

## From Forgiven to Forgiving

### Key Verse:

**Colossians 3:12-13** — Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. (NLT)

### Hurts Happen

It is important to acknowledge that hurts happen to us. We frequently are mistreated, offended, abused, cut off, belittled or otherwise maligned.

In many cases, the hurts are caused by real offenses. However, we are also frequently hurt by imagined or perceived offenses. The hurt can be real even when the offense was not.

Many offenses are intentional, but often they are unintentional. But knowing that usually doesn't help. We still sting from the hurts whether caused intentionally or not. Sometimes the perpetrator is aware of the offense, but often he is clueless of just how much damage has been done by his words or actions.

When offenses happen, forgiveness is needed. The very idea of forgiveness includes the requirement that a wrong has been committed—whether intentional or unintentional. In fact, if there is no offense, there is no need for forgiveness. If the offense was a matter of perception with no real sin, then the solution is communication and awareness, not forgiveness.

Unfortunately, we often compound the problem by committing offenses in response to other's offenses. In this way, a whole closet full of offenses and counter-offenses occur resulting in full breakdown of relationship—sometimes based on a simple misunderstanding. Though the original act may not need forgiving, all the resulting offenses and hurts need to be communicated and forgiven.

It is important for us to learn to handle hurts and offenses in a godly way.

### Responses to Hurts and Offenses

Different people in different situations deal with hurts and offenses in different ways—most of which are unhealthy. Following are some unhealthy and healthy ways that people deal with hurts and offenses.

#### Withdraw

One response to hurt is withdrawal. We withdraw either to protect ourselves from further hurt and/or to inflict hurt back on the perpetrator. In either case, withdrawal is basically a selfish response to hurts and is very unhealthy.

#### Bite Back

This may be the most common response to offenses—imagined or real. It generally includes an immediate response with our own offense in retaliation. After all, "The best defense is a good offense." So we go on the offensive to get the upper hand and deflect or deflate the hurt. This technique is designed stop and disarm the perceived offender.

Biting back usually takes the form of a strong, sometimes violent, reaction involving little forethought. And that swift, reactive response is what makes it difficult to change this form of response. Biting back may also be the response of pent up frustration or previous hurt. While there is a need to communicate those frustrations or hurts, biting back is never an appropriate response to hurts and offenses.

## Revenge

Sometimes we respond to hurts and offenses with a plan for revenge. Our sense of justice has been violated and we are going to make sure the perpetrator pays. So we seethe, plan, calculate, imagine, and plot our attack. This is a very self-centered and ungodly response to offenses. It can lead to bitterness and will cut us off from the blessings of relationship with God and others.

## Blame

We often shift all blame for problems to the other person. That makes it easy for us to justify our own actions and feelings. However, it is highly unlikely that we did everything perfectly the way God expects. We must own our part of the problem. Regardless of how the other person responds, we must repent for our sins and ask for forgiveness for our poor responses.

## Ignore

Sometimes we ignore an offense because we are oblivious to the assault. For example, a driver may make an obscene gesture as he races around your car. If you don't happen to see it, then it does not have the desired effect and the attempted offense is ignored.

At other times, people ignore offenses as a way to ease the hurt. This denial of the offense is an escape mechanism to avoid the pain of the hurt. Unfortunately, it also avoids any constructive progress from the event. For example, you may see a driver race around you while making an obscene gesture. Your first reaction may be to assume he has an anger problem and ignore the incident to avoid the hurt. However, a better approach is to ask yourself why he may be upset. As you look around, you realize that while talking on your cell phone, you had wandered into his lane. So you get back in your lane and make a note to not talk on your cell phone while driving in traffic. While the offense was not appropriate, you were able to gain some benefit from it by approaching it with the right attitude.

There are also times when we should ignore an offense out of love. While most offenses need to be addressed to solve the underlying problems, there are a few occasions when the offense should be overlooked or ignored.

