

# Forgiveness

## vs. Bitterness

**Forgiveness is responding to offenders so that the power of God's love through me can heal them.**

### Definition

Forgiveness is clearing the record of an offender and choosing to live with any continuing consequences of the offense.

The primary word in Scripture translated *forgiveness* is *aphesis*. It denotes dismissal, release, or pardon. It is a derivative of the root word *aphiemi*, which means "to send away."

*Aphiemi* is the word used by Jesus when He said, "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12).

A Greek word for *forgiving* is *charizomai*. It means "to do something pleasant or agreeable; to do a favour to; to give graciously, give freely." This is the word used by Paul when he wrote, "Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32).

### Why Forgiveness Is Important

There are serious consequences for one who refuses to forgive an offender. Listed below are serious physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual consequences experienced by anyone who refuses to forgive an offender.

- **We are not forgiven.**

Jesus said, "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly

Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14–15).

- **We are tormented.**

When a servant who was forgiven of a great debt refused to forgive a fellow servant who owed him a small debt, the Lord said, "O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses" (Matthew 18:32–35).

- **We are defiled.**

When we are offended, God gives us the grace to forgive our offenders. Therefore, we are to "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).

- **We damage our health.**

If we refuse to forgive our offenders, we will not be able to properly observe the Lord's table.



**G**od's formula for forgiveness: seventy times seven equals zero.

"Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven." —Matthew 18:21–22

"If he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him." —Luke 17:4



**G**iving forgiveness to a believer is a gift to yourself, because we are all members of one Body.

“For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep [die prematurely]” (I Corinthians 11:30; see also Matthew 6:14–15).

## How Forgiveness Relates to Pardon

If someone kills a member of our family, we are to forgive that person. However, we do not have the authority to grant a pardon, because we do not have authority to punish the offender. Therefore, even with our forgiveness, that person will suffer the continuing consequences of the offense. Forgiveness is clearing the record of an offender and restoring fellowship. However, the seeds of destruction may continue to have serious consequences.

After David committed adultery with Bathsheba and arranged the murder of her husband, he repented. Then “Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die” (II Samuel 12:13). David’s sin was forgiven, but there were further consequences. “Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour” (II Samuel 12:11).

## How We Learn to Forgive

When people are asked if they can recall someone who deeply hurt or offended them, they usually respond immediately by saying, “Yes!” The question must then be asked, have these offenders been fully forgiven?

A lack of forgiveness creates bitterness, and bitterness is like the disease of leprosy. Those who

have leprosy lose any sensation of pain; therefore, they are unaware of situations in which they are hurting themselves. Similarly, those who are bitter are often unaware of how they hurt other people with their words, attitudes, and actions. In order to motivate people to forgive, God uses commands, contrasts, and concepts.

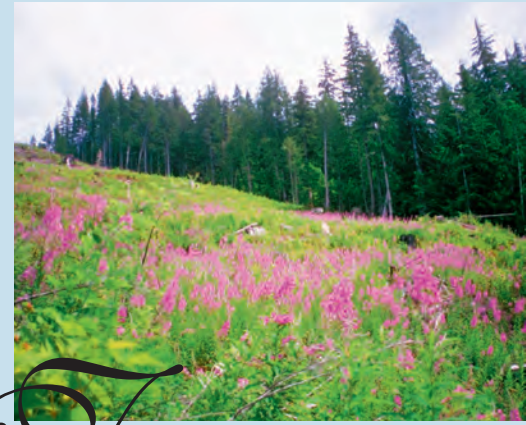
## Commands to Forgive

- “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32).
- “Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye” (Colossians 3:13).
- “Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven” (Luke 6:37).
- “Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him” (Luke 17:3).

## Concepts to Understand Forgiveness

- **Pleading for mercy vs. pleading for more time**

The servant who refused to forgive a small debt after being released from a huge debt was not able to give mercy, because he did not ask for it. He asked instead for an extension of time: “Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all” (Matthew 18:26). The wise master put him in prison with tormentors to cause him to realize



The mercy that accompanies forgiveness is appreciated only when the offender is willing to accept a just punishment of his offense. (See Genesis 44.)

**“If you are suffering from a bad man’s injustice, forgive him lest there be two bad men.”**

—St. Augustine

**A sheep quickly rebounds from hardship. It will take suffering and affliction without retaliating or uttering a sound.**





## Overlook a transgression!

*“The discretion of a man defereth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression.”*

—Proverbs 19:11

**“I will permit no man to narrow and degrade my soul by making me hate him.”**

—Booker T. Washington



## True forgiveness disregards any thoughts of retaliation or revenge.

An offense is an indication of a violation of God’s principles. We can be sure that our offender will suffer consequences from God.

