

FORGIVENESS

How is the term forgive currently defined?:

Forgive - “to give up resentment... or claim of requital (compensation or retaliation)”
(Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

The Bible:

- The original New Testament Greek word for “forgive” is “aphiemi” which means “to send away,” “to disregard,” or “to let go.” (Strong’s Concordance w/ NASB)
- The Old Testament Hebrew word for forgive is “kawphar” which means “to coat or cover over,” or “to make atonement for.” (Strong’s Concordance w/ NASB) Atonement means to appease or satisfy.
- The Bible is God’s story about His relationship with us, what went wrong, and how He planned to re-establish that relationship with us. To cancel the debt that was created when we (via our first parents Adam and Eve) sinned and disobeyed God, God sent us His Son Jesus Christ to be that Payment (“atonement sacrifice”) on our behalf. Since God is perfect and sinless, the Payment had to also be perfect and sinless (Hebrews 4:14-16). Anything less would not do to satisfy the debt incurred. The one requirement is that we must accept the free gift Jesus made on our behalf by placing our faith in Jesus and surrendering our will to Him as our Lord and Savior (Romans 10:9-10).

Back to forgiveness:

- So, to be clear, when a hurtful action towards another person occurs, it creates a debt, or “claim” (meaning compensation, payment, or restitution is required) in order to restore that relationship. If the debt is not paid, true restoration or reconciliation cannot be achieved. It is fake if we pretend it to be so.
- Forgiveness therefore is a “cancellation” of the debt incurred by another who has hurt or wronged us. By cancelling the debt, we are not pretending it does not exist but are actually turning over the matter to God to leave room for His wrath, not ours. It is God who avenges, not us. (Key passage: Romans 12:17-21)

What forgiveness IS:

- Giving it over to God and trusting in Him to take care of it.
- It is a restoration of our relationship with God. Otherwise, if we don’t forgive others, He does not forgive us (Matthew 6:14-15).
- It is a commandment, not a suggestion. (Colossians 3:13; Ephesians 4:32)
- This does not mean we lose our salvation. But it does mean we damage our intimacy with God and may lose protection, guidance and blessings until we forgive. However, for those who choose never to forgive, how can they call Jesus Lord?
- When we do sin (hold a grudge, hate or fail to forgive), we restore our relationship with God through confession and repentance (1 John 1:9), and obedience (Matthew 7:24-27).

What forgiveness is NOT:

- It is not a feeling. So, don’t wait to forgive until you feel like it.
- It is not trusting someone who has wronged us. Trust needs to be earned.
- It is not liking the person, or what was done to us, or pretending the wrong was OK. (see 1 Corinthians 5:9-11; 2 Thessalonians 3:11-15; Matthew 18:15-17 for some examples of this)
- It does not mean we are automatically reconciled to the person who wronged us. Reconciliation requires that person to repent and ask for our forgiveness in order to restore the relationship with us (see Luke 17:3-4).

Questions for personal application:

- 1) Is there sin that is unconfessed before God that is holding you back from all that He has for you?
- 2) Who do you yet need to forgive, even if that person is no longer living? Why does that matter?
- 3) How does unforgiveness keep someone **captive** and make them a prisoner?
- 4) Why is it important that God forgives us? (see Psalm 32:1-5)
- 5) **Jesus paid the price we could not pay, for a debt He did not owe! Why???** (John 3:16)