

How Can I Be Forgiven

by Dr. Manford George Gutzke

To Forgive Is To Give

Do you have a clear idea what it means to really forgive?

"And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." How many times we have used these words when we have repeated the Lord's Prayer, and "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Living is a matter of being right with God, and being right with man. Yes, the Ten Commandments show that. What would happen if a man disobeyed the Ten Commandments? That would be sin.

Sin is here, and because there is sin, there is guilt. Every human being on earth is responsible to his Creator for his conduct. He'll be judged according to the light that he has, and knowing he's going to be judged, there's not a human being that doesn't have in his own bones the feeling of responsibility, and the feeling that he deserves to be and will be judged for what he has done. This is what guilt means.

Now there's no question about how God feels about sin. The Bible is as clear as day about it. He's against it! It's true "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. There is none righteous, no not one." But it's also wonderfully true that "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." "In the fulness of time, God sent forth His Son, to redeem them that were under the law." And "God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly." Now it is true that God will for Christ's sake forgive sin.

There are many ideas abroad in the world today about what forgiveness means, many of which are simply not true. For example, some people will feel that when you say God forgives sin, that means that God says, "Oh well it's all right." Oh no! It isn't all right! He is of purer eyes than to behold evil. He'll not tolerate it.

Then someone will say, "Well, with reference to the things that go wrong, nobody is really to blame." Oh, but they are! The truth of the matter is I am responsible for what I did. Other people will say, "When you say that God forgives sin, what you're saying is that God says in a nice kind way, "Oh well, let's just forget it." Oh no! that's impossible. You know if God were just to pass over sin like that the devil would laugh at Him.

If God is going to rule over all things in the universe, "whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." You see, the injury has been done. The injured person will remember and he is waiting to be vindicated. When you're talking about God and sin, sin's got to be taken up and actually handled.

To understand what happens when one person does wrong to another person, suppose that a man cheats me out of \$40. Simply put, he has done me wrong, and he is now under obligation to return to me the \$40 that he cheated from me. This action on his part has created a barrier between us. How can one remove that barrier? You might say, "Well, he could pay it." But suppose he hasn't got it? I could forgive the debt! Never forget, the basic element in forgiving is giving. This must not be taken lightly. In the first place the obligation is real. He actually owes me \$40, and I am entitled to collect it or its equivalent.

Now Moses' law about this is very explicit. Moses would say in a situation like this, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." Now some people are offended by that. They say, "Oh, that's terrible." Yes, it's terrible. But don't forget it was terrible when he took my \$40. Do you know where that expression "an

eye for an eye" came from? It would be the case if two men got into a fight with each other and one man knocked an eye out of the other man. Now, they come before Moses to decide what should be done, and Moses would say, "You lost one eye, you can knock out one eye." You'd say, "Well, that's terrible." Yes it is. It was a terrible thing that fellow lost his eye in the first place. Suppose a man does me an injustice and knocks out one of my eyes and I'm going to act naturally. Do you think I want to knock out his eye? Why listen, I want to knock off his whole block

You see, when he says "a tooth for a tooth," that means that in the course of the fight between us, he knocks out my tooth. Now what's natural? To knock out his tooth? No! To knock out every tooth in his head. That's natural. Now Moses would say, "Oh no! How many teeth did you lose? One? One's all you get!" That's justice. That's fairness. I don't know whether you realize it or not, but that's love already in action. That means that when I go to collect from the man that owes me \$40, I can get \$40 and no more!

This is not forgiveness. When we think about forgiveness, we can think about the Lord Jesus on the cross, and when those soldiers were putting Him to death, He lifted up His voice to God saying, "Father, forgive them. They know not what they do." Or when Stephen was stoned to death, before he died he lifted up his voice with a loud cry and said, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Now what they were doing was sin, it was actually wrong. But Stephen asked that it be overlooked and not charged against them. Now to forgive does not mean to condone it. It does not mean to say it was all right. He really owes me the \$40, and it does matter.

To forgive is to give him release from ever repaying. He can go free. I'll never collect it. Now someone will say, "Well, why not do that? Why not forgive?" Because it hurts to let the other man go. Don't you know that revenge is sweet? To let him go means I'll lose my \$40!

God for Christ's sake has forgiven me. He bore my sins in His own body. In suffering and distress He died on cruel Calvary for me! He carried my sins away. Now there's nothing between myself and God. It's a wonderful thing to be forgiven your sins, through Christ Jesus, and mark my word, you can be totally and permanently and fully and freely forgiven, totally forgiven. God will never hold anything against you.

