

I. **DEFINITIONS.**

- A. The best definition I've heard of forgiveness is, "Forgiveness is treating another person as though they never hurt you." The concept of forgiveness has more to do with our behavior than with our feelings.
- B. James Dobson defines forgiveness as, "Forgiveness is giving up my right to hurt you for hurting me."
- C. That's it! What power would flow from such an approach to life's disappointments. Forgiveness is a deliberate decision to think positive, productive thoughts.
- D. What Forgiveness means to man:
 - 1. It means the erasing of the guilt of sins (Lk. 7:48; Isa. 1:18).
 - 2. It means the breaking of the bondage of sin (Rom. 6:16-18).
 - 3. It means a promise in future temptations (1Cor. 10:13; 1Tim. 1:15; 1Cor. 15:10).

II. **ACCORDING TO W. E. VINE.**

- A. Two Greek verbs are translated forgive in the NT:
 - 1. *apheimi*
It primarily means no send forth, or send away, to remit or forgive.
 - a. To forgive debts (Mt. 6:17; 18:27,32).
 - b. To forgive sins (Mt. 9:2,5,6; 12:31,32; Ac. 8:22; Rom. 4:7; Jas. 5:15; 1Jn. 1:9; 2:12).
 - 2. *charizomai*
To bestow a favor unconditionally. An act of forgiveness.
 - a. A divine act (Eph. 4:32; Col. 2:13; 3:13).
 - b. A human act (Lk. 7:42,43; 2Cor. 2:7,10; 12:13; Eph. 4:32).
- B. One Greek noun is translated forgive in the NT:
 - 1. *aphesis*
It denotes a dismissal or release. It is used of the remission of sins (Ac. 5:31; 13:38; 26:18; Mt. 3:29; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14).

III. **FORGIVENESS--THEOLOGICALLY SPEAKING.**

- A. Some different uses in the NT:
 - 1. In a secular sense (Mt. 18:27,32).
 - 2. In a religious sense (Mt. 12:32).
 - 3. Of sins (Mk. 2:5,7; Lk. 7:47ff).
 - 4. Of debts (Mt. 6:12).
 - 5. Of trespasses (Mk. 11:25; Mt. 6:14).
 - 6. To let (Mk. 1:34; 5:19,37; Ac. 14:17).
 - 7. To dismiss, divorce, or release (Mt. 13:36; 1Cor. 7:11-13).
 - 8. To leave (Mk. 1:20; 10:28).
 - 9. To leave behind (Mk. 1:18).
 - 10. To abandon (Mk. 7:8; Rom. 1:27).
- B. The power of X to forgive sins is made known in:
 - 1. Preaching (Lk. 24:47; Ac. 10:42f; 13:38).
 - 2. Baptism (Ac. 2:38; Mk. 1:4; Rom. 6:1ff).
 - 3. Lord's Supper (Mt. 26:28; Jn. 6:35ff).
- C. Even the OT looks ahead and sees the fulfillment of all things in X to include the forgiveness of sins (Jer. 31:34; 33:8).
- D. The primary work of Jesus was to forgive men's sins. This fact is seen in His:
 - 1. Miracles (Mk. 2:1-12).

2. Ministry (Lk. 23:43; Mt. 5:43-48; Jn. 14:19b).
 3. Death on the cross (Heb. 9:22; Rom. 8:32; Jn. 1:29; 1Pet. 2:21-24; 1Cor. 15:17).
- E. Forgiveness takes place because gives Himself completely in the sacrifice of His Son (2Cor. 5:21; Rom. 8:32), and so gives man a share in His own righteousness (Rom. 3:21-28). Thus, "in X" man becomes a pardoned sinner (Rom. 8:1) and a "new creature" (2Cor. 5:17). This teaching represents a summary and theological consolidation of the early Xian preaching on forgiveness.
- F. To God, forgiveness was not cheap; it cost the death of the Son of God. It was not easy; it had to conform to God's justice, which demanded punishment for sin. Sin had to be punished to satisfy the justice of God. Only in the death of X was the mercy of God and the justice of God reconciled.

IV. **WHAT FORGIVENESS IS NOT.**

A. Forgiveness is not forgetting.

1. When we are sinned against we don't forget it, we remember it! Forgiveness is a choice (1Cor. 13:5). God had forgiven David his sin with Uriah the Hittite, but He still remembered it (2Sam. 12:13; 1Kgs. 15:5).
2. God forgives in much the same way that we do. He chooses to focus upon the blood of Jesus rather than upon our transgressions. He chooses to remember our sins no more in the sense that He will no longer hold them against us. Forgiveness is not amnesia.

B. Forgiveness is not feelings.

1. We say, "When the feelings come, I will forgive." But if we wait for the feelings to arrive, we may NEVER forgive.
2. Just as agape love is a choice to treat people right no matter what so is forgiveness a choice to release, relent, and leave behind.

