

FORGIVENESS

A Command of God—Most Ignored and Neglected

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GOD'S ATTRIBUTE

God has several attributes. Holiness, love, wrath, and forgiveness are some of His attributes. The attributes of God do not conflict. They go together; they must not be divorced.

In **Hebrews 10 and 12:29**, we are told that God is a consuming fire. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. God is mad at sin. Vengeance belongs unto God. Yet as sinners (all humans), enemies of God (**Romans 5:10; James 4:4**), worthy of death (**Romans 6:23**), God forgave us our sins through the death of His Son (Jesus Christ) on the cross.

He paid the highest possible price to offer us that forgiveness. *"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"* (**2 Corinthians 5:21; cf. Ephesians 1:7-8, Colossians 1:13-14**).

From the cross to the end of this world, God stands ready to forgive any of us of all of our sins, when we have the faith to turn to Him in obedience.

GOD'S COMMAND

Forgiveness is a commandment of God. While it is marvelous to meditate on God's forgiveness of us, God challenges us to follow Him and be forgiving of those who sin against us the same way He forgives us when we sin against Him.

Jesus set the pattern in the model prayer. *"...Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors... For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses"* (**Matthew 6:12-15**).

Matthew 5:43-48 - *"...But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven...For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors*

do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore, you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Matthew 18:15,21,22,35 - *"Moreover if your brother sins (against you), go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. Then Peter came to Him and said, '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. 'So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.'"*

Mark 11:25 - *"And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.*

Luke 6:37 - *"...Forgive, and you will be forgiven.*

Luke 17:3-6 - *Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him." And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." So the Lord said, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.*

Romans 12:14-19 - *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep...Repay no one evil for evil...Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.*

Ephesians 4:32 - *and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.*

Colossians 3:13 - *bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.*

LIMITLESSNESS OF FORGIVENESS

Consider the enemies of Jesus Christ (**Luke 22**) - they sought to kill him, tore his clothes, bore false witnesses against Him, and rejoiced as He was beaten and disgraced. Some had come to hurl abusive words at Jesus while He was on the cross (**Matthew 27:39, 40**). They never asked for forgiveness, yet *Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do..." Luke 23:34.*

His prayer will never be forgotten as long as the world stands. It not only gives us a definition of forgiveness by implication, but it also gives us the beautiful dimensions of forgiveness by His example.

During His ministry, Jesus had often discussed forgiveness but on the cross, as He prayed this prayer, *He unforgettably demonstrated it.*

His prayer turns forgiveness in all directions, allowing the heavenly light of His love to shine through from every angle so that all humans will never have an excuse for living with hate.

When God forgives, the sins are blotted out so that we have a fresh start for living our lives in obedience to Him.

1 John 1:9 *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

Surely it is obvious from all Scriptures quoted that there are no limits on forgiveness. The worst of crimes and abuses are still in the forgivable realm - *Do we believe this?*

TRUE FORGIVENESS

Nothing is more devastating to our mental and emotional health, much less our spiritual health, than holding a grudge we refuse to turn loose of.

A grudge always ends up hurting the one who holds it far, far more than the one against whom it is held. Life becomes bitter and painful. We live out physical pains brought on by emotional hurt. Failure to forgive leaves us torn apart spiritually even though we may pretend it doesn't.

We are angry at everyone whom we feel has mistreated us in some way. The anger and resentment build a wall between us and God.

Our ability to openly plead to God about our own hurts and problems is destroyed because of the failure to forgive others.

We can forgive the sins of those around us and be freed from the burden the grudge has on us.

We need to be forgiving for our own good and for our relationship with others around us. We also need to be forgiving for our relationship with God.

Forgiveness should bring a behavioral change. If someone is forgiven of a sin, we should treat him as though he had never committed the sin, to begin with.

True forgiveness occurs when the injured person resolves that He will no longer hold the sinful word, wicked deed, or sinister thought against the person who committed it.

Forgiveness is one of those commands of God which is life-changing for the one who will obey the command.

To Jesus, a forgiving spirit was an essential attitude for spiritual living. More than any other character trait, He implied, this quality of the heart reveals the heart of God. *Do we understand true forgiveness?*

HOW IT HAS BEEN IGNORED, NEGLECTED, AND DISOBEYED

If there is any topic that hits the very heart of Christianity it is forgiveness. This is because it has been the most ignored, and neglected commandment of God. We have grossly disobeyed this command, thinking it will not impact negatively on our salvation.

Forgiveness is that commodity which people treasure when they are on the receiving end of it, but have a hard time doing when it is the other person who needs it.

We do sin. We hurt other people's feelings. Sometimes we do it without knowing that we have committed the offense. At other times, we strike out, knowing full well what we are doing and where it will lead. We aim for the heart of the other person and usually hit the mark, leaving him emotionally wounded and bleeding. When that happens, we tend to sit back thinking we were justified in our actions, and declare, *He got what he deserved.*

Let us look at some areas in which we do ignore, neglect, and disobey the command of forgiveness and consider what the word of God says we should do.