*“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.”*

—Romans 12:19

that he could never pay it all back. Only then would he plead for mercy and be able to give it to others. (See Luke 7:41–48.)

### • Clearing the conscience vs. responding with harshness

When David heard the case of the man who stole his neighbor’s pet sheep, he became angry and demanded an extreme punishment. The law required only four sheep for the stolen one. However, David was unable to give justice or mercy, because he was guilty of the same offense. When we harshly judge others, we condemn ourselves, because we do the same things. (See Romans 2:1–3.)

### • Having the goal of love vs. retaliation

There are three steps to receiving the power of God’s Spirit. The first is being filled with the Holy Spirit. This takes place by the indwelling of the Spirit at salvation (see Romans 8:15) and the filling of the Spirit when we ask our Heavenly Father for it. (See Luke 11:13 and Ephesians 5:18.)

The second step is the testing of the Holy Spirit. Paul lists some of these tests in II Corinthians 12:10: “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.” We pass the test of the Holy Spirit by giving thanks in every test (see I Thessalonians 5:18), rejoicing in every test (see Philippians 4:4), and when necessary, crying out to God for deliverance (see Psalm 50:15).

To the degree that we pass the test of a trial, we experience the power of the Holy Spirit, which begins with love, joy, and

peace. This pattern is illustrated in the life of Jesus. He was filled with the Spirit and led by the Spirit into the wilderness, and then He returned in the power of the Spirit. (See Luke 4:1–14.)

This sequence is also explained in our calling. First, we are called to be holy and to dedicate ourselves to the Lord. (See Romans 12:1–2.) Then, we are called to suffer. (See Philippians 3:10.) Third, we are called to the glory of God’s power upon us. (See I Peter 5:10.) Glory follows suffering. For example, “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified” (I Peter 4:14).

If the suffering God brings to our lives is not recognized as a test from His hand to produce the power of love and God’s glory, Satan will turn it into bitterness, which will bring a lack of forgiveness and destruction.

### • Edifying the Body of Christ vs. cutting off believers

Paul explains that every believer is a member of the Body of Christ and that we are all connected one with another. Therefore, if we refuse to forgive a fellow believer, we are actually refusing to forgive ourselves.

This recognition of fellow believers as members of the Body of Christ is referred to in the passage on the Lord’s table. Those who violate this concept are not discerning the Lord’s body. “Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine

himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep" (1 Corinthians 11:27-30).

• **Having fellowship through suffering vs. weakness**

Paul spoke of resurrection power that was available to every Christian who was willing to go through suffering. "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death" (Philippians 3:10). All believers are called to die to self-indulgences so that we can experience more of the power of Christ.

This is the same power that is given to those who victoriously pass the tests of suffering. (See II Corinthians 12:9.) Such suffering is also explained by Peter to those who would seek to be a blessing by returning good for evil. "Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing" (1 Peter 3:9).

**Developing a Forgiving Spirit**

1. View an offender as an "instrument" in God's hands.
2. Thank God for the benefits He plans from an offense.
3. Determine what character qualities God wants to develop in you through the offense.
4. Realize that suffering is a normal part of the Christian life.

**Two Rewards for Forgiveness**

The first reward of being offended is an extra measure of God's grace. (See Hebrews 12:15.)

The second reward of an offense is discovering how God meant it for good. "But as for you, ye 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 50:20).

*Personal Evaluation*

**How forgiving are you toward offenders?**

- Is it your goal in life to gain the power of genuine love?
- Are there people whom you have not forgiven?
- Do you see offenses as tests in which to rejoice?
- Are you fearful that if you forgive an offender he will not learn from his mistakes?
- Do you believe it is your responsibility to make sure your offenders are punished?
- Do you fear that forgiving an offender will encourage him to offend again?
- Does the thought of certain offenders bring pain and hurt to you?
- Do you compare offenses against you to your greater offense to Christ?
- Have you looked for ways to return good to those who have done you evil?
- Do you picture offenders who are believers as related to you in the Body of Christ?



he more we comprehend how much we have been forgiven, the easier it is for us to forgive others.

*"Forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."*  
—Ephesians 4:32



**"He that cannot forgive others breaks the bridge over which he must pass himself; for every man has need to be forgiven."**

—Thomas Fuller

By focusing on an offender, he then becomes our standard. In condemning his actions, we unknowingly take on his attitudes.

The same attitudes we react to in others will therefore soon be seen in us.