

WHAT IS REAL FORGIVENESS?

“A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city” -Proverbs 18:19 (NKJV)

“Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea until they have something to forgive.” (C. S. Lewis)

“Forgiveness” comes from Old English: **forgiefan** → “to give or allow” or “to give up something.”

Forgiefan is a combination of two Old English words:

for (meaning “completely”) and *giefan* (meaning “give”)

“Forgiveness” in Scripture is translated from one of these words (from the original Hebrew/Greek)...

χαρίζομαι / **Charizomai**

αφεσις / **Aphesis**

נָסָא / **Nasa'**

כָּלַח / **Calach**

אָפִיעִי / **Aphiemi**

These words mean:

- to do something agreeable, pleasant, or as a favor for someone
- to give graciously, to give freely
- to release someone from bondage or imprisonment, or to grant them liberty
- to lift up, to bear, to take away, or to carry away (like the Old Testament scapegoat)
- to send away a debt, or to give up a debt

God's forgiveness towards us is our model for our forgiveness towards others

“Just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you [forgive others]”

(Colossians 3:13, NASB)

So, the question becomes: *How* did He forgive us, so that we can forgive others “just as” He does?

This is how He forgave us...

- ✓ **Eternally.** Forever. He will never take it back. He “remembers our sins no more.”
- ✓ **Freely.** For free, without cost to us. He didn’t make us earn it.
- ✓ **Repeatedly** -- even knowing that we’d commit the same sins again in the future.
- ✓ **Completely.** No wrath, bitterness, or desire to punish remains at all.
- ✓ **Relationally.** He *told* us that He forgave us.

Biblical Forgiveness Is:

The act of freely and completely canceling a moral debt (absorbing the cost yourself), with the effect that you forever give up the right to justice, revenge, and restitution.

This implies a promise to the offender that you will not hold the offense against him/her

- when speaking to others (slander is not permitted),
- when speaking to the offender (their guilt is gone, you have released them),
- in your own mind (grudges and bitterness are not forgiveness)

WHAT IS REAL FORGIVENESS? *continued...*

Forgiveness is not...

- “I’m sorry if I hurt you, I apologize.” | “That’s okay. I accept your apology.”
- Forgiveness is not a promise to never do it again.
- “Forgiveness” is not “forgetting.”
- Forgiveness is not a restoration of trust.

How Do I Know If I've Really Forgiven Someone? Ask yourself questions like these...

- Do I have any bitterness towards this person? Do I have a hard time getting this person's sin off my mind? Do I become increasingly upset every time I think about it?
- Do I want to retaliate? Do I wish evil upon the offender? Or am I content to let God take as much time as He wants to make things right?
- Am I keeping score? Am I comparing myself to the offender?
- Do I talk about this person's offense to other people (gossip)?
- Did I grant forgiveness quickly, without taking time to realize how much 'debt' and pain I am agreeing to absorb?
- Am I willing to seek to build trust with the person again?

This question is not, “Are you ready to trust the person again?” Trust is earned, and that's a process that takes time. But are you willing to seek to build that trust again? Or, are you “keeping” their offense as a reason not to? Forgiveness = releasing the offense, which is the opposite of “keeping.”

- Am I ready to sit in heaven next to this person for all eternity?
- Do I have a 'you-owe-me' attitude, an expectation that you need to somehow make it up to me? Do I hold your offense over you in order to exert some control over you or over a situation?
- Do I set a limit on how many times I will forgive you? Is it really in the past, or does it still have an effect by limiting the amount of times I will forgive you?
- “If you will _____ then I'll forgive you.” Does my forgiveness depend on restitution, or require a commitment to never repeat the sin? Did my forgiveness have to be bought?
- Did I give forgiveness? In other words, did I “give grace” to someone *relationally*? Or was my “forgiveness” just an act of pushing the issue behind me only for my own emotional benefit?
- Would I want God to deal with me & my sin the same way I dealt with this person and their sin?

The Lord is the great Judge of each person; if His level of forgiveness to you were to change and become the same as your level of forgiveness towards others, would you become a bit nervous?