

Why Forgive?



MEMORY VERSE: “Be tolerant [patient] with one another and forgive one another whenever any of you has a complaint against someone else. You must forgive one another as the Lord has forgiven you” (Colossians 3:13, TEV).

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PM**

OUR WORLD IS FILLED WITH HURT AND INSULTED PEOPLE. Who has not insulted or hurt someone, oftentimes people we love the most? Who has not been hurt, or insulted, even by people we love the most?

It is one of the sad facts of life that it is easy to insult someone. It is even easier to be insulted. But what is not so easy is to forgive. If only forgiving people were as easy as insulting people!

This week we will study the question of forgiving other people. We will study reasons why we should forgive. Jesus told several parables (stories) about forgiving people. Forgiving people has eternal¹ results. Forgiving people is an important part of being a Christian. So this week, let us see if we can come to a better understanding of how to forgive other people.

THE WEEK AT A GLANCE: What is forgiveness? Why should we forgive other people? How do we profit from forgiving other people? How can we forgive people who have hurt us? What is the important part of unfairness² in forgiveness? How can we balance personal forgiveness with the need for justice (fairness)?

*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 7.

¹eternal—forever; without beginning or end; lasting forever.

²unfairness—not being fair.

SUN THE FORGIVENESS PART.

“Be kind and tender-hearted to one another, and forgive one another, as God has forgiven you through Christ [Jesus]” (Ephesians 4:32, TEV).

One of the most important parts of the Christian faith is forgiveness. Our religion is nothing if there is no forgiveness.

Forgiveness involves God’s forgiveness of us. Without God’s forgiveness, we would not be any better off than the beasts. Without the promises that come with God’s forgiveness, we would be worse off than the beasts. This is because the beasts have no understanding of spiritual matters. Without the



Without God’s forgiveness, we would be no better than the beasts.

promise of eternity³ that comes with forgiveness, it would be easier to be a chicken. Why? Without forgiveness, chickens do not live in hopelessness.⁴ But without God’s forgiveness, humans do live in hopelessness.

Christians are expected to forgive other people because God has forgiven them.

But forgiveness is not always easy. Sometimes we have been hurt so much that forgiveness seems impossible.⁵

But a sense of unfairness and injustice⁶ is a part of forgiveness. To forgive someone is not to hold that person responsible for what he or she did wrong. To forgive someone is not to hold a grudge⁷ against the person who hurt you. You do not forgive someone for giving you money, fixing your flat tire, or helping your mother cross a busy street. You forgive someone when they insult you, when they cheat you, when they hurt you, or when they hurt someone you love. True forgiveness is often given before wrongs are made right. You forgive before the person says she or he is sorry. Forgiving someone before she or he apologizes is not fair. If we asked for fairness and justice in every part of our lives, we could never forgive or be forgiven.

Why should a Christian forgive? Ephesians 4:32. What does God’s forgiving us have to do with our forgiving other people?

³eternity—life without end; forever.

⁴hopelessness—having no hope.

⁵impossible—not possible.

⁶injustice—not being fair.

⁷grudge—a felling of anger; a feeling of not liking someone.

MON WHY FORGIVE?

What do each of the following verses teach us about why we should forgive other people?

Matthew 6:14 _____

Mark 11:25 _____

Luke 6:36, 37 _____

Luke 17:3 _____

Luke 23:34 _____

Colossians 3:13 _____

We can find in the Bible many reasons to forgive.

God commands us to forgive. Jesus, as our example, forgave us. God tells us that if we do not forgive other people, we do not deserve to have God forgive us.

But none of this goes to the root of the question, Why forgive other people? We need to receive forgiveness from God

⁸revenge—getting even.

⁹unwillingness—not willing.

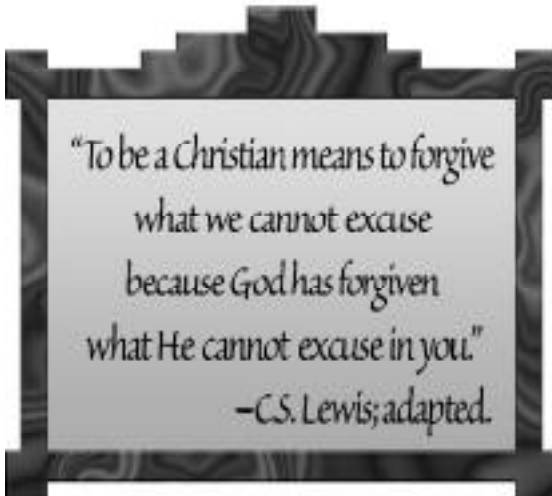
to be saved at the end of the world's history. But what purpose does God have in wanting us to forgive other people?

