

# Forgiving— The Easy Part of Reconciliation

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**F**orgiving is a beautiful attribute of a Christian and a needed characteristic for the follower of Christ. The Bible tells us that unless we forgive, we cannot be forgiven. Matthew 6:14-15 instructs us, “For 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.”

Our forgiving of others must be totally unconditional. We have heard people say things like, “I could forgive him, if he only would apologize.” Or “I can forgive; but I can’t forget.” If these are our attitudes, it means we are not yet willing to forgive.

Another thing we hear is, “I have forgiven them as much as possible. Their actions did a lot of damage to me. I have to face it every day! But I have forgiven as much as I can ...” We really need to think about this. Would we want God to forgive us only “as much as possible”?

Our forgiving of others must be total and sincere. It dare not be dependent on the repentance of the offender, or whether or not he deserves to be forgiven. How many of us deserve the mercy and forgiveness of God? In Matthew 18, Jesus tells the story of a king who forgave a servant a great debt. But then the forgiven servant went out and persecuted a fellow servant who owed him a trivial amount.

Forgiving is sometimes easy. The overwhelming love the father had for the prodigal son far surpassed a duty to forgive. And that is often the case. If we have a Christlike love, forgiving is not a chore. What a blessing it is when an offender comes to ask forgiveness, and we can honestly tell him he was forgiven long before he asked for it.

## Abusing forgiveness

Although forgiving is obviously a needed Christian trait, it can be presented wrongly. When it comes with a smug attitude, it can be downright obnoxious to the other party. Telling an offender that we forgive them while they still believe they are on the right side of an issue can be, and often is, deemed self-righteous and arrogant. And it may very well be just that.

We get this good feeling because we took the initiative and forgave. We convince ourselves that we are spiritually superior because we took the “holy” step of forgiving one who offended or perhaps betrayed us. We believe that the ball is now in their court, and if they only forgive us as freely as we have forgiven them, it would all be over. We think, “Of course, an apology on their part would also be in order ... in any event, my heart is clear. I have forgiven.”

But God tells us in Jeremiah 17:9-10, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.” We are also warned in Proverbs 28:26 that, “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered.”

So how do we resolve conflict? If we can look at this issue objectively, the answer is very obvious. But it requires us to go much deeper than simply saying “I forgive you.”

## The biblical answer

In a nutshell, the answer is “Repent.” Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:23-24: “Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.” Please notice that He does *not* say, “If you have ought against your brother, forgive him.” This instruction is for when you remember that “thy brother hath ought against thee ...”

Repentance, or *asking* forgiveness, is a far more effective way to be reconciled than *offering* forgiveness to another. Forgiving is usually the easy part. True repentance and *asking* forgiveness from others requires humility, brokenness, and sorrow for one’s actions. This kind of repentance comes only from a heart that is of a broken and a contrite spirit, which God promises not to despise. Ps. 51:17, Is. 66:2, etc.

We can be sure that encouragement to repentance from Jesus, Peter, Paul, and others is not only repentance toward God, although that is of utmost priority. Our repen-

tance must also be to those we have offended. When possible, restitution should be part of our repentance.

Perhaps you ask, “But what if the other person is wrong and I know I am right on the issue? His actions and words were so far off that it is no wonder that I became angry and said things I shouldn’t have! Should I ask him to forgive me when I am certain the things he said or did were wrong?” The answer is an unequivocal “Yes!” But if I apologize for losing my temper or having an un-Christ-like attitude, will I not be conceding that he may have been right on the issues? The answer is: Absolutely not!

The opposing party will be far more likely to reflect on the correctness of his position when he sees our repentance. Invariably, a sincere apology that is absent of excuses or reasons will awaken a desire for reconciliation. If we can grasp this clear biblical principle, it has the potential to restore business, personal, and even church relationships.

In 2 Chronicles 7:14 God tells us: “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.” This can be applied to our families, communities, and even our churches.

When our children have their little quarrels, we tell them the most mature will be the first to ask forgiveness. We would do well to also apply this truth as adults.

## Conclusion

When Christians clash it is almost always that both parties are at fault. One side may be mostly right and the other mostly wrong. But there is usually much room for even the side that is more right to repent. And often this will be a step toward healing broken relationships.

Repentance is often a fast track to forgiveness, in both forgiving others and obtaining forgiveness from them. It is the road to freedom from anger, bitterness, and resentment. When we acknowledge our own sins, it becomes very easy to forgive others of theirs. Hence, the title of this article: “Forgiveness—The Easy Part of Reconciliation.”

We can’t control the actions of other people. They may at times be hurtful, obnoxious, and wrongheaded. They may not respond right to our repentance. We can’t help that. But we can control our own actions and reactions, with the help of the Holy Spirit. And we can choose how the actions of others will affect us. Godly sorrow and repentance is a beautiful and healing attribute. And it is the will of God. ~