Forgiveness Involves Meekness

Forgiveness! It's of the Lord Jesus Christ as He was dying on Calvary's Cross, speaking to His Father about people who were doing wrong to Him, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do."

In many ways we say, "It's not good for man to be alone." This is broader than we might think as it enters every aspect of a person's being.

When God made man, He arranged that man would never be alone. God would always be with him. In his plan God made woman so that man would never be alone. But sin entered into the human experience and ruined things so far as the plan of creation was concerned. You remember that the first two men born into the world the normal way, Cain and Abel, as brothers, demonstrated the result of sin.

One of the words that was revealed to Moses on the Mount was "Thou shalt not kill." This is an eternal law of God. Now this means far more than just ending another person's physical life. This commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," is broken whenever there is ill-will against anyone, when deep down in my heart I just hold something against someone, it's just like killing that person.

John in his First Epistle has much to say about how hating a brother is sin. In fact, he says, "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer." You and I might find that rather strong language, but it is true. Hating does not need to be violent, or expressed in vicious words or overt in action. If I just wish that someone didn't exist; that the world would be better off without them, I need to watch that! Or I can ignore that other person's presence, just live and act as if they didn't exist, I'm really doing what is meant by hating.

Our interest in this, is in the matter of fellowship; in being together with people. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "You yourselves are taught of God to love one another." And again John writes in his First Epistle, "We ought also to love one another." Why? Because we live in this world and this happens to be God's world, and believe it or not, God made those other people, and He's letting them live also.

What hinders our living together in loving fellowship? Sin! Sin in the form of selfishness. I can just be so interested in the things of my own and have such pride, that I want to get everything I possibly can. I can have such envy about anyone else who I think has more than I have. I can have jealousy about anyone else who I think is in better standing than I and in all of this, I am sinning; breaking the fellowship. In serving self, I can actually offend and harm others.

In the give and take of living with other people, it's a natural thing for me to respond to them according to the way they do to me. When I receive from another, I owe him, I have obligation to him. If another receives from me, he owes me, he has obligation to me. Sometimes this exchange is one-sided. The other man takes when I do not give, and now his debt to me is even greater. In other words, he steals!

Debts are just terrible, they cause estrangement between people. They lead to alienation, and can lead to hostility. It could be money, or the way he treats me, or perhaps it can be his attitude; but if he doesn't do what I think he should do, I can hold it against him. This becomes ill-will, even hatred, and living is blemished. And such hatred is actually sinful. Now the estrangement needs reconciliation. This calls for forgiveness.

This promise of forgiveness in which we rejoice, so freely offered to anybody, whosoever will come, has one condition with it. "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." The forgiven man must forgive others. He's not going to be forgiven and be allowed to hold a grudge against other people. Christ came into the world to effect a reconciliation between man and man and between man and God.

The person at fault often doesn't make the first move. It is his responsibility to do so, but he's not going to do it. The one who has been hurt is also admonished to remove the hindrance. Each party has the responsibility to act first to forgive and affect reconciliation. There is much to be learned and understood in all this.

Men are sinners, but the Lord Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. He takes the initiative. He comes to forgive and to bring the forgiven soul to God. Between man and man, it's the Christian that must take the initiative and forgive the other in order to promote communion. The natural, unforgiven man will not seek reconciliation with God. He's just foolish enough to feel he doesn't need it. In Scripture, sinful man does not seek out God. He hides away from the presence of God. It is God who seeks the sinner. The Christian who has Christ in him, who has suffered wrong, will seek the wrongdoer.

To forgive anyone, to give to the other person release from his obligation, requires meekness. Now meekness is related to humility, it isn't the same thing. Meekness is related to humility like a child is related to a parent. It is my esteem of myself. It's the opposite of pride, but meekness is in my response when I'm being hurt, when I respond to other people by no retaliation. You remember the passage that says, "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth. He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth."

Paul has an application of this in mind when he wrote to the Corinthians and said this, "Now therefore, there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourself to be defrauded?" This is not strange in a home. That's about the only way in some cases where a wife or a mother, or a father or a brother can get along. This meekness, the failure to retaliate is not natural, but it is spiritual. It's beyond equity, beyond justice, beyond fairness; it requires the grace of Christ Jesus.

So many feel that we are supposed to wait and be asked by the man who has done us wrong to forgive him. That's not scriptural. If I wait until he comes and asks me, the chances are I'll wait a long time. Again, I am not to wait until he comes and asks me. I am personally to see to it that he is forgiven to

begin with, not because he asks me but because I want to have fellowship with him, I'm not going to let anything that has happened between us divide us.