By forgiving, we help ourselves. When we forgive other people, we free ourselves from anger and hate that can destroy our lives. By forgiving other people, we are showing God's character to other people. We show the world what kind of God we serve when we forgive other people. By forgiving, we help destroy the hate, revenge,⁸ and violence that does so much damage in the world. By forgiving, we help make the world a better place. Imagine what the planet Earth would be like if everyone learned to forgive everyone else.



What would the world be like if people forgave each other?

Look at the world around us today. How much pain and suffering can you see that has come from a lack of forgiveness? Make a list of world wars, home problems, or personal quarrels and fighting that are due to people's unwillingness⁹ to forgive.

TUE HOW TO FORGIVE.

It is easy to say we should forgive. But it is hard to forgive. Many people have suffered terrible insults by people who have shown no regrets or sorrow for what they have done. How are we to learn to forgive?

We can learn to forgive only by understanding and remembering how God has forgiven us. The grace that forgave us is the same grace that can lead us to forgive other people.

What do the following verses say about the Cross and about what happened for us there that can help us understand how we can forgive other people? Isaiah 53:6; Romans 4:5; Romans 5:6-8; Ephesians 3:7; 1 Timothy 1:12-15; Hebrews 12:2, 3.

God forgave us our sins, not because

¹⁰unearned—not earned.

we were worthy or because we deserved it. God forgave us only because of grace. Grace means unearned¹⁰ favor. We are not worthy. But God has given us the honor of being called the “children of God” (1 John 3:1, NRSV).

In order to forgive us, Jesus had to accept the sins of the world. God Himself, in the person of His Son, carried in Himself the penalty for all our sins. That is what it cost God to be able to forgive us so freely. That is the greatest of all unfairness.

We must remember that we are all brothers and sisters in sin. The price we have to pay to forgive other people is almost nothing when we think of the great price Jesus, the eternal God, had to pay in order to forgive us.

The only way we can learn to forgive other people is to fall at the foot of the cross and die to self. When we are broken of self, we can be put back together in a way that will let us forgive. When we learn to accept the grace that God wants to give us, we can give grace to other people. When we realize that we have been forgiven, we can begin to forgive.

No one said forgiving would be easy. No one said it would not take pain, prayer, and tears to forgive other people. It takes grace to forgive, and God has plenty of grace for all of us.

What do you say to someone who is a Christian but says, “I have so much bitterness against a person. Please tell me how to get rid of it”?

WED FORGIVING OUR ENEMIES.

“‘You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your friends, hate your enemies.’ But now I [Jesus] tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those [people] who persecute [attack] you, so you may become the sons of your Father in heaven’” (Matthew 5:43-45, TEV).

A good example of Christian forgiveness is shown in Ernest Gordon’s story, *Miracle on the River Kwai*. Gordon tells how he was captured while trying to escape from Sumatra after the fall of Singapore during World War II. Gordon was forced to march with other prisoners into the jungle to build a bridge over the river Kwai. Here a miracle of grace took place. The Holy Spirit gave the prisoners mercy¹¹ toward their enemies.

“We were forced to stand on a side-track for a long stay. We found ourselves on the same track with several carloads of wounded Japanese soldiers. They were on their own and without medical care. . . .

“They were in a shocking state. I have never seen men looking so dirty. Their uniforms were covered with mud, blood and excrement.¹² Their wounds were infected, and full of pus and bugs. . . .

“The wounded men looked at us sadly as they sat with their heads resting against the railroad cars. They were waiting to die. . . .

“Without saying anything, most of the men in my group took off their packs.

They took out part of their ration (food) and a rag or two. With water canteens (holders) in their hands, they went over to the Japanese train to help them. Our guards tried to stop us. But we refused to pay attention to them. We knelt by the side of the enemy to give them food and water, to clean and dress up their wounds, to smile and say a kind word. Cries of ‘Arigatto!’ (‘Thank you!’) followed us when we left.”—Adapted from *Miracle on the River Kwai* (London: Wm. Collins Sons & Co., Ltd., 1963), pp. 162, 163.

What is Jesus’ medicine for a spirit of revenge? Matthew 5:38-42.

