

# ***We Must Forgive!***

## **If We Do Not We Will Not Be Forgiven**

Forgiveness ... that crucial aspect of our day-to-day walk with God, comprises both an act and an attitude, without which we as Christians cannot be made pure and free from sin. Without it we are easily caught up in slavery to grudges and bitterness toward others, and without it we can never attain the Kingdom of God which has been promised to the saints.

Thankfully, the spirit within us craves to be free from this bondage to acrimony and resentment, and to throw off the burden of harboring the memory of shortcomings that our neighbors might throw at us. Forgiveness forms the avenue by which our lives are saved from death: Jesus Christ paid the price for our sins — forgave them — by living a perfect, sinless life, and being sacrificed and shedding His blood for each of those whom the Father calls (Hebrews 9:11-22). Without shed blood there is no *remission* of sin [**remission** (Strong's 859) = **ephe<sup>s</sup>is**, “freedom, pardon”]. This forgiveness on His part for us did not just hide them from view: it removed them utterly from us, as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12)!

Forgiveness is an essential pillar of the “model prayer” that Christ instructed us to pray “after this manner” (Matthew 6:9-12). The Old Testament sacrifices pictured the forgiveness of sins on a physical plane to a sinful, rebellious people. (Note the sin offerings of Leviticus 4 and elsewhere.)

Forgiveness is essential whenever sin is present; it can occur only when there is a perception of righteousness — of right and wrong — so cannot occur without an acknowledgement of God's laws, whether these laws are understood or not (1 John 3:4). ***In a very real sense forgiveness is a contract or agreement between the person who has been wronged and the one who caused the imposition***, a truth we shall see

clearly as we read on.

### **What Is Forgiveness?**

What does God's word say about this wonderful concept He has placed in His plan? The words used in both testaments are given below.

#### ***Forgive***

*Old Testament* (usually Strong's 5545): **calach**; “to forgive”.

*New Testament* (usually Strong's 863): **aphiem**; “to send forth [in freedom]”.

#### ***Forgiveness***

*Old Testament* (Strong's 5547): **celiy-chah**. From 5545; “pardon”.

*New Testament* (Strong's 859): **aphesis**. From 863; “freedom, pardon”.

#### ***Forgiven***

*Old Testament* (usually Strong's 5545): see *forgive* above.

*New Testament* (usually Strong's 863): see *forgive* above.

The overall meaning of *forgive* is to remit sin or guilt, and to be pardoned from error. Its basis is an *act* that results from the underlying moral foundation of the spirit of God and its inherent qualities: faith, hope, joy, peace, moderation, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and humility (Galatians 5:22-23 and elsewhere).

Forgiveness is very close in definition — and cannot be separated from — other works of God's people: compassion, love, mercy, judgement, kindness, and gentleness.

### **How Does One Forgive Another Person?**

For the “forgiveness contract” to be accomplished, it is imperative that the offending party be ***truly repentant*** of the sins perpetrated toward

the other party. As long as repentance is offered, the offended person is obligated to forgive.

### **Repent**

*Old Testament* (usually Strong's 5162): **nacham**; "to repent or comfort; to make a strong turning to a new and positive course of action. When one repents he exerts strength to change, to regasp the situation, and exert effort for the situation to take a different course of purpose and action. The stress is not upon new information but upon the visible action taken". In three cases the word **shuw** (Strong's 7725) is used, meaning "to return or go back to the point of departure".

*New Testament* (usually Strong's 3340): **metanoeo**; "to perceive afterwards, and thus to change one's mind or purpose for the better, and avoid sin".

Jesus told Peter to forgive his brother if his brother sinned against him, not just the first time he repented and asked forgiveness, but essentially forever as long as genuine repentance is expressed: *"I say not unto you, Until seven times, but, Until seventy times seven"* (Matthew 18:21-22). Jesus Christ elaborated more thoroughly on this issue of forgiveness in Luke 17:3-4, when he tied repentance to forgiveness: *"Take heed to yourselves: If your brother trespass against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to you, saying, I repent (Greek meta-noeo), you shall forgive him."*

Thus, **repentance** by the offending party is a prerequisite to forgiveness, and there is no limit to the number of times we must forgive our brother if he repents of offenses to us. If others sin against us but do not repent, we cannot ourselves forgive them because there has been no contract established between us. However, God has provided a remedy for this all-too-common situation: we can ask the Father to forgive them. He knows their hearts and attitudes (Hebrews 4:12), and can deal with them in His love and patience, whereas we do not possess such perfect insight into the other person's character. Notice some examples of the Father being asked to forgive:

1. Jesus Christ on the stake: *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"* (Luke

23:34). The Pharisees, Roman soldiers, and others responsible for His death were weak and subject to peer pressure, and to the intense pressure of Satan and the demons to destroy this sinless Being.