Does this mean that if I have been wronged and there is alienation or estrangement between me and the person who has done me wrong, and I want fellowship with that person, I must forgive him to start with? By giving up to him? That's exactly what it means.

This is what God does, "While we were yet sinners. Christ died for the ungodly." The great wonderful truth of the Gospel is that God seeks the sinner. It's the Good Shepherd that goes out to find the lost sheep and bring the lost sheep home. We read about the Lord Jesus Christ, "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." But you see, He came unto them. He knew the treatment He would receive. He knew that they would neglect Him, finally reject Him, they would even kill Him, but that didn't keep Him from coming. And He came to them and offered to them the forgiveness of God.

The Lord Jesus said, with reference to the men who put Him on the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." And remember when Stephen was stoned to death because he said he had seen the Lord? They gnashed on him with their teeth and they hurled rocks and killed him, throwing stones at him. And it says about that as he was dying he cried with a loud voice, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." And then the Bible says, in your ordinary translation, he fell asleep. But the Greek for that is "he fell on slumber," the way a baby falls asleep in its mother's arms. That's the way Stephen fell asleep. They were stoning him to death. Isn't that wonderful? There wasn't any great power in Stephen. It wasn't that he was so good. It wasn't because Stephen had special will power. But God! God moved out to forgive.

That's the very essence of the Gospel. And He wants me who has been blessed, whom He has received, whom He has given His grace and mercy, He wants me to show that grace and mercy to other people. Start right today, let them go. Let them off the hook! Drown all those old grudges of yours. You say, "Well, I can't do it!" No, you can't, but Christ can! And He will. If you will turn your heart over to Him.

Forgiving Needs Grace

Do you think it is right to forgive a person who has not repented of the wrong that he has done to you?

We have seen that the essence of forgiveness is giving. If I'm going to forgive anybody it means that I give to that person release from any obligation to make up what he has done wrong to me. It's letting him go. As we say, it's letting him off the hook. Holding nothing against him. I suffer the loss.

It's not easy to do, and it's so right at the very outset for us to realize that since forgiving is actually a matter of giving, then the whole experience of forgiving shares the common problem of giving to other people. When I give anything, I take something that's mine, and give it to someone to be his, and it's no longer own.

If giving is so important and if it's so related to our spiritual blessing, why not just freely give? Well, there are a number of reasons. Frankly, I like what is mine. I'd like to keep it, I can't afford to give it away. I might need it. After all, he had as much chance as I had to get it. Then again, I'd give it to him and he'd just waste it. Or perhaps he's not worthy to receive what I worked so hard to get. All of which goes to show that naturally when I give, I want returns. I want to give to my advantage. And here is the blemish in so much of the natural giving that we do. Right away I want to tell you, this is not righteous. Do you remember how Paul put it? "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich."

Since what is true about giving is true about forgiving, what we are saying is that the real meaning

of my giving is greatly reduced. It's to be much discounted, if when I give I look to see whether or not he's worthy, or whether or not I like him. In giving, I should judge the circumstances, not the person. I should give where there is need, not where there is virtue. We should be very careful that we give to the poor because of his poverty, not because of the kind of person that he is.

All of this is actually inspired by the action of the Lord Jesus Himself. Paul says, "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly." I'll tell you right now when it comes to doing something for someone that is not worthy, I only need to remember what Christ Jesus did for me. Now believe me, I wasn't worthy, and if He had stopped to look at me, He'd never have done it. I was in need. I was lost, and He gave Himself for me.

Our Lord Jesus said, "Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect." "Love your enemies." Now when it says "love your enemies," this does not mean like them. It doesn't mean you approve them.

The scriptural meaning of love is not a matter of sentiment. Love, in the Bible, is not a word that deals with your inward feeling. It deals with your outward actions. To love anyone in the Bible sense is to do for that person, to give to that person. The feeling you might have is one of pity, or compassion. But the word "love" as is used when "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son," it doesn't mean He liked it. But the world was in darkness and He sent His Son to bring light. To love is to *do for*, to give to anybody, everybody, whosoever. Remember, we do not give because the man is worthy, nor even because he will appreciate it, we give because the man is in need.