Ernest Gordon looked upon his buddies with surprise and amazement. Eighteen months ago they would have tried to kill their enemies if they had fallen into their hands. “Now these same men were dressing the enemy’s wounds. We had experienced a moment of grace in those bloodstained railway cars. God had broken through our hate and had given us the will to obey His command, ‘You shall love’ . . .

“We saw that God was honoring us by allowing us to share in His work . . . for the world He loves.”—Adapted from *Miracle on the River Kwai*, pp. 163, 164.

THU FORTHGIVENESS AND JUSTICE.

“Submit [surrender] yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority

¹¹mercy—kindness we do not deserve.

¹²excrement—bowel movements and urine.

[power] instituted [established] among men: whether to the king, as the supreme [greatest] authority, or to governors, who are sent by him [the king] to punish those [people] who do wrong and to commend [praise] those [people] who do right” (1 Peter 2:13, 14, NIV).

A man does a terrible crime against a woman. He is caught and found guilty. Before sentencing,¹³ the court wants to hear from the woman. What she says will decide whether his sentence will be easy or hard. It is up to her.

Now the woman is a Christian, led by the Holy Spirit to forgive the man who did this crime against her. And she has forgiven him through the grace of Jesus working in her life. She also understands that she herself has been forgiven because of Jesus’ death for her. She has openly announced her forgiveness of the man.

The question is, What does she say to the court? This man has done a terrible crime against her. Does she plead for his freedom? Does she ask that he be given the lightest sentence possible? Or does she seek the greatest possible punishment?

Think about this question from all sides: If he receives a light sentence, he will be free again soon to do the same thing to another woman.

If he is given a light sentence, other men might be tempted to do the same crime. Maybe he really deserves the worst possible punishment. But if she forgives him, should she not want him to be punished as lightly as possible, or maybe not be punished at all? What would you do in a situation like this?

First Peter 2:13, 14 makes it clear that rulers have their part in punishing people who do evil. In a sense, we all do evil (Romans 3:10-18). But the important point to remember is that we need to know the difference between governmental and spiritual matters, between sin and crime.

Maybe we are to forgive all evil things. But forgiving all evil things does not mean that all evil things should go unpunished¹⁴ by law. The difficult part for Christians is how to know the difference. How do we forgive, but at the same time, respect the need for people to be punished by law?

Read Exodus 21:23-26. How do you compare¹⁵ legal¹⁶ truth and spiritual truth with forgiveness?

FRI **ADDITIONAL STUDY:** Read John 21:15-19. “The Savior’s way of dealing with Peter had a lesson for him and his fellow disciples. Peter

¹³sentencing—receiving his punishment.

¹⁴unpunished—not punished.

¹⁵compare—show how things are the same.

¹⁶legal—of the law.

had denied his Lord (John 18). But the love which Jesus had for Peter had never weakened. As an apostle, Peter should take up the work of preaching the word to other people. Peter was to meet the sinner with patience, sympathy, and forgiving love. Remembering his own weakness and failure, Peter was to come for the sheep and lambs as gently as Jesus had cared for him (Peter).”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 516.

Read Luke 7:36-49. “How many people today are showing the same spirit. When the debtor¹⁷ pleaded with his lord for mercy, he had no true sense of how great his debt was. He did not fully understand his helplessness. He hoped to free himself. ‘Have patience with me,’ he said, ‘and I will pay you all.’ So there are many people who hope by their own works to earn God’s favor. They do not understand their helplessness.¹⁸ They do not accept the grace of God as a free gift. Instead, they are trying to build themselves up in self-righteousness (holiness). Their own hearts are not broken because of sin. They are too strict and unforgiving¹⁹ toward other people. Their own sins against God, compared²⁰ with their brother’s sins against them, are as ten thousand talents (dollars) to one hundred pence (pennies)—nearly one million to one. But they dare to refuse to

forgive.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ’s [Jesus’] Object Lessons*, pp. 245–247.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is the point of Matthew 18:21-35. How do we connect this point with God’s grace? Does forgiving other people make us worthy for God to forgive us?



2. How do you understand the work of grace in forgiveness? How is forgiveness an example of grace?
3. What do you say to someone who says that, even as a Christian, it is impossible to forgive the person who raped and murdered his or her daughter?

¹⁷debtor—person who owed a lot of money.

¹⁸helplessness—having no help.

¹⁹unforgiving—not forgiving.

²⁰compared—to have shown how things are the same.