

Myth #6: Christians Must Forgive and Forget

The sixth in the series:

Urban Myths: Debunking Christian Clichés

June 26 & 27, 2010

Intro:

Whenever I address the topic of forgiveness, I know I'll be scratching where people itch because *everyone* is able to relate to this issue. You've *all* been hurt. You've been *let down* and *disappointed*. People have *made you mad*.

Maybe you've been *abandoned* or *betrayed*. Forgiveness certainly is a popular topic... but it can be confusing.

Picture a conversation: Someone says, *I can't forgive*. Why not? *It is irrational and impossible. It's like this: God commands us to forgive and says we're to forgive as we have been forgiven. And you know how God forgives: the Bible says God remembers our sin no more. So, forgiving means I have to act like the hurt never happened. I can't pretend; I can't feign amnesia.*

I can't forgive.

Does this conversation resonate with you - you think forgiveness *doesn't make sense*? You feel like you *can't do* what the Scriptures call you to do? Let's back up and take this step-by-step. Let's talk about forgiveness. First:

1. Why we forgive:

There are a variety of reasons that should motivate us to forgive: You can categorize them according to the different aspects of your lives: *spiritual, emotional, social and physical.*

oA spiritual reason: God's will. It is commanded! In **Matt. 18** Jesus taught that we are to forgive based on the fact that we've been forgiven. To refuse to forgive someone is an offense to our Master who has already forgiven us!

Forgiveness is a conspicuous part of the Lord's Prayer: **Mt 6:12 - Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.** He elaborates on this petition: **14,15 - For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly**

Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. Heavy! I'd call that a pretty good reason to forgive.

oAn emotional reason: your peace. We experience peace when we obey God's will: **Is 32:17 - The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever.** Refusing to forgive robs us of peace: in **Mt 18:34** the unforgiving person is handed over to torturers! When we hold on to how much others owe us, we only hurt ourselves. "*Unforgiveness is the poison we drink hoping others will die.*" Another descriptive quote on the positive side: *Forgiveness is setting the captive free and then realizing that you were the captive!* To experience peace and freedom, we must entrust the situation to God: **Is 26:3 - You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.**

oA social reason: your relationships. Forgiveness offers not only intrapersonal peace but interpersonal peace: **Rom 12:18 - If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.** In **2 Sam 13** we read of a very sad result of unforgiveness: Absalom never forgave Amnon for how he treated his sister, Tamar. His bitterness led to him to murder his brother. In huge contrast: **Ps 133:1 - How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!** Forgiveness will help you make peace in relationships. **Ps 122:8 - For the sake of my brothers and friends, I will say, "Peace be within you."**

oA physical reason: your health. Refusing to forgive can be *a sign of feeling superior to the person who wronged you.* But arrogance isn't good for you: **Prov 3:7,8 - Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones.** Research has shown that there is a link between *resentment* and *physical problems*. People with anxiety over broken relationships and unresolved anger

know this all too well. Feeling bad about others hurts your physical health. **Pr 14:30 A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.**

2. The extent to which we are to forgive:

There is a key phrase that encapsulates our goal. Many Bible verses teach about forgiveness, but one phrase describes just how radical it is to be. It shows that we are to forgive to the nth degree.

oForgive as you have been forgiven. Col 3:13 - **Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.** God's kind of forgiveness sets the pattern for us. Eph 4:32 - **Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.** So, let's consider...

3. How God forgives:

There is a confusing facet - God says he remembers our sin no more. Jer. 31:34b - **I will forgive their iniquity and their sin I will remember no more.** Is 43:25 - **I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.**

oWhat this can't mean: God can't recall? Is that what we think is going on here? I don't think so. Omniscience is not forgetful. There is *nothing* he doesn't know. Think of it, if God *couldn't* recall something that we could, then we'd know something that he doesn't. And that's not right.

In order to think right about what it means for God to *remember no more* we need to think of what it means when he *does* remember something or someone. Let's consider some biblical examples: **Gen 8:1- God remembered Noah.** Had he forgotten Noah? No, this means that *he turned his*

attention to him. It was time to focus on what was next for him. This gets us pointed the right direction:

oWhat this must mean: He won't refocus!

Gen 19:29 - God remembered Abraham. Had Abe slipped his mind? God gave the situation his attention. **Ex 2:23-25 - The Israelites' ... cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.**

It means to *refocus* attention on them. He **remembered Hannah**, and blessed her. The list goes on. Many prayers begin with: *remember me, oh God.* It means, *give me your attention. Look my way.*

Therefore: to *not remember* is to *choose not to give attention* to the matter. It's not that God *can't* remember but that he *won't*. He *chooses* not to hold the past against us. **Ps. 103:10 - He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.** Jesus paid the price of sin. There is no sin on our account. **Ps 130:3,4 - If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness.... To forgive is to not keep score.** 1 Cor 13:5 **Love...doesn't take into account a wrong suffered.** That's what it means that God remembers our sin no more.