**Proverbs 19:11** — Sensible people control their temper; they earn respect by overlooking wrongs.

**Proverbs 12:16** — Fools quickly show that they are upset, but the wise ignore insults.

 **By Proverbs 12:16, what do you typically act like?**     a fool     wise

 **Is it time for a change?**     yes     no

## Confront

When it comes to confronting someone about an offense, it seems we take either of two extremes. On the one hand, we totally refuse to confront the other person. That is motivated by fear, lack of love for the other person, and selfishness. We are motivated more by our own needs and desires (peace, quiet, comfort, freedom from pain, etc.) than we are by a love for the other person (correction, growth). We are saying that we do not value the relationship with the other person enough to endure the potential pain needed to help them or to rebuild a close, loving relationship.

**1 John 4:18** — Where God's love is, there is no fear, because God's perfect love drives out fear. It is punishment that makes a person fear, so love is not made perfect in the person who fears.

**John 15:12-13** — "This is my command: Love each other as I have loved you. The greatest love a person can show is to die for his friends.

At the other extreme, we can be very confrontational, pushing hard to get the other person to change. This, too, can be motivated by self love and lack of love for the other person. We want them to change so our lives will be better. The focus is us, not them or the relationship.

Often, we must confront those who commit offenses. But we must do it in a spirit of humility and love. Our motivation must be the well-being of the other person rather than our own personal peace and comfort. We must also value an open, loving relationship with that person more than our fear of hurt and rejection. We have to be willing to risk getting our hand bitten as we reach out in love.

**2 Timothy 2:24-25** — A servant of the Lord must not quarrel but must be kind to everyone, be able to teach, and be patient with difficult people. Gently instruct those who oppose the truth. Perhaps God will change those people's hearts, and they will learn the truth.

## Forgive

Forgiving a person, along with confronting the offense, is usually the correct response to hurts from an offense.

In some cases, forgiveness is not required. When sin is involved, forgiveness is needed. It doesn't have to be overt sin. Ungodly attitudes of selfishness, failure to love others, and other similar sins all need forgiveness.

However, we are sometimes offended by the personalities, choices, or habits of another person. We are also offended when others don't fulfill our expectations—which may or may not be valid. While such situations may lead to sinful responses, they in themselves are not sin and do not need to be forgiven.

For example. I might be offended and hurt because Judy didn't properly thank me for the new ring I bought for her. While she may have been appreciative, it just wasn't as much as I wanted. So now I am hurt and offended. As a result, I withdraw, cutting off some of the closeness in our relationship. And when little things happen, I snap at her in unkind ways. The original offense is not a sin and does not need to be forgiven. However, my response to failed expectations is wrong and I need to repent and ask for forgiveness.

## Reasons to Forgive

### We Are Loved and Forgiven

God loved us enough to confront us, correct us, and forgive us. Each of us have been forgiven for much. In love, God forgave us a tremendous debt that we could not pay.

**Romans 5:6-10** — When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God's condemnation. For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son.

God paid a high price to satisfy your sin debt and provide forgiveness. Sin is contrary to God's nature and abhorrent to Him. God is pure; sin is the opposite of pure. The wonder of the Cross is that God was willing to take sin upon Himself to bring us into relationship with Him. God's love for us is greater than His hatred of sin. Therefore, He personally took our sins in His body and paid our debt to deliver us from the power of sin.

**1 Peter 2:24** — He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross ....

God is a perfect God, and His forgiveness is perfect. When we forgive someone, we often do not forget it. Then, when that person does something else wrong, we bring back that early offense to show them how really bad they are. Some people think God does the same thing. However, when God forgives our sin, He will not remember it against us.

**Isaiah 43:25** — "I—yes, I alone—will blot out your sins for my own sake and will never think of them again.

**Micah 7:19** — Once again you will have compassion on us. You will trample our sins under your feet and throw them into the depths of the ocean!

**Psalms 103:11-12** — For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west.

God **could** remember our sin after it is forgiven. However, He **chooses** not to remember it. God's love and forgiveness for us is a choice He makes.

