

Forgiveness – A Biblical Principle

Introduction

While preparing for another study, an interesting fact came to life. The study I was preparing for was a study from Daniel chapter 9. When running cross references between Daniel 9 and what we are presented with in the New Testament, an interesting fact came to light. That study in Daniel 9 led to this study on forgiveness. As we get into this message, you will see what I mean. So let's get started with our look at the idea of forgiveness as presented to us from Scripture.

A Definition Of Forgiveness

Forgiveness, as defined in the American Dictionary Of The English Language, is given as,

1. The act of forgiving; the pardon of an offender, by which he is considered and treated as not guilty. The *forgiveness* of enemies is a christian duty.
2. The pardon or remission of an offense or crime; as the *forgiveness* of sin or of injuries.
3. Disposition to pardon; willingness to forgive.
 And mild *forgiveness* intercede
 To stop the coming blow. *Dryden.*
4. Remission of a debt, fine or penalty.

Noah Webster states in the first definition of forgiveness that it is the duty of Christians to forgive their enemies. We, as Christians, should live our lives with a willingness to forgive. We should actually be looking for the opportunity to forgive someone who has caused us injury or committed an offense against us. As we continue on here, though, we will learn that there are rules, if you will, for forgiveness. There must be certain things in place in order for forgiveness to have any meaning at all. We will see that the idea of forgiving without our offender seeking our forgiveness is stretching the idea of forgiveness into an area that is not scripturally correct. Another notion that is not correct is that we should just forgive someone and then forget the offense. Even God does not forget an offense, He just does not charge the offense against us when we seek forgiveness. Let's take a look at what all this means.

What Does Forgiveness Require?

It is good for us to go about our lives ready and willing to forgive those who fault us. How we do that, however, is not immediately clear, if we do not look at what scripture has to say. Should we just forgive and forget? The answer to that is no. We are not required to relieve ourselves of our own good common sense in this area. If we forgive and forget the offense of someone against us, we are likely to have that same person cause that same offense against us. The same reasoning applies to forgiving someone without their seeking our forgiveness. This subject is an important one and it is one that Jesus addressed with His disciples. Let's take a look at Luke 17:1 – 4,

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Luke 17:1–4 (KJV)

¹ Then said he unto the disciples, **It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come!**

² **It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.**

³ **Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.**

⁴ **And 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.**

Jesus is telling his disciples here that offenses will come. There will be people who will cause offenses against you. He adds in that first verse, “but woe unto him, through whom they come!” In this section he is speaking about those who offend “one of these little ones.” Matthew 18:1 – 6 will shed some light on the conversation going on,

Matthew 18:1–6 (KJV)

¹ At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

² And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,

³ And said, **Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.**

⁴ **Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.**

⁵ **And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.**

⁶ **But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and *that* he were drowned in the depth of the sea.**

Jesus had called a little child to himself and put the child in the middle of the group. He instructed them that unless they converted and became as little children, they would not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Just as Jesus humbled himself and became man, we must humble ourselves and become as little children in order to enter into the kingdom of heaven. We can see from what we read that verse 6 here in Matthew 18 and verse 2 of Luke 17 are talking about the same thing. Now Luke 17 goes on with what we are looking at. Luke 17:3 begins our instruction of forgiveness,

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Luke 17:3 (KJV)

³ Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.

There are rules for forgiveness. Notice here, Jesus is telling his disciples to “take heed to yourselves:” This is something that needs to be paid attention to! If there is an offense, then you must start with rebuking the offender. Notice it does not say you should just forgive him. Those who do are jumping the gun. It requires rebuke first. Noah Webster defines rebuke in this way,

1. To chide; to reprove; to reprehend for a fault; to check by reproof.

I especially like the last part of this first definition, to check by reproof. Scripture is always the best source of information and definitions of scriptural topics or words. Jesus tells his disciples exactly what the idea of reproof is in Matthew 18:15,

Matthew 18:15 (KJV)

¹⁵ Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

Now, the person who caused the trespass has a choice. They can either repent of the offense or not. Both of these scenarios are covered in scripture! Jesus said in verse 15, “if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.” It should be noted here, too, that you should go and tell the person who trespassed against you and not tell everyone else about it. Jesus tells them, “go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone:” That is the first step. Matthew 18:16 – 18 shows us how to handle the one who does not respond to our reproof,

Matthew 18:16–17 (KJV)

¹⁶ But if he will not hear *thee*, *then* take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

¹⁷ And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

These words are ones that go completely against the grain of many of the professing Christians in the world today and the churches they belong to. At least that’s the way they talk, anyway. In this world of “can’t we all just get along” mentality, this section is overlooked completely. If you love someone, then sometimes you have to do those things which may make you feel a bit uncomfortable at first. If the person who trespasses against you will not repent when you reprove them, then scripture tells us to do so in the presence of two or three witnesses so that every word may be established. If this person still will not respond to the reproof, then you tell it unto the church. If the trespasser continues in his way of

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not repenting, then you are to treat him as a heathen man and a publican. In other words, he is no longer welcome. As we shall see a bit later, if this person should repent, then you need to forgive him.

Verse 4 further refines the process for us,

Luke 17:4 (KJV)

⁴ And 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.