We are to forgive this person, no matter who it is. And the only practical procedure I know is just to forgive everybody, every time. Someone will say to me, "I just can't do that. I do not have it in me." But God does, and Christ in you will do this. So, throw away your old hurts. You'll say, "Well, this will kill me." Probably so! But you can win because you can be raised from the dead. "Reckon yourself to be also dead indeed." And again, Why? Not for their sakes, but for the sake of the name of Christ Jesus your Lord. It's a glory to Him when you let His grace work through you. In all this business, of forgiveness, we need the grace of God in our hearts.

Forgiveness Brings Blessing

"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." These words are taken from the Sermon on the Mount.

Up until now, we have been sharing what forgiving will cost me. But now I want to tell you what I'll get out of it. Blessing will come to me when I forgive the man what he owes me. Then God will forgive me what I owe Him. And I'll tell you, that's far, far more than that man ever owed me. Receiving forgiveness from God is involved with my forgiving others. It's almost as if when you open the door to receive God's mercy, you're going to have to let your own mercy go out.

Because of what we know about the human heart, the first action will come from God. It's God who is going to forgive me out of His grace, and then I am in the very same process almost to forgive other people. In Hebrews 8:12 we read, "And their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." Now that was a quotation from Jeremiah 31:34 where God said, "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Jesus of Nazareth taught us that as we pray in asking God for forgiveness, we're to use these words, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." This seems to be the only petition in the Lord's prayer that could be counted as conditional or as provisional. I am to be forgiven as I forgive. It seems as if when the heart is open to receive the grace of God, it's as though out through that open door should go the grace of God to other people.

When I was over in Taiwan, some years ago, I was very much intrigued by looking at the fields

where they were growing rice. I grew up in the country and I saw how this was, that they let water run in there and cover the whole field. I often wondered in my own mind why that soil didn't get sour and kill those plants. Every time I knew about water lying anywhere it would kill the grass or plants. And then I found out every single one of those rice paddies has an outlet, the water runs in, and across the field on the other side the water runs out. And it's because the water runs out that the water stays sweet and the plants can grow. Can you see what that would do in forgiveness? If God gives His grace to me in forgiving me, I need to forgive somebody else so the grace of God may flow through me.

If you're not accustomed to farming, maybe you're accustomed to electricity. Do you recognize the fact that so far as having electrical current passing through the wires in your house, you've got to have an outlet? Do you know that as long as you don't turn on the lights so that they'll burn, there won't be any electricity show on the meter? It's got to have an outlet for the electricity to pass through. You and I need to give out the grace of God if we want to receive the grace of God. If I use it, if I put it to work, I'll have it. There'll be plenty of it coming. If I don't use it, if I don't show the grace of God to other people, let me not fool myself. There'll be none for me.

In spite of everything, we're inclined to think that well, we'll receive the blessing and then we have it. Then if we feel real good about it and want to, we'll give some away to somebody else. Oh, no! That's not the way it is. If I receive the blessing from God I'm to open my heart and let it pour out to other people and the more I open my heart and the more I give away, the more I'll have. There is that passage in the Bible that says, there is that which the more that is given away, the more a man has. And that is exactly it.

In Matthew 18:23 we read, "Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants." Then it goes on through this whole parable and you'll remember how one man owed him a large amount, 10,000 talents, and he couldn't pay and the owner forgave the man. He had another servant, this servant had another servant that owed him a hundred pence. He laid hands on him and took him by the throat saying, "Pay me this thou owest." They came and told the master that the man he had forgiven would not forgive his fellow servant. "And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." You know this sounds as though I could lose my forgiveness. The word is yes. One thing is sure, forgiving others is involved in my being forgiven.

In Mark 11:25-26 we read, "And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses." That's the truth my friend! If you and I have had any dealings with the Lord and we've been forgiven, mark it down. Just simply tell yourself plainly and clearly. I'd better forgive the other fellow. Believe me, it's worth it.

With all that I owed to God, and the little the other man did to me, should I lose my great salvation because this other man has bothered me and I won't forgive him? Christ Jesus came to reconcile me to God. Then He gives me the ministry of reconciliation and tells me to go out as an ambassador and tell people that they're to come to God. How are you going to illustrate it? How am I going to give people the idea that God will forgive them? Very simply! I'll forgive them.

This ministry of reconciliation is not something special, an emergency that occurs once a month or once in a year. It's a normal constant continuous thing. I don't mind telling you that in the time I've been studying this, to share it with you, I have been struck by the fact that the Christian person, a believing person should go around all set, all ready to forgive anybody, anything, anytime. That's what I said. Just exactly that! I mean everybody, everything, everytime.