### We Are Commanded to Love

We must learn and follow God's ways. We are not here simply to enjoy life. There is much to enjoy in God's beautiful creation. However, we are here because others don't know Jesus, yet. And if we don't reach them, they may spend eternity separated from God. We are God's representatives and need to accurately represent Him.

**2 Corinthians 5:20** — So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!"

**Isaiah 2:3** — People from many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of Jacob's God. There he will teach us his ways, and we will walk in his paths." ....

God desires for us to walk in the same kind of love that He has.

**John 15:9-17** — “I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father’s commandments and remain in his love. .... This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. .... This is my command: Love each other.

Jesus has provided the example of love for us to follow. He has provided the power to walk in love by the Holy Spirit whom He sent to dwell in us (see Lesson 3, *The Person, Work, and Ministry of the Holy Spirit*). Our part is to daily **choose** to love.

 **To follow Jesus’ example in loving people, what is your part?**

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## We Are Commanded to Forgive

Loving others cannot be separated from forgiving others. Forgiving others is not optional.

**Matthew 18:21-22** — Then Peter came to him and asked, “Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?” “No, not seven times,” Jesus replied, “but seventy times seven!”

**Matthew 18:32-35** — Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?’ Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt. “That’s what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart.”

## Wrong Ideas About Forgiving

There are many wrong ideas about forgiving others. Following are some common ones.

### But My anger Is justified

God’s anger over our sin was more than justified, yet He loved and forgave us. We are called to do the same. Actually, forgiveness presupposes a real violation along with true justification for anger. If there is no sin, then there is no real need for forgiving that person. So any time there is a need to forgive someone, there *is* justification for anger—but not the Scriptural *right* to be angry. So being justified is no excuse for refusing to forgive.

### But I Just Can’t Forgive

God would not command you to do something that is impossible. Since He commands us to forgive others, it is not impossible. Refusal to forgive someone is a choice that you cannot afford to make. So ask for the Lord’s help and choose to forgive.

## But I Can't Forget

Totally forgetting the hurt is not required in forgiving. Many hurts leave deep scars and take years for healing. You may not be able to forget the pain and hurt. Forgiveness, like love, is a choice you make. Often, you have to remake that choice several times along the way. Each time it comes to mind, keep choosing to forgive. Then allow God to heal the hurts.

## But If I Ask Forgiveness, I Am Saying It Is All My Fault

It may have been all your fault. But that doesn't matter. When you repent and ask forgiveness, you are taking ownership of the part that *you* did wrong. You are working to make it right. It is not your responsibility to ensure that the other person understands his guilt or that he repents.

**Helpful Rule:** *It is better to be right than to look right.*

## But I Can't Act Like Nothing Ever Happened

Something *did* happen or there would be no need of forgiveness. Forgiving someone does not mean you have to ignore the wrong things they did. God is commanding that we be loving and forgiving. He is not asking us to be stupid.

**Matthew 10:16** — “Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves.

**2 Timothy 4:14-15** — Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm, but the Lord will judge him for what he has done. Be careful of him, for he fought against everything we said.

Even when you have forgiven someone, there is a level of trust that has been damaged. Trust is built over time as a person proves himself faithful, good, and trustworthy. True, godly love and forgiveness are based on qualities in the one giving the love or forgiveness, not the one receiving it. Trust is different. Trust is based on qualities in the recipient expressed over time. Godly love and forgiveness occur instantly as a result of choice. Trust develops over time. Because of Love, all should be forgiven—but not all should be trusted. Note: Depending on the breach of trust involved, full restoration and reconciliation may not be possible or advisable in this life.

**Helpful Rule:** *Love all, forgive all, trust some.*

## But If I Forgive Him, I am Saying Everything is Okay

Actually, in forgiving you are just releasing your claim for vengeance and justice. In essence, you are acknowledging that you belong to God, and not yourself. Forgiving someone would hopefully lead to everything *becoming* okay. But it doesn't excuse or make right the wrong things that were done. Nor does it eliminate all consequences of the actions.

