

SEEING GOD AS HE IS

LESSON 7 – GOD’S FORGIVENESS

I. Defining forgiveness:

A. Hebrew:

1. **nāsā** - means “the taking away, so forgiveness or pardon of sin, iniquity, and transgression.” - listed as one of God’s attributes (Exod 34:7; Num 14:18, Mic 7:18); thus, sin can be forgiven and forgotten by God because it is taken up and carried away; in Exodus 32:32, 34:7, Numbers 14:18, 1 Samuel 15:25, Job 7:21, and Micah 7:18; *nāsā* means “to take away guilt, iniquity, transgression” – in other words, to forgive or pardon

2. **sālāh** is used to describe God’s offer of pardon and forgiveness to the sinner, but never refers to people forgiving each other - It is exclusively a *divine* action (e.g., Exod 34:9; Num 14:19-20; 2 Kgs 5:18, 24:4; Ps 25:11; Isa 55:7; Jer 5:1, 7, 33:8, 50:20; Lam 3:42).

B. Greek:

1. **aphiemi** – conveys the sense of “loose” or “let go.”

2. **charidzomai** - from the Greek word, *charis*, which means grace.

3. **lēsous** - a proper noun that comes into English as “Jesus,” which is the Greek form of the Hebrew “Joshua” meaning “the Lord saves.” Matthew 1:21 says: “She will bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins (from Hebrew in OT – Joshua or Jehoshua; also from Isa. 7:14, where Immanuel, or “God with us” is used in the same context)

C. Realistic definitions:

1. Forgiveness involves an intentional decision to acknowledge the result of a wrong done to us, but deciding to let go of the resulting resentment and anger and be willing to live with the results without seeking revenge; although the

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results of the sin may always be with us, exercising forgiveness can lessen the grip of the spiritual, mental, and physical pain, as well as free us from the control the offender might still exert over us; ideally, it can lead to better understanding, sympathy, and even empathy for the offender, helping both parties to grow spiritually; although forgiveness usually involves pain as we assume the debt of sin for ourselves, this is the way that full spiritual healing and restoration occur – this is what Jesus taught us

2. We must see the difference between *being* forgiven and *feeling* forgiven: forgiveness is objective, but feeling forgiven is subjective: one can feel forgiven but not be because of a failure to repent; we can also forgive ourselves when God has not pardoned us, and that false feeling can multiply sin; we can also *not* feel forgiven even when we have been - a lack of feeling forgiven does not negate what God has done. To deny what God has done, just because we don't feel it, is actually an affront to our Lord

II. Helpful scriptures about forgiveness:

***Ephesians 4:32** – “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

***Mark 11:25** – “And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”

***1 John 1:9** – “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

***Matthew 18:21-22** – “Then Peter came up and said to him, ““Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?”” Jesus said to him, ““I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.””

***Matthew 6:12,14-15** – “...And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors... for if you forgive others their

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trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

***Luke 6:37** - “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven,”

***Colossians 3:13** – “Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”

***Acts 2:38** - And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

***Ephesians 1:7** – “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace...”

***Colossians 3:13** – “Bear with each other and forgive one as the Lord forgave you.”

***Matthew 18:21-22** – Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

***Micah 7:18-19** – “Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.”

***Psalms 103:12** – “As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.”

***Luke 23:34** - Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

***Hebrews 10:17** - Then he adds: “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.”

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***Proverbs 17:9** - Whoever would foster love covers over an offense, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.

***Proverbs 28:13** - Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.

***Psalms 32:5** - Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD." And you forgave the guilt of my sin.

***Luke 17:3-4** - So watch yourselves. "If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying 'I repent,' you must forgive them."

III. Practical applications for us:

A. Human barriers to forgiveness:

1. Anger
2. Pride
3. Suffering
4. A lack of love
5. Misunderstandings of the situation

B. Spiritual benefits of forgiveness:

1. A building up of *love*
2. A building up of *patience*
3. A building up of *compassion*
4. A building up of *peace and joy*

C. Physical benefits of forgiveness:

1. Healthier relationships
2. Improved mental health.
3. Less anxiety, stress and hostility.
4. Fewer symptoms of depression

D. Difficulties we encounter with forgiveness:

1. Trying to make it conform to our self-righteous sense of 'fairness' – the need to demand equity in all human interactions, including sin and forgiveness

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- a. The ‘ledger must be balanced’ – it is human nature to keep score and try to keep things even
 - b. All wrongs must be made right – since this is not always possible, what then?
 - c. For God’s view of maintaining a relationship with an unbalanced ledger, see Psalm 91:14-16
2. Harboring resentment – whether from pride, anger, selfishness, or ignorance; this is wrongly saving the ‘hurt’ for possible sinful use later (Eph. 4:31; Job 5:2)
3. Struggling to forgive *ourselves* - sometimes we feel that we must first be ‘comfortable’ with our forgiveness, even if God has already forgiven and forgotten; When we don’t believe that God has in fact forgiven us when we have confessed our sin, we are calling into question His faithfulness; we are, in a sense, arrogantly saying that God’s promise cannot be trusted. See I John 1:9, Psalm 103:10-11
4. Failing to forgive others if they don’t ask our forgiveness first – what about Jesus’ statement in Luke 23:43? See also 2 Cor. 5:19
5. Weaponizing forgiveness - misusing forgiveness to control or manipulate others for a ‘quick fix’, or to gain status, or to extract favors or sympathy from the offender, or trading forgiveness for easy reconciliation; we must also remember: forgiveness is *not* a means to revenge (Rom. 12:19)
6. The problem of *forgiving and forgetting* (Hebrews 8:12)
 - a. Given His eternal omniscience, it is impossible for God to actually forget our sins
 - b. If God were to “erase” parts of His memory regarding our sins when forgiven, this would result in gaps, inconsistencies, and even mistakes in His providential care for our future spiritual needs

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c. Indeed, how could God keep His promise regarding our future in Romans 8:28 without a perfect memory and understanding of our past, including our sins and mistakes?

d. Given our human nature and that we also are made in God's image, it is not always possible to remove painful memories from our fragile minds, no matter how hard we try

e. Consider Hebrews 10:17 and 6:10:

1). In verse 17 of ch. 10, the writer quotes from Jer. 31:34, stating "...their sins and lawless deeds I will *remember* no more."; the Gk word for 'remember' use here is *mnemoneuo*, defined as to actively call to mind or make mention of, or to hold in remembrance and actively think or feel about something; thus, God says He will **never** do this with our forgiven sins, effectively placing them out of His mind and preventing them from ever affecting His considerations regarding our salvation or providential care

2). In verse 10 of ch. 6, the writer also states that God will never be so unjust as to **forget** our good works; the Gk word for 'forget', *epilanthanomai*, means to mentally give up to oblivion or intentionally or carelessly forget or care about

3). Thus, God will **never** forget our good works, and He will **never** bring our forgiven sins back into His mind for consideration; effectively, this makes our sins both eternally *forgiven* and *forgotten!!*