

*If we confess our sins,
he is faithful and just to
forgive us our sins,
and to cleanse us from
all unrighteousness.*

1 John 1:9



To Forgive, or not to Forgive: that is *the* Question

A Follow-up on Forgiveness



Adult Sunday School
October 22, 2023

To Forgive or not to Forgive?

Quick Review:

1. Forgiveness is:
 - The release of a moral debt (Matt 6:12)
 - A separation from the guilt of one's actions (Psalm 103:12)
2. What is forgiven: Sin (not people) (Psalm 32:1; Eph 1:7; 1 John 2:12)
3. Why sin is forgiven: To reconcile a broken relationship
4. Why I must forgive sin: My greater moral debt has been forgiven
5. Necessary elements to the process of true forgiveness:
 - Agreement on the moral debt – both parties
 - Request for mercy – offending party
 - Granting of forgiveness – offended party

God & Forgiveness:

1. It is God's glorious nature to forgive sins. Ex. 34:6-7
2. God is morally obligated to forgive the sins for which Christ died. 1 Cor 15:17; 1 John 1:9; Rom 3:26
3. God does not forgive all sins.
 - a. God will not forgive the sins of Satan or the demons (Heb 2:16)
 - b. God will not forgive the sins of those in hell (Rev 20:11-15)
note: In the end, God makes no distinction between sin/sinner to love the one and hate the other.
 - c. God does not forgive the sins of unforgiving people (Matt 6:15; 18:35)
 - d. God does not forgive those who 'trust in themselves that they are righteous, and treat others with contempt' (Luke 18:9-14)
 - e. God does not forgive those who forsake him (Josh 24:19-20)
 - f. God does not forgive those who fail to see their sin (John 9:41)
 - g. God will not forgive those who rebel against his leading (Ex 23:20-21)
 - h. God will not forgive those who think they are safe from God's wrath despite their rebellion (Deut 29:18-20)
 - i. God will not forgive those who blaspheme the Spirit (Matt 12:30-31)
4. God's prophets sometimes urge God to withhold forgiveness
 - a. Because God's people have gone after other gods (Isa 2:6-9)
 - b. Because God's people insist on harming God's spokesman (Jer 18:23)
 - c. *Note:* These requests are not motivated by personal hurt

5. God's forgiveness follows a sinner's repentance & request for mercy (Lev. 6:1-7; Deut 30:1-3; Jer 33:3, 8; Dan 9:8-10, 18; 1 John 1:9)
6. Observations:
 - a. God never withholds forgiveness because of the severity of sins committed
 - b. God never withholds forgiveness because his anger overpowers his grace and love
 - c. God never withholds forgiveness from those who ask for it.
 - d. God only withholds forgiveness from those who are obstinately continuing in their sin
 - e. God's withholding of forgiveness should never be seen as vindictive, or arbitrary.
 - f. When God forgives, he enters into loving relations with the forgiven – no matter who they are (see Jonah)
 - g. God's forgiveness is *always* for the benefit of the forgiven.

Forgiveness & Me

1. I must forgive all sins against me by those who seek it, because Christ has forgiven me when I sought it (Col 3:13; James 5:16)
2. I can forgive my brother's sins because Jesus took the punishment for them.
3. Forgiveness in the modern era:
 - a. A release of unpleasant feelings, not a release of sin
 - b. Restored relationship is not in view; my own mental health is
 - c. For the benefit of the one forgiving, not the forgiven
 - d. Perhaps it would be better to call this 'forbearance' not 'forgiveness' (Rom 3:25)
4. Jesus freely forgave sins, but never for his own psychological benefit (Matthew 12:31-32)
5. Withholding forgiveness never justifies feelings of hostility, hatred, bitterness or revenge. Withholding forgiveness simply recognizes that a moral debt exists and is unresolved.
6. We must always maintain a spirit of forgiveness and an eagerness to forgive – as God does.
7. I am obligated to forgive all sins God has forgiven. Can/should I forgive sins God has not?
8. All moral debts against me will ultimately be satisfied – in Christ or in judgment. In both cases, I can take comfort that justice will be done (2 Thess 1:6-9)
9. Withholding forgiveness until repentance validates the sense of guilt for the one who sinned. We pray these drive him to Christ.