

MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

Article 4

This is the fourth teaching article in the series on the subjects of forgiveness and reconciliation. In the first three articles, we addressed some of the most common misunderstandings about forgiving another of his sins.

Misunderstanding #1	When I forgive, I must forget (remove the offense from memory)	Nowhere does Scripture require you to have a blank memory about your own sins or sins committed against you. In fact, the memory of certain sins (even though these sins have been forgiven by God) is important for your training in righteousness, to help you not repeat them (<i>for example, notice God's record and David's remembrance of his sins in II Samuel 12:13-23</i>). This is tremendous hope, because you can forgive, even though you may not be able to erase from memory that the other person sinned against you. (<i>Please read the first article in the series on forgiveness for a more complete explanation</i>)
Misunderstanding #2	When I forgive, I must release the guilty person from all the consequences of his sin	Receiving God's forgiveness does not guarantee that all the consequences of your wrongdoing will be removed. For example, the thief on the cross, although forgiven by Jesus, still died (<i>Luke 23:40-43</i>). Forgiveness is an act of grace that reestablishes a right relationship with the offender. In other words, there is no longer an estrangement between the offender and the one who has had the sin committed against him. On the other hand, consequences often serve as an encouragement and a reminder to the offender to change. (<i>Please read the second article in the series on forgiveness for a more complete explanation</i>)
Misunderstanding #3	I am commanded to forgive only when someone comes to me to ask for my forgiveness	Forgiveness of others requires that we stand ready to grant forgiveness when asked. In order to do this, it is important to already have dealt with the issue of forgiveness of the other within self first. Forgiveness in the heart is a much larger issue than just the relationship with the other person. It is a matter of maintaining a right relationship with our heavenly Father.

In this article, we will examine **Misunderstanding #4**: *I'm not ready yet to forgive. I don't want to be a hypocrite and say I forgive when I don't feel like forgiving.*

When people make a statement such as the one above, very often they are indicating either a) a lack of understanding about how to forgive, or b) an unwillingness to forgive.

A. Lack of understanding about how to forgive:

Many people think of forgiveness as a feeling. On the contrary, forgiving others often requires that we go against our feelings. Since forgiveness of others is a command, and we are enabled by God to follow His commands, we can forgive, even when we don't feel like forgiving (*based on John 14:15; Philippians 4:13*). Forgiveness is an act of the will, and is demonstrated by a difference in our treatment of the ones who have sinned against us. The Scriptures tell us how we are to practice forgiveness: we are to forgive as God in Christ has forgiven us (*Ephesians 4:32*). In order to do this, we must examine:

The nature of God's forgiveness of us: When God forgives us, He stands ready to grant us forgiveness of every type of wrongdoing (*Exodus 34:6-7, esp. verse 7; Psalm 103:3, 10-12*), except that of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (*Matthew 12:22-32, esp. verses 31-32; Mark 3:20-30, esp. verses 28-29*). In addition, He was ready to forgive us while

we were still His enemies (*Romans 5:10*) and before we were ready to ask for or receive forgiveness (*Psalms 86:5; Romans 5:8*). Finally, He forgives us out of His mercy and grace and not because we merit (deserve or have earned) His forgiveness (*Romans 5:6-8; Ephesians 2:4-7; Colossians 2:13-14*). We too are to forgive others in our hearts whether or not we are asked, and stand ready to grant forgiveness if and when we are asked (see article 3 for further details).

The practicality of God's forgiveness of us: When God forgives us, He forgives completely (*Psalms 103:10-12; Jeremiah 50:20; Romans 5:16-21; 8:1, 33-34; I John 1:9*). In demonstrating His forgiveness, He does it the following ways, and we are commanded to forgive in the same ways:

1. He cleanses us from all unrighteousness (He restores us to fellowship) (*I John 1:9*). Since God's eyes are too pure to look upon evil (*Habakkuk 1:13*), He must cleanse us to have restored fellowship with us. We too must stand ready to restore fellowship with the one who has sinned against us, if and when he asks forgiveness.
2. He removes reminders of our sins *from His presence* (*Isaiah 38:17*). Similarly, if we have things (even objects, such as a photograph, a broken object, etc.) that serve as reminders of the other's sins, we must remove them from our presence. When, however, the reminder cannot be removed (such as a person or governmental authority), remember that God will not allow any situation in your life that you cannot handle in a godly way (*based on I Corinthians 10:13*).
3. He will no longer bring our sins up *to Himself*, to charge them against you (*Hebrews 10:14-17*). Similarly, we are not to dwell on the other's sins in our thought lives.
4. He will no longer bring up our sins *to us* as an accusation against us, nor deal with us according to the sin (*Psalms 103:10*). He may bring it up to us, but only for our teaching and help, or as a reminder not to repeat the sin (see Article 1 for more details). Similarly, in our dealings with the person who has sinned against us, we are no longer to accuse the person. If we bring up the sinful deed, it should be only as a reminder to the person not to repeat the sin, or for teaching or help.
5. He will no longer bring up our sins *to others* as an accusation against us, as is demonstrated through many examples in the Scriptures. For example, when talking with Satan about Job, God did not bring up Job's sins (even though Job was a sinner), although Satan attempted to accuse Job in God's presence (*Job 1*). Similarly, we are not to gossip about the other's sins.

As we have seen above, forgiving in the same way as God forgives is a matter of dealing with the other person differently than we did when we held grudges. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and is demonstrated through our deeds. Very often, this requires our actively going against our feelings. This brings us to the second indicator:

B. Unwillingness to forgive:

Because we are commanded to forgive others (*Ephesians 4:32*), we are enabled by God to do so. Therefore, we sin when we refuse to forgive (*James 4:17*). We cannot use the excuse of "lack of readiness" to forgive, and we are out of fellowship with the Lord when we remain unforgiving, because:

1. We show serious ingratitude for God's merciful forgiveness toward us when we do not forgive others (*Matthew 18:21-35*), and
2. Our Father withholds His forgiveness of our everyday transgressions when you do not forgive others (*Matthew 6:14-15; Mark 11:25-26*).

Our forgiveness of others is important in the sight of God. Yes, we may have very strong feelings about the wrongs done against us, but the Lord does not command us to change our feelings. He does command us to change our deeds (thoughts, speech, and actions) toward others. We cannot continue to harbor grudges against others, and we must stop speaking against others. We can and must forgive others, because the matter is bigger than our human relationship with the sinning person; the issue is a right fellowship with our Heavenly Father.

Refer to: **FORGIVENESS (FORGIVING OTHERS AS GOD HAS FORGIVEN YOU)**. Portions of this article are excerpted from Lessons 12 and 13 of the *Self-Confrontation manual*.