

Practical Godliness

Lesson 1 | Forgiveness



There are few less important and more significant things to understand in the Bible than that of **learning how to forgive**. Let's face it, we live in an imperfect world full of imperfect people who are in no hurry to apologize for the ways in which they have wronged us. We are human beings who must experience an entire sanctification process: body, soul, and spirit (1 Thes 5:23). This means we have feelings that get hurt, pride that must be overcome, and a physical body that can be bruised and the first step of healing these battle scars begins with forgiveness.

Admittedly, few Christians today know **how** to forgive and **what** it truly means to forgive; else why is it that so many Christians hold on to grudges against those who have wronged them. Yes, there is a difference between wronging someone in a business transaction and hurting someone emotionally; generally, the latter is preceded by the former. This brings us to the first step of learning **practical forgiveness**, and we must understand its basic and functional Biblical definition:

1. *Forgiveness* (g0859) occurs in the KJV 17 times and each time it is associated with what God must do as an act of grace toward the man or woman who repents.
2. *Forgive* (h5375) occurs 654 times in the Hebrew Old Testament and it means to bare away or remove.
3. *Forgive* (g0863) occurs 146 times in the Greek New Testament and it means to send away or let go of.
4. *Forgiven* (g5483) occurs 23 times in the Greek New Testament and it means to grant forgiveness, to pardon, to give graciously, give freely, bestow, to forgive. (Related to "grace" - g5485)

Before we look at some key scripture, I want to point out a pattern here amongst the words for forgiveness in the Bible:

- Only God offers true forgiveness, we cannot offer it on our own.
- We all possess the free-will choice to forgive as it means to send away [something that hurt us], or let go of [a grudge or wrongdoing], but this is only human forgiveness and it is not enough for the Christian who walks with a compassionate and loving God.
- True forgiveness cannot be done without grace, nor can one extend true forgiveness to others without knowing the grace of God first in their own Christian walk.

One of the chapters in the Bible which deals with practical forgiveness is Matthew chapter 18, the **Parable of the Unforgiving Servant**:

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. ²³ "Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ When he began to

settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵ And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and **forgave** him the debt. ²⁸ But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' ²⁹ So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' ³⁰ He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. ³¹ When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. ³² Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I **forgave** you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³ And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. ³⁵ So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not **forgive** your brother from your heart." **Matthew 18:21-35**

What lesson of practical godliness can we learn from this parable of forgiveness? It took me a while to learn what I think it is that Christ wants us to learn from His words here. After going through some painful times in my own life, I want to suggest the personal lessons Christ has taught me from this parable:

1. In verse 22, Jesus is saying that there is no limit to how many times you are to forgive someone. He is saying there is no sin against you that can justify you **not** to forgive someone. Forgive as oft as a sin is done to you. You are never wrong to do the right thing and forgiving someone is never the wrong thing to do.
2. In verse 24, the amount this man owed his master was so large that it was impossible for him to pay it back. The master realized there is no way his servant could pay him back the full amount, and he says you know what? I forgive you the debt. But the servant didn't realize the gravity of what had just happened. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned.
3. In verse 28, could it have been that this servant did not know the meaning of being truly forgiven? Could it have been that he did not truly accept his master's forgiveness that he still felt he owed him and was frantic to collect all of his debts from those who owed him because he felt he still needed to pay back his master? He never accepted the grace of his master and, therefore, he couldn't extend the grace of his master to others.
4. In verses 29 and 30, nothing can justify an unforgiving spirit. He who is unforgiving toward others shows that he himself is not a partaker of God's pardoning grace. A person who chooses to be unforgiving is a person who chooses not to be saved. For by grace you are saved (Eph 2:8) and if all forgiveness from God is mingled with His grace, then it can also be said of our salvation, *for by forgiveness you are saved*. If you can't forgive someone even if you want to with all of your heart, ask yourself, have I truly accepted the forgiveness of God in my own life?
5. In verse 35, Jesus is teaching that he who refuses to forgive is thereby casting away his own hope of pardon by God. It is true that the servant was extended the grace of true forgiveness; but his unmerciful

spirit shows that he now rejects God's pardoning love. In doing so, he separated himself from God and is in the **same condition** as before he was forgiven. He has denied his repentance, and his sins are upon him as if he had not repented.

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. **Matthew 18:15**

Notice what is **not** said by Jesus here, "Do not say to the one who was sinned against you, '*You must come to me.*'" "**Go** to the one who has hurt you", is the command from Jesus. It is a personal affair; go and seek them. It is useless to expect the person (a spouse, a son, a daughter, or a friend) who does the injury to try to make peace. The **injured one** always has to forgive, though he or she has nothing to be forgiven. Remember we injured God while we were yet sinners, but He extended forgiveness to us through his only begotten Son. It always comes to that, and the injured one should, if they are of the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5), be the one to start the reconciliation.

¹⁹ Honor your father and mother, and, you shall love your neighbor as yourself." **Matthew 19:19**

How do we keep the commandment by honoring our father and our mother if they have wronged us and yet they do not come and ask for forgiveness from us, their child(ren)? Simple answer, the Christian child must forgive his or her parents and honor them. And what does honoring your parents look like? It looks like what Jesus did to honor His Father while on earth (John 5:23). I will tell you, there are times where I felt my parents were in the wrong; however, it was better that I humbled myself as their son and made peace with them by asking for forgiveness than if I were to rebel and only deepen the trough of sorrow and sadness by separating myself from my parents' love – even if at the time, I felt they were in the wrong. And I can promise you this, as the LORD's mercies are new every morning (Lam 3:22), so are those of Christian parents when their children come to them in repentance.

There are three important questions to consider when regarding this command. First, whom are you to love? By the word "neighbor" we are to understand that as any person who is near us. The Samaritan, when he saw the wounded man on the road to Jericho, felt that this man was in his neighborhood; therefore, the man was his neighbor and he was bound to love him.

