

# Forgiveness

## God's forgiveness and forgiving others

Forgiveness stands at the heart of the gospel and the Christian life. God's forgiveness of sinners through Christ's atoning sacrifice provides both the foundation of salvation and the pattern for believers' relationships. "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32). Biblical forgiveness involves the willing cancellation of a legitimate debt, the release of an offender from deserved penalty, and the restoration of broken relationship.

**God's forgiveness** flows from His grace rather than human merit. All humanity stands guilty before divine justice, having violated God's holy law through both original sin and personal transgression. The just penalty is eternal death. Yet God, "rich in mercy," provided forgiveness through Christ's substitutionary death. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1:7). This forgiveness is complete—covering all sins past, present, and future for those in Christ. It is free—requiring no payment from the forgiven. It is final—never to be revoked or withdrawn.

The appropriation of divine forgiveness requires **repentance and faith**. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Confession acknowledges sin's reality and guilt without excuse or minimization. Repentance turns from sin toward God. Faith trusts Christ's blood as sufficient payment for sin's penalty. This pattern continues throughout Christian life: believers regularly confess sin and receive fresh assurance of forgiveness, not to restore salvation (which cannot be lost) but to restore fellowship with God.

**Forgiving others** constitutes a non-negotiable Christian duty. Jesus taught unambiguously: "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:15). This does not mean divine forgiveness depends on human forgiveness as a meritorious work, but rather that those who have truly experienced God's gracious forgiveness will extend it to others. Unwillingness to forgive reveals a heart that has not grasped the magnitude of its

own forgiveness. The parable of the unforgiving servant illustrates this principle powerfully.

Practical forgiveness faces real challenges. It **does not require denying offense's reality**—genuine wrongs demand genuine forgiveness. It **does not eliminate consequences**—forgiveness releases the offender from personal retribution but may still involve civil penalties or natural results. It **does not guarantee immediate emotional healing**—choosing to forgive precedes feeling forgiving. It **does not obligate continuing in harmful relationships**—forgiveness can coexist with wise boundaries. It **does mean releasing bitterness**, surrendering the right to vengeance, and genuinely seeking the offender's good.

The extent of Christian forgiveness proves radical. Jesus commands forgiving "seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:22)—not literally 490 times but limitlessly. Forgiveness extends even to enemies, persecutors, and those who remain unrepentant. While reconciliation requires two parties, forgiveness requires only one. Believers forgive unilaterally, releasing offenders regardless of whether they acknowledge wrong or seek pardon. This supernatural capacity flows from the Spirit's power, not human effort.

Refusing forgiveness produces **spiritual bondage**. Bitterness corrodes the soul, consuming emotional and spiritual energy. It hinders prayer, damages relationships, and grieves the Holy Spirit. Conversely, extending forgiveness brings freedom. It breaks chains of resentment, restores joy, and demonstrates Christ's transforming power. Forgiveness does not minimize sin's seriousness but entrusts justice to God, the righteous Judge.

In a culture that often conflates forgiveness with weakness or enables wrongdoing, biblical forgiveness stands distinct. It demonstrates strength—the power to release legitimate grievances. It upholds justice—acknowledging wrong while extending grace. It mirrors Christ—who forgave those nailing Him to the cross, praying "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). This forgiveness—costly, complete, and transformative—defines Christian character and community.

# God's Forgiveness

## Receiving forgiveness from God

**1 John 1:9** — Confess and He will forgive

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

**Ephesians 1:7** — Forgiveness through His blood

In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

**Colossians 1:14** — Redemption and forgiveness

In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:

**Acts 13:38** — Forgiveness through Christ

Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins:

## Forgiving Others

### Extending forgiveness to those who wrong us

**Matthew 6:14-15** — Forgive to be forgiven

For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

**Ephesians 4:32** — Forgiving one another

And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

**Colossians 3:13** — As Christ forgave you

Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

**Matthew 18:21-22** — Seventy times seven

Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