## But He Isn't Sorry

In an ideal situation, the offender would recognize his offence and come ask for forgiveness. In a near ideal situation, the offender would recognize his offence as soon as you point it out to him, then he would ask to be forgiven. But in many cases, the offender just doesn't get it. But you are still required to forgive him, which fulfills your obligation. What he does with it is between him and God. What if God waited until you fully understood the magnitude of your sin before forgiving you?

## But All of the Offense is by the Other Person

I have no guilt in the situation. I was fully in the right. Yeah, sure! None of us are perfect. In most conflicts and offenses, there are wrongs on both sides. Your job is to let the Lord show you the areas where you were wrong, repent, then ask the other person to forgive you for those specific actions. Often the other person will reciprocate, but that is not a condition for your repentance.

**Helpful Rule:** *I am not as innocent as I think I am.*

## But He Started It

He was in the wrong first. Why do I always have to forgive first? Well, if you want to be godly, you need to go first.

**Romans 5:10** — For since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, ....

Jesus did not wait for us. Even while we were actively fighting God as His enemies, Jesus died for us.

**Helpful Rule:** *Love always goes first in the hard stuff.*

## I Just Can't Forgive Myself

Some people are able to forgive others more easily than they can forgive themselves. Like for others, you must choose to forgive yourself. God has forgiven you. Who are you to refuse to forgive someone whom God has forgiven—including yourself? Are you greater than God?

## Goal of Forgiving

The ultimate goal of forgiving is the restoration of a relationship that has been damaged by offenses and hurts. God is a god of restoration. The primary reason that Jesus died was to restore our relationship with God that was broken by our sin. It was not just to keep us from going to Hell.

**Ephesians 2:13** — But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ.

**Romans 5:11** — So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God.

God is also interested in our relationships with one another. That's why He commands us to love and forgive each other. Sin damages fellowship and relationship. Sin can only be fixed by repentance and forgiveness. Nothing else works. Forgiveness puts you on the road to restored relationship.

## Help Us Forgive

Forgiving love is so foreign to this world's love that even many Christians struggle with how to walk in it. It is easy to be carried away with murmuring, complaining, faultfinding, division, and bitterness. Here are some practical guidelines to help you walk in God's love rather than succumbing to the hatred and bitterness of this world.

## Learn and Remember

Daily remind yourself of God's great love for you that paid a tremendous sin debt that you could never begin to pay. The more you truly begin to see God's great love for you and the deliverance He provided, the easier it is to love Him and others.

**Ephesians 2:4-5** — But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!)

**Luke 7:36-47** — One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to have dinner with him, so Jesus went to his home and sat down to eat. When a certain immoral woman from that city heard he was eating there, she brought a beautiful alabaster jar filled with expensive perfume. Then she knelt behind him at his feet, weeping. Her tears fell on his feet, and she wiped them off with her hair. Then she kept kissing his feet and putting perfume on them. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She's a sinner!" Then Jesus answered his thoughts. "Simon," he said to the Pharisee, "I have something to say to you." "Go ahead, Teacher," Simon replied. Then Jesus told him this story: "A man loaned money to two people— 500 pieces of silver to one and 50 pieces to the other. But neither of them could repay him, so he kindly forgave them both, canceling their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?" Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he canceled the larger debt." "That's right," Jesus said. Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Look at this woman kneeling here. When I entered your home, you didn't offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You didn't greet me with a kiss, but from the time I first came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet. You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume. "I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love."

Both Simon and the woman owed a greater sin debt than either of them could repay. However, only the woman realized the magnitude of the debt. Because of that, she understood the vastness of God's love that would forgive such a huge debt. Her response to that great outpouring of love was a genuine response of great love.

If you have trouble loving and forgiving others, maybe it's because you haven't seen the magnitude of your sin for which you were forgiven, or its terrible cost for Jesus.

## Choose

Realize that love and forgiveness are choices you make, not feelings. You make the choice, God provides the power. Feelings follow later. Love and forgiveness are both processes that must be walked out day by day.