Jesus is telling his disciples here that as often as this person may trespass against you, and repents, then you are to forgive him on every occasion. Interestingly, Jesus uses the example of being trespassed against seven times in a day and seven times repenting, then seven times forgiveness is to be granted. So, we see that in order for forgiveness to be granted there must first be repentance.

Is There A Limit To Forgiveness?

Let's look now at Matthew 18:21 – 22,

Matthew 18:21–22 (KJV)

²¹ Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?

²² Jesus saith unto him, **I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.**

Now we notice here that Peter has not quite got the idea, yet. In a sense, Peter is asking Jesus, So, I only have to forgive my brother seven times in a day? Jesus responds to him in verse 22. The King James Version of the Bible is the only Bible around where you will find the truth that we are about to discover here. None of the new translations, from the early 1900's to the present, have this verse like the King James Bible does. This is to their discredit, as we shall see. When Jesus responds as recorded here in the King James Bible, he does so with the word "Until" and in both cases it is capitalized. Why is this so important? It is important because by not using the word "until" and not capitalizing it, you will miss the meaning behind it that is about to be shown. Every other translation leaves out the word, "until" and comes to a wrong conclusion about this verse. Every other translation turns this verse into a finite number of times we are to forgive our brother. But as we have even seen before, this is not the case. The greatest majority of the new versions turn this into forgiving your brother 490 times or seventy times seven. The ESV even goes as far as to corrupt this by somehow saying this means 77 times! If you go to any of the new translations, you will find a footnote describing the number in this verse.

To properly understand this verse, you will need to rightly divide the word of truth. The word, "until" is capitalized in both cases because Jesus is quoting someone in each case. When Jesus says, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times..." because he is quoting Peter here who just asked if they were to forgive

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their brother seven times. Jesus then quotes Daniel when he uses the second occurrence of the capitalized word, “Until.” Let’s take a look at Daniel 9:24,

Daniel 9:24 (KJV)

²⁴ Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy.

We see here that Daniel is being told by Gabriel that “seventy weeks are determined upon thy people...” A week is seven days, so this seventy weeks is the same as seventy times seven. This is the verse Jesus was quoting when he responded to Peter. As you may know 69 of these weeks have been fulfilled already and the seventieth week is waiting to happen. This is not for the church, but for the nation of Israel. Gabriel specifically said seventy weeks are determined upon THY PEOPLE. This seventieth week is what is known as the Time of Jacobs Trouble; it is what we read about as the time described in the book of Revelation.

So, what exactly does Jesus mean then when he says to Peter that they are to forgive their brother until seventy times seven? It means that until the seventieth week is completed as told to Daniel by Gabriel, you are to continue forgiving your brother whenever he repents. Notice what the rest of Daniel 9:24 says about this period of time. It says these seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, (Jerusalem), to:

Finish the transgression,

Make an end of sins,

Make reconciliation for iniquity,

To bring in everlasting righteousness,

To seal up the vision and prophecy, and

To anoint the most Holy.

When these seventy weeks are completed there will no longer be a need to forgive anyone because there will no longer be any effects of the transgression, there will be no more sin, iniquity will be reconciled and there will be everlasting righteousness as prophesied because Jesus will be anointed as King.

What we get out of this then is there are in a sense two limits to forgiveness and that only during this time before those seventy weeks are completed. One limit is whether the person to be forgiven will repent. The second is the willingness of the person doing the forgiving will do so. Both you see require

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us to act in a way that is pleasing to God. In one respect, we need to recognize that if we trespass against someone, we need to seek forgiveness by repenting. On the other hand, we must, as we stated in the beginning of this study, be walking in a spirit of forgiveness.

The Thing That Brings It All Together

To put this whole study into perspective, we need only to consider the relationship of forgiveness between us and God. John 3:16 – 17 says,

John 3:16–17 (KJV)

¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

¹⁷ For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

God recognized our need to be saved, to be forgiven, if you will. A thought that seems to be more prevalent these days is that God will just forgive all of us whether we repent or not. As we see here, however, our forgiveness requires action on our part. It requires us to believe on the only begotten Son of God. If we believe then we do not perish, but receive everlasting life. The love of God is such that He has provided us the way to everlasting life. He did this because we could not save ourselves. But, it requires repentance on our part. Romans 6:23 tells us,

Romans 6:23 (KJV)

²³ For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This shows that if we do not receive the gift of eternal life from God through Jesus Christ our Lord, we will earn death.

God gave us the free gift of salvation and all we have to do is believe on Jesus to receive this free gift. We read earlier from Luke that forgiveness requires repentance. If we do not repent of our sins to God, we shall perish. This is not my own statement, but told to us by Jesus. Consider what He said in Luke 13:2 – 5,

Luke 13:2–5 (KJV)

² And Jesus answering said unto them, **Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things?**

³ **I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.**

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⁴ Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?

⁵ I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

We are all sinners needing to repent of our sins and believe on Jesus. Will you repent and be forgiven? Will you forgive others when they repent of sins against you?

Remember, God did not send His only begotten Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it. It is true that the consequences of our sin can affect us in this life, but the guilt of that sin is gone forever when we repent of that sin to God. He always forgives us of our sins when we repent and thereby seek that forgiveness. A famous psychiatrist, Karl Menninger, said that if he could convince his patients in psychiatric hospitals that they are forgiven, 75% of them could walk out the next day. Forgiveness is a powerful tool that we have in our arsenal, and one we should not only practice providing, but also willing to receive.