You cannot hold a grudge and be blessed. Listen, fellowship with that other person is worth far more than you getting back what little bit he owes you. Let it go. Leave him with God. It's an investment you're making for the joy, peace and blessing of God.

Make sure so far as you are concerned that there are no loose ends in your consciousness of any quarrel or contention, that you have with anybody when you come to pray. I can actually bring me into line for the blessing of God very simply, just forgive, anybody, everybody, about anything, everything, in the Lord. And God will forgive me. I wasn't worthy, I hadn't anything to bring and He freely forgave me.

Forgiveness Is Forever

If a man became a Christian and believed in Christ, do you think that memories of his past sins would ever need to bother him?

"And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." As men live they will do wrong, they will sin. There is no man that sinneth not, and as people live together someone will do things that are actually hurtful to another person. They will trespass against each other. These things are human. Now it's the glory of the Gospel that Christ receiveth sinful men, "though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

We have noted that in our receiving the blessing of the Gospel, the receiving the forgiveness of sin, that this is actually involved in our sharing this blessing with others, that we are not only just to receive this for ourselves, but we are to then show it unto others.

Now to be able to share this great blessing of forgiveness involves giving the other person release from any obligation that he may have toward me. And that forgiving involves meekness. In my attitude toward other people, there is to be in my spirit no retaliation, no getting even, that forgiving needs grace. No human being would be able to do this, only in the power of God, and that forgiving brings blessing. So it follows that I am to give anybody, everybody release, let them go free, from anything or everything that that person owes to me. No matter what he has done, no matter what I have lost, there is to be no retaliation. And no matter who it is, no matter if he is unworthy, it's still to be true that that's what I will do, and I'll do all this in order that I may continue in the favor of God and have His blessing.

Now someone will say, "Well, I just don't think I could. I just don't feel that way." You're right! No human being ordinarily will want to do this thing. This is spiritual. This comes through the Holy Spirit from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Our help is in the name of the Lord, and that's what you will need. It is possible to forgive in this way only in and by and through Christ. Such forgiving is forever. It's done.

When I first became a Christian I knew I was forgiven and that was wonderful. It was too good to be true but there it was. And I remember as a young Christian that I heard an earnest preacher say, "Be sure your sins will find you out." He set up the idea before us that some day in heaven all would be revealed, and everything we ever did on earth would be shown on a big screen up there in heaven and we'd see it, and I want to tell you that as he preached he just made me shudder. I still wanted to go to heaven, I didn't want to go to hell, but I'd have been willing to take a back seat, if I were in heaven and it was going to be a case of just showing everybody what happened. It wouldn't be so much only the big things I had done wrong, but there's some little things that don't amount to anything, I'd hate like anything for the neighbors to find out. But you know, that good man was wrong. Because you see those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ have been washed in His blood and if you're washed, you're clean. And if you're clean, it's gone.

Remember Naaman in the Old Testament? It says about him that he was a great captain, a great man in the Syrian army. But he was a leper. You'll remember Naaman came to Elisha that he might be healed of his leprosy, and after some dealings with Elisha it turned out that this man finally did what Elisha told him to do and went and bathed seven times in the River Jordan, and he was healed. His flesh came again as the flesh of a little child. Have you ever seen the skin on a baby's arm? Well now, that's the

way it was with Naaman. No scars. Regardless of your sin, if you have yielded yourself to God and put your trust in Him and believed in Him, you're washed. You're clean!

I remember some time ago I had the privilege of being with a man who has been very well known, a movie actor, who had become a Christian. Some young people asked him to give his testimony of how he became a Christian. And I recall him telling several of us that the young people were going to be disappointed. And I wondered how they could be disappointed because he had a remarkable story, living an ungodly worldly life and then being transformed into a real Christian. I thought that would make a wonderful story. And he said something like this. "You know what they expect me to do? They expect me to just tell them all the wicked things I used to do when I was in Hollywood, when I was a movie actor, and then how God saved me; oh no! Do you know where my sins are? God promised, 'I have cast all thy sins behind my back.' Do you think I'm going to rake them out? Oh, no! God told me 'thy sins and iniquities will I remember no more.' You think I'm going to remind Him?" And I thought to myself, how marvelous that anyone should so understand the goodness and the grace of God. Believe me! The forgiveness of God is total. Listen, the human being simply cannot do anything so wrong, so bad, that the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ cannot wash whiter than snow. The forgiveness of sin, of God is total and eternal. If I have ever received Him and I've ever been forgiven of God, believe it! They're gone! He carried them away. They're all gone, forever! And in the sight of God you are without spot and without wrinkle.