**2 Corinthians 5:7** — For we live by believing and not by seeing.

 **Are you walking by what you see or feel instead of by what you know is true?**     \_\_\_ yes     \_\_\_ no

**Deuteronomy 30:15-19** — "Now listen! Today I am giving you a choice between life and death, between prosperity and disaster. For I command you this day to love the LORD your God and to keep his commands, decrees, and regulations by walking in his ways. .... "Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness

the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live!

Our part is to choose. God provides the power to walk it out *after* we choose.

**Luke 22:42-43** — “Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.” Then an angel from heaven appeared and strengthened him.

### Watch Your Perception

Realize that offenses you feel are often a matter of your perception rather than their intention. In the seventies, it was popular to have a “Honk if you love Jesus” bumper sticker on your car. Unfortunately, some Christians forgot that they had the sticker and became very offended when people kept honking at them. The offense was in the perception of the intent, not the actual intent. Love expects the best rather than assuming the worst.

**1 Corinthians 13:4-7** — Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

**Helpful Rule:** *Assume that they did not intend to offend you until they tell you that they intended to offend you.*

### Overcome

Overcome evil with good. Even if the offense is intentional, we are still required to love and forgive. You dissipate darkness by shining the light, not by adding more darkness. Love always overcomes evil. Every time you respond to evil with God’s love, you are giving the kingdom of darkness a black eye.

**Romans 12:14-21** — Bless those who persecute you. Don’t curse them; pray that God will bless them. .... Never pay back evil with more evil. .... Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, “I will take revenge; I will pay them back,” says the LORD. Instead, “If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads.” Don’t let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.

**Luke 6:32-36** — “If you love only those who love you, why should you get credit for that? Even sinners love those who love them! And if you do good only to those who do good to you, why should you get credit? Even sinners do that much! .... “Love your enemies! Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked. You must be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate.

### Think and Speak

God tells us what we should think about and how we should speak. Refuse to think or speak in an unloving way. Rather, think loving, godly thoughts. If you keep your thinking right, your speaking and actions will also be right.

**Philippians 4:8-9** — And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and

admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.

How does this compare to what do you often think about? Just listen to the conversations you hear at work, home and church. Do they exhibit the kind of thinking described in this verse? In most cases, our thinking and conversations are very negative—just the opposite of God's will.

**Ephesians 4:29-32** — Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

Life works better when you do it God's way—He should know!

## Encourage

Encourage others to walk in God's love and forgiveness. It will help you remember to do it, also.

**Titus 3:1-2** — Remind the believers to submit to the government and its officers. They should be obedient, always ready to do what is good. They must not slander anyone and must avoid quarreling. Instead, they should be gentle and show true humility to everyone.

## Correct

Where correction is needed, bring it in a scriptural manner with a spirit of love. Jesus' love did not allow us to continue in our error. True love for others will confront and restore. It is not love to ignore a friend's sin.

**Leviticus 19:17-18** — "Do not nurse hatred in your heart for any of your relatives. Confront people directly so you will not be held guilty for their sin. "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against a fellow Israelite, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

**Matthew 18:15-17** — "If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back. But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses. If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. Then if he or she won't accept the church's decision, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector.

Jesus is not instructing us to hate these people. That would conflict with his other teachings. We are to consider them as people heading in the wrong direction whose ways we must not follow.

## Acknowledge

Acknowledge that justice and vengeance belongs to God. You do not have a right to them because your rights were purchased by God when He saved you.

**1 Corinthians 6:19-20** — Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.

So release your rights for justice—which don't really belong to you anyway. Quit trying to take what belongs to God.

## Properly Asking for Forgiveness

Most of this lesson has been about forgiving others. But it is important that we learn to humble ourselves and ask forgiveness when we sin against others. Often, we must take the first step in the restoration process. So what is the right way to ask for forgiveness?

### Cool Down & Listen

I can't see my faults clearly in the heat of an argument. Often I have to calm down some before I can begin to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit pointing out where I have been unkind and unloving.