2. The example of Stephen while being stoned: *"Lord, lay not this sin to their charge"* (Acts 7:60).

3. The example of Jesus and the adulteress: the woman said that no one had accused her of her sin, and Jesus told her, *"Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more [repent]"* (John 8:10-11). She was told to repent, but was not yet forgiven of her sin at this point because she had not yet repented.

### **Seek Out Your Guilty Brother**

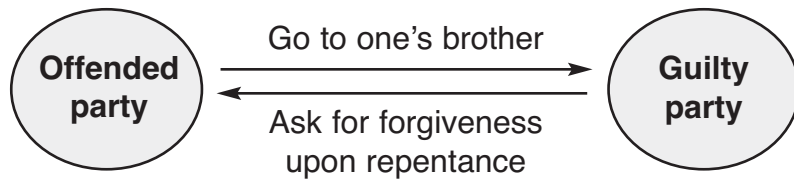
Forgiveness is such a critical issue for us Christians that we are told to seek out a brother who has done us harm, and ask him to request forgiveness from us. ***You are to go to your brother that has offended you, and ask that he repent of his sin and ask forgiveness from you.***

*Moreover, if your brother shall trespass against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone: if he will hear you, you have gained your brother"* (Matthew 18:15).

Going to your brother and telling him he has made a mistake and harmed you is an act that demands great character and determination. Likely as not the offending party is not even aware that he has committed such an error, and will gladly admit it and ask for your forgiveness; after all, brethren are instructed to dwell together in unity (Psalm 133:1). In a very real sense we do what Jesus Christ did when He allowed Himself to be sacrificed on the stake (John 10:15; 15:13). In Matthew 18:15, "... if he will hear you"... could as well say "... if he will ask your forgiveness ...."

There is a risk that the sinning party will not acknowledge his error, but even in that case there is a remedy God has given us. He says, *"... if he will not hear you, then take with you two or three more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses*

every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it to the church [ecclesia]: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him



be unto you as a heathen man or a publican” (Matthew 18:16-17). These scriptures make plain that forgiveness of sins against another person is so incredibly important. Errors in words or actions against a brother must not be left to fester; they are to be attended to expeditiously because, if not, they will eat away at our spiritual character, and deny us of abundant living. These conflicts will even interfere with your communication with God (I Peter 3:7).

*“Be you angry and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath” (Galations 4:26).*

*“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:31-32).*

*“Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God, lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled ...” (Hebrews 12:14-15).*

as follows:

This process is really a *serving* cycle, the guilty party asking his brother to forgive while the offended party serves in return by forgiving. Forgiveness becomes a ***mutually accepted contract*** between the parties that ***wipes away the sin*** that has been committed ... just as Christ wiped away our sins through his shed blood on the stake, removing it from us as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). We do for one another what our heavenly Father and Christ did for us!

The sacrifice of Christ has taken away our sins, following our repentance, baptism, and the laying on of hands to receive the gift of the spirit God places within us (Acts 2:38; Hebrews 6:1-2). Like the “forgiveness process” above, we have identified our errors, have been convicted of them, have displayed that broken and contrite heart (Psalm 51:17), and have received God’s spirit. Being made clean and white, we can now directly access the throne of the Father through this sacrifice of His Son, symbolized by the rending of the curtain of the temple that sequestered the Holy of Holies, the place where God dwelled with men (Matthew 27:51). We are now servants of the Most High God, preparing to rule with Him in the new age (Revelation 5:10).

Forgiveness requires repentance, or changing, of the guilty party so he will no longer continue in sins. As we noted earlier, repentance (***metanoia***) means to change and think and act — to move from law breaking to obedience. Repentance knows no limits when it is genuine.

