the wrongdoer owes you. The wrong has incurred an obligation, a liability, a debt. Anyone who has been wronged feels a compulsion to make the other person pay down that debt. We do that by hurting them, yelling at them, making them feel bad in some way, or just waiting and watching and hoping that something bad happens to them. Only after we see them suffer in some commensurate way do we sense that the debt has been paid and the sense of obligation is gone. This sense of debt/liability and obligation is impossible to escape. Anyone who denies it exists has simply not been wronged or sinned against in any serious way.

What then is forgiveness? Forgiveness means giving up the right to seek repayment from the one who harmed you. But it must be recognized that forgiveness is a form of voluntary suffering. What does that mean?

Think about how monetary debts work. If a friend breaks my lamp, and if the lamp costs fifty dollars to replace, then the act of lamp-breaking incurs a debt of fifty dollars. If I let him pay for and replace the lamp, I get my lamp back and he’s out fifty dollars. But if I forgive him for what he did, the debt does not somehow vanish into thin air. When I forgive him, I absorb the cost and payment for the lamp: either I will pay the fifty

¹ J MacArthur, *The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness*, Crossway, Wheaton, 1998, p11

² CS Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

³ Daniel Wilson, The Journal of Greenville Presbyterian Theological College, Katekomen, *God’s Definition of Forgiveness* p2 <http://gpts.edu/resources/documents/katekomen/Forgiveness-1.pdf> accessed 30 May 17



dollars to replace it or I will lose the lighting in that room. To forgive is to cancel a debt by paying it or absorbing it yourself. Someone always pays every debt.

This is the case in all situations of wrongdoing, even when no money is involved. When you are sinned against, you lose something—perhaps happiness, reputation, peace of mind, a relationship, or an opportunity. There are two things to do about a sin. Imagine for example that someone has hurt your reputation. You can try to restore it by paying the other person back, voicing public criticisms and ruining his or her reputation. Or you can forgive the one who wronged you, refuse payback, and absorb the damage to your reputation. (You will have to restore it over time.)

In all cases when wrong is done there is a debt, and there is no way to deal with it without suffering: either you make the perpetrator suffer for it or you forgive and suffer for it yourself.”⁴

Indeed, this is how God forgives. He does not forgive by looking the other way, He forgives by Jesus death on the cross in our place which is so costly and allows Him to be both just and the justifier (Romans 3:25,26).

Horizontal Forgiveness

1. The vast majority of the occurrences of forgiveness concern God forgiving His people or an individual. Only about 12 passages deal with horizontal forgiveness, forgiveness of other people. Have a read of each of them noting down what it says about forgiveness:

- Matthew 6:9-15; Luke 11:1-4

- Matthew 18:21-35

- Mark 11:25

- Luke 6:37,38

- Luke 17:1-6

- John 20:19-23

- 2 Corinthians. 2:5-11

- Ephesians 4:25-5:2

⁴ Tim Keller “*Serving Each Other through Forgiveness and Reconciliation*” on <http://www.thrivingpastor.com> accessed 29 May 17, p2



- Colossians. 3:12-17
2. What does “forgive as God has forgiven you” mean? Does it mean someone has to repent before you have to forgive them? Is God’s forgiveness conditioned on our repentance or is our repentance a gift from God as well? Consider these Scriptures along with those above:
 - Acts 2:38; 3:18-20 and 20:21
 - Romans 4:1-5:2
 - Ephesians 2:1-10
 - The examples of Joseph (Genesis 45:4-5) Stephen (Acts 7:60) and Jesus (Luke 23:34)
 - Colossians 1:29 and Philippians 2:13
 3. How do you know if someone has truly repented? Can you ever really know?
 4. Do you *have* to forgive everyone? Is it ever ok not to forgive someone? If so under what circumstances?
 5. Read Proverbs 10:12, Luke 6:27-31, 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a 1 Peter 4:8. Can you love someone without forgiving them? How can we live out love in situations where we have been badly hurt or wronged?
 6. When you forgive does that mean that there are no consequences? If you think there are consequences, how long should they last? Outline your views on these situations:
 - Wife of a husband who committed adultery
 - Child sex offender
 - Someone who lied about you or backstabbed you at work



- Your mum or dad who treated you badly when growing up
 - A friend or work colleague who stole from you (relatively minor things) several times and said they were sorry each time they were caught
 - Someone who mistreated your child
 - A marriage partner who repeatedly loses their temper
7. What is difference between godly sorrow that leads to repentance and worldly sorrow or grief that leads to death? (2 Corinthians 7:10)
8. How would you define horizontal forgiveness?

9. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?

“Forgiveness is the touchstone of a Christian. A touchstone was a flat stone that if you scrapped a nugget of gold along it, it would leave a mark. No mark, not real gold. The touchstone for real and genuine Christian faith, whether someone has truly put their faith in Jesus, whether there has been true repentance, is forgiveness”

Chris Allen

10. When you have been badly hurt by someone what does it look like to for you to apply Romans 8:28,29?

11. Many say forgiveness is a process. How should we go about this process of forgiving? What would some over-arching principles? Consider:

- Matthew 7:3-5
- Luke 7:36-50
- 1 Corinthians 10:31
- 1 Peter 4:8



12. What is the interaction between justice and forgiveness? If you forgive someone, does that mean you don't press charges or you don't tell the boss? Is there a difference between something that is illegal and something that isn't?

Reconciliation

Reconciliation means that we restore our relationship to one that enables us to be compatible and friendly with one another again. "Reconciliation is restored peace, true shalom, or wholeness and health returned to something that was broken and diseased."⁵ "It requires the injured party, out of love, release their demand for justice and for the perpetrator to choose to love the one they have injured – a process made possible only when both the injured party and the perpetrator repent of their sin and forgive".⁶ It doesn't mean that our relationship will be completely restored, as though nothing happened.

13. What light do these texts throw on forgiveness and/or reconciliation?

- Matthew 5:21-26
- Matthew 18:15-20 (noting the parable of the unforgiving servant follows immediately after this)
- Romans 12:18
- Galatians 6:1,2
- 2 Timothy 2:22-26, 3:16,17 and 4:2

What should we do when we are offended?

What should we do when an offender won't repent?

What if they won't reconcile?

⁵ Dan Allender, *Bold Love*, p 161

⁶ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, quoted in Judy Dabler, p 181



What should we do when we offend someone?

When can/should you rebuke and confront? How should we do it?

“Reconciliation is a product of love and forgiveness, with forgiveness being a force that heals and builds. Love and forgiveness are made possible when the transformative process of repentance causes conflicting parties to see how they have contributed to the dispute, and godly sorrow is accompanied by the desire to change with movement toward reconciliation (2 Corinthians 7:8-13).”⁷

Restoration

14. Discuss this statement?

*“I forgive you” does not mean “I trust you.” Even if you forgive someone and they repent and you are reconciled, you may not completely trust the person who did the wrong. Forgiveness means a willingness to try to re-establish trust, but that re-establishment is always a process. The speed and degree of this restoration entails the re-creation of trust, and that takes time, depending on the nature and severity of the offenses involved. Until a person shows evidence of true change, we should not trust him or her. To immediately give one’s trust to a person with sinful habits could actually be enabling them to sin. Trust must be restored, and the speed at which this occurs depends on the behaviour.*⁸

⁷ Judy Dabler, “Biblical Counselling, the Church and Conflict Resolution” in B Kellemen and K Carson Ed, *Biblical Counseling and the Church*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015) p 181

⁸ Tim Keller *Serving Each Other through Forgiveness and Reconciliation*” p5



Anger

Anger is a critical cause of unforgiveness. Anger itself, is not always sin. As we know God gets angry (Exodus 34:6; Numbers 32:13; Nahum 1:2-6) but God's anger is different to ours. He is not temperamental and irritable, requiring some sacrificial inducement in order to placate a fiery temper. We're not to think of God's wrath as equivalent to a bad mood on steroids. His righteous hatred of sin is a fixed and holy disposition, not a volatile temperament. His demand that sin be atoned for is an essential matter of divine righteousness, not a fatuous need for vengeance.⁹

God is angry with sin. He is angry with religious hypocrisy (Matthew 23; John 2:14-16) and with injustice (Jeremiah 22:13; Ezekiel 9:9; Habakkuk 1:3) and with godlessness and wickedness (Romans 1:18-21). He is angry with those who do not worship Him as God. Those are the types of things that God gets angry with and they are the types of things we can be angry with without sinning (Ephesians 4:26).