### Honestly Evaluate

We usually replay conflicts over and over in our minds, reinforcing what the other person did wrong. Bad idea! Instead, you should carefully replay the incident in your mind while watching for things *you* did wrong. Don't worry that you might not find anything. The Holy Spirit is a great help if you will let Him. Regardless of how wrong the other person was, there almost always are things that you said or did that need to be fixed.

### Repent

Acknowledge your sins to the Lord and yourself. Then determine what you should have done. Reinforce that in your thoughts and determine to follow through properly the next time. There will be more opportunities to get it right—and probably sooner than you think. The next step will help remind you to get it right next time.

### Request Forgiveness

Ask the other person to forgive you. Avoid generalities like, "I'm sorry." Also avoid shifting blame or otherwise bringing up what the other person did wrong. "I'm sorry for getting mad when you acted like a jerk." Keep the focus on you, not them. It is also important that you be very specific in owning up to what you did wrong. Say, "I am very sorry for .... Will you please forgive me?"

If the other person refuses to forgive you, it may be because you were not specific enough, accurate enough, or sincere. Our pride wants to minimize our guilt, so don't be surprised if your request was unacceptable. If rejected, honestly evaluate your motive and presentation, then try again. Once you've made an honest attempt at acknowledging your guilt and requesting forgiveness, then don't worry if he still refuses to forgive you. You have done your part.

### Verbalize Forgiveness

If the other person also asks forgiveness, forgive them verbally. Take the request as it is given, even if it is general. Don't think about the other wrongs that should have been listed. Just graciously forgive with, "Yes, I forgive you." And mean it!

**Helpful Rule:** *Always be quick to ask for forgiveness and quick to forgive others.*

## Consequences of Unforgiveness

Our motivation to love and forgiving others must come from a love for Jesus rather than a fear of consequences. However, it is important to realize that there are some serious, negative consequences when a person chooses not to love or forgive.

**Matthew 18:32-35** — Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?' Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt. "That's what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart."

In this passage, the unforgiving servant was turned over to the torturers (tormentors). Unforgiveness leads to bitterness and torment to the person who refuses to forgive. This torment is often evident in heightened stress, emotional pain, isolation, and possibly even physical problems. This bitterness can take root and spread torment to others like a cancerous tumor.

**Hebrews 12:15** — Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many.

Choosing not to forgive someone is like handing the enemy a two-by-four and inviting him to beat you up with it. You don't have to ask him twice. If you refuse to forgive people, then God will not forgive you. This does not mean that you lose your salvation—that is based only on faith in Jesus. It means that the blessings of God are cut off in your life. If you want the blessings of God released in your life, you must release others by forgiving them. When you refuse to forgive someone, you are the one who is really imprisoned!

**Mark 11:25** — But when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too."

**Luke 6:37-38** — "Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you. Forgive others, and you will be forgiven. Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back."

Lack of godly love among Christians makes it difficult for others to come to Jesus and experience the deliverance available in loving relationship with Him and believers.

**1 Corinthians 8:13** — So if what I eat causes another believer to sin, I will never eat meat again as long as I live—for I don't want to cause another believer to stumble.

**John 13:35** — Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

Seeing unloving actions and attitudes in the Church has possibly offended more people than any other cause. Such demonstrations of ungodliness has also caused many immature Christians to become bitter, disillusioned, and eventually cease following the Lord. (Mature Christians should have their eyes fixed on Jesus. They may be grieved by ungodliness among other Christians, but they realize that people are people. Mature Christians choose to follow Jesus even if no one else does.)

## Results and Benefits of Forgiveness

Walking in love and forgiveness brings glory to God, peace to His people, and the flow of God's blessings in our lives.

**Matthew 5:16** — In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.

**Romans 8:6** — So letting your sinful nature control your mind leads to death. But letting the Spirit control your mind leads to life and peace.

If you want life and peace, you must choose to walk in love and forgiveness. It is not optional!

## Homework

 **List anyone you need to forgive.**

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 **List anyone you need to ask forgiveness from.**

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*personal response; personal response; to daily choose to love; personal response; personal response; personal response*