Forgiveness is especially potent when dealing with “enemies”, those who are attempting to hurt or trouble us. Do good to them, and thus

**Identify the error → Confess your sin to your brother → Be forgiven by your brother**

## To Forgive, Identify Sin

Forgiveness is an *action* on your part that requires you to *identify* the sin that was committed, and then *confess* it, after which the other party *forgives* the infraction. The infraction can be identified only when it is evaluated in the light of God’s laws, for *“Sin is the transgression of the law”* (I John 3:4; see also Romans 3:20 and 7:7).

The forgiveness process can be summarized

*“heap coals of fire upon their heads”* (Proverbs 25:21-22; Romans 12:20). Benefitting your enemy’s possessions is a form of forgiveness (Exodus 23:4-5), as is showing mercy to those who mistreat you (Matthew 5:7, 39-48; see also Luke 6:27-34), loving your enemies (Luke 6:35-37), and blessing those who persecute you (Romans 12:14-21; I Corinthians 4:12-13).

Be especially forgiving of the brethren, for they do not intend to harm you but are your part-



ners in suffering (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13). It is to them that we show preference in doing good, as we have opportunity (Galatians 6:10).

## Who Must Forgive

All people ought to forgive — or ask God to do so — but ***all of God's people must forgive!*** We must all forgive our brothers of their sins against us, from the heart (Matthew 18:35). In the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:23-34), the servant who was forgiven his debts by his master failed to forgive the debts owed to him by a fellow servant, even when that fellow servant had a repentant heart. As a result, the unforgiving servant then had to pay the debt his Father had forgiven him, and was tossed to the “tormenters” until the debt would be paid. We can forgive others who have wronged us in our prayers, asking the Father to forgive them.

*“And when you stand praying, forgive if you have ought against any, that your Father which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses”* (Mark 11:25).

If we do not forgive others of their sins against us, our heavenly Father will not forgive us of our sins (Matthew 6:12-15; see also Mark 11:25-26). Does this mean that salvation will not be extended to anyone who will not forgive his brethren, every last one of them? Indeed it does, for forgiveness embodies the whole essence of one's life in Christ Jesus. We stand naked and accused of our sins if we do not forgive others of their sins against us, for we have failed to do as Christ did through his willing sacrifice for our sins. We, like Him, must be a living sacrifice for others in the world (Romans 12:1; Galatians 2:20).

## Forgive the Wicked?

Should we forgive the wicked? No, at least those who are truly ***wicked*** (Strong 7451 = ***ra'***, “bad or evil”), who do evil on a habitual basis — as a way of life — and do not even desire to know of God and His ways. Note Job 21:1-34, where the wicked tell God to leave them alone, and do not want to acknowledge His ways and obey Him;

prayer in their minds is futile (verses 14 and 15). In verse 16, ***wicked*** (Strong 7563) is from the Hebrew ***rasha***, meaning “morally wrong, an actively bad person”. Further, the wicked do not know God (Job 18:21), they speak wickedly against God (Psalm 73:8-9), and are sometimes born that way (Psalm 58:3). There is no way they these miscreants can be turned to doing good. These are the tares, sons of the Devil, who will be gathered up and burned at the end of the age (Matthew 13:36-43). Those on the earth in the end time whose names are not written in the Book of Life will worship the Beast (Revelation 13:8), and will be destroyed in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15). Apparently there will be quite a number of these evil individuals.

Just as each person seems right in his own eyes (Proverbs 16:2), and as Satan, the father of the wicked, feels justified in his evil deeds, so the wicked perceive themselves as right and good, and even believe that God is wicked like they are (Psalm 50:20-21). The wicked will not learn righteousness (Isaiah 26:10). In fact, we are instructed to pray for the demise of the wicked: “*Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate You?*” (Psalm 139:21). David exclaimed, “*Pour out your wrath upon the heathen that have not known you, and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon your name*” (Psalm 79:6).

David prayed that God's enemies, rather than be converted to His way, would *not* be converted (Psalm 69:27-28). Paul prayed for the damnation of those who were preaching a false gospel to the Galatian church (Galatians 1:6-9), and the Imprecatory Psalms (7, 35, 55, 58, 59, 69, 79, 109, 137, and 139) ask for God's children to pray for His wrath upon the heathen.