"I will not tell them they have offended me (as they do not have the sense or conscience to know they have sinned against me). Or "I am not sure they have truly repented."

In **Matthew 18:15**, and **Luke 17:3**, Jesus emphasized that when we know of a brother's sin (*applicable to sisters*), we should rebuke him, not wait and hope someone else will do it.

When he turns to say, he repents, we are to freely and openly forgive him.

We are unable to know another person's heart. If someone says, I repent, or words to that effect, our obligation is simple – believe it and accept it.

We are not to be in the examining of repentance business. Our place is to forgive and leave the examination to God.

Are we complying with this command?
Are we demonstrating this principle today?

“They don't deserve it.”

Forgiveness is not something we try to get others to measure up to before we offer it.

Who among us (humans) deserves to receive forgiveness from God? None!

Romans 5:10 - *For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.*

Jesus had been mistreated in every conceivable way. He had been falsely accused, underhandedly condemned, and brutally crucified. Those who persecuted Christ did not deserve to receive forgiveness from Him.

Stephen (a disciple of Jesus) was misjudged and unfairly condemned (**Acts 7:54-60**). Those who were angry with Stephen, cast him out of the city and stoned him. They stoned Stephen as he was calling on God. They did not deserve to receive forgiveness from him.

Jesus Christ prayed *Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.*

Stephen prayed *Lord, do not charge them with this sin.*

Are we complying with this command?
Are we demonstrating this principle today?

“They have never asked me to forgive them. I will not pray for them to have God's mercy”

Ephesians 4:32 - *and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.*

Matthew 5:43-48 - *“...But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven....”*

When someone sins against you, you know that a tragedy is taking place in the heart of that person: The one who is sinning against you is telling you about it by his misbehavior. Through his actions, he is crying out for help. He is saying by his evil words or deeds, “I'm in trouble. I've allowed sin to take over my life. I

need someone to show me what God is like. I am trapped in the valley of death, and I need someone to show me the path to life! Can someone have mercy on me and show me how to treat other people in this world? Will someone help me put my life back together?” When you respond to the person who has wronged you with love and compassion, with sensitivity and lovingkindness, you are addressing his deepest problem. Responding to him with love is the supreme act of grace that you can extend to him.

You and I cannot decide whether or not God in heaven will forgive those who have wronged us, but we can extend a spirit of forgiveness to them.

We are to pray and pray in love, forgiveness, and good for all humans. **1 Timothy 2:1-3** - *Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,*

Are we complying with this command?
Are we demonstrating this principle today?

They have done this against me several times.”

In **Matthew 18:21,22**, and **Luke 17:4,5**, Jesus emphasized that when an offender turns right around and does the offense again, even seven times in a day or seventy times seven, our place is to forgive.

Are we complying with this command?
Are we demonstrating this principle today?

“This is my limit; I can no longer forgive.”

Luke 6:37 - *“...Forgive, and you will be forgiven.*

There are no limits on forgiveness. The worst of crimes and abuses are still in the forgivable realm.

Are we complying with this command?
Are we demonstrating this principle today?

“I will forgive them but I will still treat them as ‘those’ offenders.”

Does God treat us in such a manner? **Romans 8:1** - *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*

Hebrews 8:12 - *For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.*

True forgiveness occurs when the injured person resolves that He will no longer hold the sinful word, wicked deed, or sinister thought against the person who committed it.

Are we complying with this command?
Are we demonstrating this principle today?

"I will revenge, I will pray to God to destroy them, to execute vengeance on those who offend me"

Through all the mistreatment of Jesus' entire life, He did not strike back, answering railing for railing or curse for curse. He did not respond to their cutting criticisms; He prayed for them in a spirit of forgiveness. Instead of castigating them, He covered their dark crimes and their wicked hearts with His compassion.

Matthew 5:43-48 - *"...But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven...."*

Romans 12:14-19 - *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep...Repay no one evil for evil...Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.*

Vengeance does not belong to us. It is not our right (on earth) to ask God to execute vengeance on those who offend us. It is God's right alone to determine whom to avenge, when to avenge, and why He should avenge.

Are we complying with this command?
Are we demonstrating this principle today?

"I will forgive them by mouth but not in my heart."

Jesus' prayer *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do..." (Luke 23:34)* shows that forgiveness, in its human dimension, must begin in one's heart before it can move out to the one who has committed the wrong. The prayer indicates that what really matters is not what people do to us, but the kind of attitude we have about them and what they have done to us.

When someone sins against us, that sin is his problem with God. Our attitude toward the offender and his sin is our problem before God.

Let us forgive truly from our hearts. Are we complying with this command? Are we demonstrating this principle today?

CONCLUSION

None of us were good enough when God forgave us. We have done too many terrible things to God yet He forgives us. God is always willing to forgive.

We are to love others as God loves us and forgive others as God has forgiven us!

Luke 6:37 - *"...Forgive, and you will be forgiven."*

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