Second, what are you to do with your neighbor? Love him. It is a hard thing to love someone. It is not enough for you to say you do not hate your neighbor; you are to love him. When you see him in the street, it is not enough that you keep out of his way or not knock him down. It is not sufficient that you do not bother him by night or disturb him. "Love your neighbor" is not a negative command. It is a positive command and you cannot forgive without knowing what it means to love and to honor those nearest you: your family and your neighbors. **Love is not in the not doing; love is in the doing.** True, you must not dishonor your parents and you must not injure your neighbor, but you have not done all when you have simply refrained from harming your neighbor and avoided him. You ought to love your parents and your neighbors which is more than giving to charity or financially helping out when necessary.

Only when your heart goes with your hand and the kindness of your life conveys the kindness of your soul do you truly love someone. True forgiveness not only forgives in words, but also in deed and manner of heart – for God so loved that He gave.

Third, how are you supposed to love someone who wrongs you? How does God love us who caused the death of His only begotten Son? The answer is, "as yourself". How much does one love himself? None of us too little; some of us too much. You may love yourself as much as you please, but take care that you love your parents, your children, and your neighbor as much. You certainly need no exhortation to love yourself and I can assure you, that will not be a lesson in Practical Godliness. Your own case will be well seen to; your own comfort will be primary the theme of your anxiety. There is no need to exhort you to love yourself; you will do that well enough. See to it, then, that as much as you love yourself, you also love your neighbor. This even applies to your enemies (Matt 5:44) who have not asked for forgiveness for hurting you.

Lastly, **there are 2 kinds of repentance, worldly and godly.** The former leads unto death, the latter unto joy everlasting and salvation:

⁹ As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly sorrow, so that you suffered no loss through us. ¹⁰ **For godly sorrow produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly sorrow produces death.** ¹¹ For see what earnestness this godly sorrow has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter. ¹² So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong, nor for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong, but in order that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God. ¹³ Therefore we are comforted. **2 Corinthians 7:9-13**

God comforts those who mourn (Matt 5:4). Sorrow according to the will of God, renders the heart humble, contrite, submissive, disposed to mortify every sin, and to walk in newness of life and this repentance is connected with saving faith in Christ. There is a great difference between this sorrow of a godly sort, and the sorrow of the world. The fruits of **true repentance** are mentioned **where the heart is changed, the life and actions will be changed (Pro 23:7).** **Godly sorrow brings indignation at sin, at ourselves, at the tempter and his instruments. It brings a godly fear of watchfulness and a cautious fear of sin.** It brings desire to be reconciled with God, a zeal for duty to Him and against sin. We often sorrow because our evil deeds bring unpleasant consequences to ourselves; but this is not repentance. Real sorrow for sin is the result of the working of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit reveals the ingratitude of the heart that has slighted and grieved our Savior and brings us in contrition to the foot of the cross. **By every sin Jesus is wounded afresh; and as we look upon Him whom we have pierced, we mourn for the sins that have brought anguish upon Him.** Such mourning will lead to the renouncement of sin. The worldling may call this sorrow a weakness; but **it is the strength which binds the penitent to the Infinite One with links that cannot be broken.** It shows that the angels of God are bringing back to the soul the graces that were lost through hardness of heart and transgression. The tears of the penitent are only the raindrops that precede the sunshine of holiness. This sorrow heralds a joy which will be a living fountain in the soul.

"Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God; and I will not cause Mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord."
Jeremiah 3:13, 12. "Unto them that mourn in Zion," He has appointed to give "beauty for

ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” **Isaiah 61:3.**

To be Forgiven means to be a Christian:

- **Vertically**, forgiveness *always* means reconciliation between you and God (2 Cor 5:18-20), iniquity separates us from our parents and so it separates us from God our Father (Isa 59:1-2,8), and He is always ready to extend his Spirit of Grace to any who comes to repent of their sins, transgressions, and iniquities (Ps 51:1-2).
- **Horizontally**, forgiveness *does not always* mean reconciliation, this means the person you have wronged and asked for forgiveness from may not be ready to forgive you (Ps 38:18-19), but if you have asked for forgiveness from them, you have removed the stain of guilt from your own soul making peace with God (Matt 18:21).
- Forgiveness does not cancel consequences of the sin (Gal 6:7), *i.e. premarital sex resulting in pregnancy*. God will forgive the girl AND the boy who transgressed IF they repent, but that divine forgiveness will not cancel the pregnancy, the girl will still have a baby.
- Forgiveness does not equate into restoration of what "used to be", *i.e. because of sin, Christ will bear the nail-hole scars in his hands forever*.
- Forgiving someone does not mean you will be able to be there friend again, *i.e. forgiveness does not mean you expose yourself to unnecessary danger, especially in a bad relationship*.
- Forgiving someone does not make you weak, it makes you a Christian (Matt 18:22).
- You are never wrong to do the right thing and forgiving someone is never the wrong thing to do.
- Forgiving someone does not mean they will automatically forgive you, *i.e. if 2 parties are at fault and there is mutual guilt felt by both, the one who is closer to God will forgive first and you must wait on the Holy Spirit to soften and prick the heart of the other (Ps 73:21), once we say sorry first, the rest of what happens next is out of our control and in the hands of Jesus (Acts 2:37)*.
- Lastly, we should teach our children to honor their parents and the importance of asking for forgiveness when they disobey, but we should also be careful not to make them think that the world will always apologize to them when the world wrongs them – this is the difference between worldly forgiveness and heavenly forgiveness.
- To be forgiven means to be a Christian. – R.C. Sproul
- If you do not heal what hurt you, you will bleed on those who did not cut you.