C. Forgiveness is not dependent upon others.

1. One must carefully balance out Lk. 17:3,4 with Mt. 5:44; 6:12,14. We cannot afford to withhold forgiveness until the offender does all of the acts of restitution they need to do. They may NEVER do what they need to do.
2. It would seem to me that Mt. 6:14 teaches two levels of forgiveness:
 - a. The divine level; this is God Himself forgiving the sins of men by the blood of X.
 - b. The human level. This is humans forgiving each other to obtain the forgiveness of God. It is possible for humans to forgive trespasses and sins and God not to forgive them. Example: Jesus prayed for forgiveness of those who were executing Him which is an example of human forgiveness (Lk. 23:34). However, God did not forgive these sins until the people repented of them later at the preaching of the apostles (Ac. 2:38).
3. As long as one waits on full restitution they keep themselves from enjoying the healing that comes with giving forgiveness. If you choose to wait on the offender to repent and give full restitution you may be waiting until Jesus comes again!

V. **WHAT FORGIVENESS IS.**

A. First, forgiveness is unlimited.

Just as Jesus freely forgives all of our sins, so we freely forgive all the offenses against us (Mt. 18:22; 1Jn. 1:9).

B. Second, forgiveness is necessary.

What happens if we are the injured party, the one wronged? God does not allow us to walk in anger and hatred regardless of how justified we might feel. To hold grudges, bitterness and resentment are all forms of hatred (1Jn. 3:11; 4:20).

- C. Third, forgiveness is an act of the will.
You can forgive an individual whether you "feel" like it or not. Even while we are still in sin, God loved us by sending His Son to die for us (Rom. 5:8).
- D. Fourth, forgiveness is forgetting.
For God to remember our sins no more doesn't mean that they are completely erased from His memory, but rather God has forgotten to hold those sins against us (Jer. 31:34b; Heb. 8:12).
- E. Five things one can do to "forget the sin" are:
 1. We cannot always forgive in our own strength, ask for God's help.
 2. Refuse to dwell upon the trespass in your mind.
 3. Don't talk about the incident to anyone, including the offender.
 4. Remove all possible reminders of the incident.
 5. Become reconciled to one another as soon as possible.

VI. TWENTY STEPS TO HEALTHY FORGIVENESS.

- A. (01) Realize the deep connection between God's forgiveness of you and your forgiveness of others.
To remain genuinely open to the joy of receiving God's forgiveness, you must be willing to open up the "pipes" of your life and let forgiveness flow into the lives of other people. Only as you loosen that valve and let forgiveness flow through to others, do you stay open for the pure waters of God's Spirit to flow through the pipes of your life.
- B. (02) Keep your ledger of power, love, and justice in balance.
Jesus is Lord; He is in charge (not you). You are loved; give some of that love away in the form of forgiveness. Christ gave His life for you; He forgave your sins so you must forgive others.
- C. (03) Allow God to take your eyes off the offense and the offender and trust God to deal with your offender appropriately in time or eternity.
Leave it to God, He can handle it (much better than you can).
- D. (04) Realize that what has happened, has happened, and no amount of focusing upon it can change its having happened.
- E. (05) Realistically accept the fact that people are not perfect.
We need to strike the middle ground of accepting imperfection without becoming bitter.
- F. (06) Be willing to take some degree of relational risk.
Forgiveness is a risk. You risk that you may be hurt again.
- G. (07) Realize that genuine forgiveness involves a commitment over the long haul.
Forgiveness is daily, it's not a "one shot deal." It is a constant.
- H. (08) Understand that trustworthiness is reestablished a little at a time. You want to be able to trust that person, but can you ever? Yes, if you learn to do it (allow yourself to do it) a little at a time.
- I. (09) Know that past untrustworthiness is overcome gradually by current trustworthiness.
The way to build trust is to daily build trustworthiness. Just like overcoming bad credit you do it in little pieces, one at a time. Eventually the trust is rebuilt.
- J. (10) Refuse the temptation to let high expectations get in the way if restitution is part of the process.
Be willing to accept a slow pace and manageable chunks of repayment. Or accept the reality that no repayment is coming.
- K. (11) Refuse the temptation to control the perpetrator with a nothing-is-ever-good-enough mentality.
Holding the offense up in a way that says nothing will ever be good enough won't work for you or for the offender.
- L. (12) Study the Scriptures for Biblical models.
Esau forgave Jacob, Joseph forgave his brothers, the father forgave the prodigal son, the unmerciful steward learned to forgive.
- M. (13) Examine the results in Scripture of refusing to forgive.

- Look at Cain, King Saul, the prodigal's older brother all who refused to practice forgiveness.
- N. (14) Hold a high view of forgiveness.
Forgiveness is an act of divine grace. We must view it on the pedestal it deserves.
- O. (15) Believe that you will accomplish forgiveness only with God's power.
God has the power to do what we cannot. Your will power will never be enough.
- P. (16) Yield to God to start your healing process.
My forgiveness, quite honestly, usually does more for me than for the offender. I am always blessed by it.
- Q. (17) Resist the temptation to view forgiveness as being weak.
Forgiveness is hard work! It requires superhuman strength! If you believe that a forgiver is a weak, spineless person then you have never forgiven. Fighting is easier to do than forgiveness.
- R. (18) Understand that the relationship may take on a new, higher form.
Forgiveness is not salvaging effort; it is a renewing and restoring effort.
- S. (19) Choose as your mandate for forgiveness; "As God in Christ Jesus has forgiven you."
Forgive because you have been forgiven... period.
- T. (20) Watch your capacity to forgive increase as your gratitude for God's gracious forgiveness deepens.
The more you appreciate how God has forgiven you, the more you're able to forgive others.