## Why Forgive Others?

The question of why we must forgive others has already been answered through the course of this paper. Not only must we forgive others because it is a prerequisite for salvation, but we remove conflict, hatred, and animosity from our lives. We enable ourselves to live fully in the light of God's spiritual fruits (Galatians 5:22-23). By forgiving we achieve true peace of mind and bring health to our total being, for showing fear of God by forgiving is “... *health [medicine] to your navel*

and marrow [watering or moistening] to your bones” (Proverbs 3:8). By forgiving others you clear your mind of guilt so you can pray more effectively.

Forgiving others is so critical that, unless we forgive others of their sins against us, our Father will refuse to forgive us (Matthew 6:14-15; 18:34-35; Mark 11:25-26; James 2:13). We are in a very real sense doing to others what our Father is doing to us, which is the meaning of the law and the prophets (Matthew 7:12). We are in nearly every way following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ (1 John 2:26).

Notice some examples of forgiveness in Scripture:

**A. Joseph forgave his brothers.** *“Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that you sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years has the famine been in the land; and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve your posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. Haste and go up to my father, and say unto him, thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down unto me, tarry not. And you shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near to me, you, and your children, and your children’s children, and your flocks, and your herds, and all that you have. And there will I nourish you, for yet there are five years of famine, lest you, and your household, and all that you have, come to poverty. And, behold, your eyes see and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaks unto you. And you shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that you have seen; and you shall haste and bring down my father hither. And he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck, and wept; and*

*Benjamin wept upon his neck. Moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them; and after that his brethren talked with him”, (Genesis 45:5-15); “And Joseph said unto them, fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good to bring to pass as it is this day, to save much people alive” (Genesis 50:19-21).*

**B. David forgave Saul.** *”And David said to Abishai, destroy him not; for who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord’s anointed, and be guiltless?... And David answered and said, behold the king’s spear! and let one of the young men come over and fetch it. The Lord render to every man his righteousness and his faithfulness; for the Lord delivered you into my hand today, but I would not stretch forth my hand against the Lord’s anointed. And, behold, as your life was much set by this day in my eyes, so let my life be much set by in the eyes of the Lord, and let him deliver me out of all tribulation. Then Saul said to David, blessed be you, my son David; you shall both do great things, and also shall still prevail. So David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place” (1 Samuel 26:9, 22-25).*

**C. David forgave Shimei.** *“And when king David came to Bahurim, behold, there came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera: he came forth, and cursed still as he came. And he cast stones at David, and at all the servants of king David: and all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left. And thus said Shimei when he cursed, come out, come out, you bloody man, and you man of Belial: the Lord has returned upon you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead you have reigned; and the Lord has delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom your son; and, behold, you are taken in your mischief, because you are a bloody man. Then said Abishai the son of Zeruiah unto*

*the king, why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray you, and take off his head. And the king said, what have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? so let him curse, because the Lord has said unto him, curse David. Who shall then say, wherefore have you done so. And david said to Abishai, and to all his servants, behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels seeks my life, how much more now may this Benjamite do it? let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord has bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look on my affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day. And as David and his men went by the way, Shimei went along on the hill's side over against him, and cursed as he went, and threw stones at him, and cast dust" (II Samuel 16:5-13).*

**D. Jesus asked the Father to forgive His enemies.** *"Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots" (Luke 23:34).*

Forgiveness is intimately tied to repentance,

that essential quality of mind akin to the Father Himself when He first forgave us. It is the essence that wipes us clean, and which epitomizes the relationship we as brethren must have with one another. Unless we forgive every last one of our brethren of any evil they may have done to us — knowingly or unknowingly — we cannot expect our heavenly Father to forgive us. If a brother will not come to us and ask for forgiveness, we need to go to him and tell him of the problem that he may ask for forgiveness from us. If someone perpetrating evil against us has not repented and asked for forgiveness, we must go to the Father and ask that He forgive the person, be he in or out of the body of Christ.

Think of those whom you may forgive, who have done evil to you and for whom you may still hold some animosity. Forgiveness will open the pathway to healing of body, mind, and spirit, and will place you on the plane of God Himself. Even as Jesus Christ claimed to be the Son of God and made Himself equal with God — which incited the Jews to want to kill Him (John 5:18) — so are we as His children able to forgive others as He did, and be washed clean. *"Forgive us of our sins even as we forgive others of their sins against us"* (Matthew 6:12).