“Righteous anger arises from an accurate perception of true evil – that is, as a violation of God's moral law. It focuses on God and His will, not on me and my will. Second, righteous anger is always self-controlled. It never causes one to lose his temper or retaliate in some vengeful way.”¹⁰

Sometimes we get angry with those types of things. But more often than not I get angry when someone has offended me. I get angry when my rights have been infringed. I get angry when I have been treated poorly, when I am treated like a servant, when I am taken for granted, when I am not respected, when I am not loved, when I am ... Notice the difference – it's all about me not about God. If anyone had the right to be angry with how He was treated, with how He was not given the respect, love and honour due to Him, it was Jesus. But He wasn't angry about that. He got angry when people were led away from God. For those who bayed for His crucifixion and for those who actually crucified them, He asked that His Father forgive them! What a stark contrast to what I get angry about.

The sinfulness of anger comes up again and again in Scripture. Read

- Ecclesiastes 7:9
- Ephesians 4:31
- James 1:19-20

⁹ MacArthur p24

¹⁰ J. Bridges, *Respectable Sins*, (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2007), p122



Dealing with Anger

This is the progression (or really deterioration) of what happens when we don't deal with our anger in accordance with Scripture:

wrong → hurt → anger → resentment → bitterness → destructive effects

You can't control the wrong that happens to you, nor the hurt that you feel or the emotion of anger that comes from it. However, you must deal with the emotion of anger well or you will stay angry and indeed sin.

"Resentment is anger held on to. Most often it is internalised. It arises in the heart of a person who is ill-treated in some way but who does not feel they are in a position to do anything about it. An employee may feel ill-treated by his boss but doesn't dare react in an outwardly angry fashion. A wife may react similarly toward an overbearing husband. Resentment may be more difficult to deal with than outwardly expressed anger because the person often continues to nurse his wounds and dwell on his ill-treatment.

Bitterness is resentment that has grown into a feeling of ongoing animosity. Whereas resentment may dissipate over time, bitterness continues to grow and fester, developing an even higher degree of ill will. It is usually the long-term reaction to real or perceived wrong when the initial anger is not dealt with.

[Here's an example] An elder intervened in a situation regarding a teenage girl in his local church. The girl's father thought the elder mishandled the situation. Instead of seeking to resolve the issue, he became angry and then bitter. In the words of the pastor, he was eaten up with bitterness'. The father said to the pastor, 'I've forgiven him, but I don't want anything to do with him.' Quite obviously he had not forgiven. True forgiveness results in a restored relationship, not continuing animosity. This man was consumed with bitterness, but in his self-righteousness he couldn't see it. All he could see was the perceived or actual wrong of the elder, which he continued to dwell on."¹¹

John Piper says:

"In marriage, anger rivals lust as a killer. My guess is that anger is a worse enemy than lust. It also destroys other kinds of camaraderie. Some people have more anger than they think, because it has disguises. When willpower hinders rage, anger smolders beneath the surface, and the teeth of the soul grind with frustration. It can come out in tears that look more like hurt. But the heart has learned that this may be the only way to hurt back.

It may come out as silence because we have resolved not to fight. It may show up in picky criticism and relentless correction. It may strike out at people who have nothing to do with its origin. It will often feel warranted by the wrongness of the cause. After all, Jesus got angry (Mark 3:5), and Paul says, "Be angry and do not sin" (Eph. 4:26).

Therefore, one of the greatest battles of life is the battle to "put away anger," not just control its expressions."

¹¹ J. Bridges p130,131. The two chapters on Anger in *Respectable Sins* are well worth reading



15. How do you put away anger and not just control its expressions:

- In marriage

- At work

- In Christian circles

16. What do you do when you are angry that you have been unjustly treated?

17. What has the Holy Spirit pricked your conscience to change through this study?

18. How will you do that?