S - God doesn't *forget* in the sense of *being unable to recall* and he doesn't expect that from us. *Remembering an offense no more* means *making no repayment and taking no revenge*, but it *can't* mean *having no recollection*. That is impossible.

4. How we can forgive: We can't if forgiving means we're to pretend that nothing ever happened. But we don't have to act. Why? Because ***There is a difference between forgiving and restoring trust.***

oForgiveness can be instantaneous. It is a decision. It is a matter of obedience. God commands it. We're to forgive! **T** - I want to concentrate on our last point, so I'll tell you a couple stories to get us there: A kid is careless and knocks over a very valuable lamp. It was handed down from a great grandparent, but now it is shattered. *Can that child be forgiven? Sure. Should that child be forgiven? Yes. But will forgiveness put the pieces back together? No, it's broken. Forgiveness and restoration are two different things.*

The story of David and Bathsheba painfully illustrates the truth of consequences. **2 Sam 12:13,14.** (Other consequences are listed in **10-12.**) Was David forgiven? Yes! Read **Ps 32** and **51.** But he *still* experienced the consequences.

Mentioning David and the consequences of his unfaithfulness leads me to remind you about a valuable ministry we have here at Dayspring: the support group, Faithful and True. It's been very effective in helping men to live with integrity in the sexual area of their lives. This group equips men to live as an example with godly purity. It's easy to remember the name: what kind of man do you want to be? Faithful and true! That is what God requires of us and that is what our families need as well. We are starting a second group and you can stop by the table in the lobby for more information or drop a card in the offering plate.

Forgiveness can be instantaneous, but...

oTrust must be re-earned over time.

You can forgive your teen for his reckless driving, but that forgiveness doesn't take away the consequences. There is still damage that needs to be repaired and that's going to cost something, so will the ticket.

Forgiveness doesn't act like nothing happened. It doesn't *immediately restore the relationship with full privileges.*

In **Acts 15:36-42** we read that Paul decided not to include John Mark on an upcoming trip because he had

bailed out on the previous missionary journey. Trust was eventually rebuilt and the relationship was restored (**Philemon 24; 2 Tim 4:11**), but it took time.

Picture a guy in marriage counseling: *I'll tell you what is wrong with our marriage: my wife is withholding trust. Yeah, I screwed up in the not-so-distant past, but she's supposed to forgive and forget. She's to blame.*

I might answer this way: *You've repeatedly misrepresented where you've been and what you've done. You've misled and manipulated. You've demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt that your word is worthless. And now you say she should trust you. Step one is to become trustworthy. Don't shift blame by telling the person you've wronged to get over it. It is her responsibility to grant trust. But it is yours to earn it.*

To be trusted you need a lot of dots in a row. When you have that, then you can be pretty confident about where the next one will be. Consistency provides predictability. But if your actions have been all over the place, then don't expect to be trusted. There is no basis for extrapolation with any degree of certainty.

This difference in granting forgiveness and granting trust even shows up when it comes to forgiving ourselves. Should you forgive yourself? Yes. Can you? Yes. Should you trust yourself? Maybe not, at least, not yet. Don't place yourself in a position where you'll be tempted beyond what you can withstand. You know your weaknesses.

Concl: Remember the story of the boy who broke the lamp?

Your life might be like that. You know you're forgiven for the guilt of your sin, but you're wondering why your life is still in pieces. If God is real, shouldn't he fix it, and put the pieces all back together? Forgiveness doesn't fix everything down here. We still live with consequences.

All this leads to two challenges:

1. Live in a way that demonstrates faithfulness so others can trust you.

2. Forgive others when they let you down. Forgiving is not irrational and it is not impossible. Because what God calls you to do is to forgive the guilt of the offense, not to pretend that nothing ever happened. And he empowers us to obey.

Luke 18:27 - What is impossible with men is possible with God.

More Meat (unused extra ideas and verses)

How God forgives has to do with eternal, spiritual consequences. Spiritually it is as if we had never sinned. But socially? There are huge consequences! Financially? Physically, with your health?

Can you be forgiven for ruining your body and or mind with drugs? Sure. But you'll still have a ruined body or mind, unless God chooses to do a second miracle, which he can.

If you have trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation then you are not going to come into judgment for your sins because Jesus already has in your place (**John 5:24: Rom 8:1**). The guilt is no longer on our account. Your balance is zero because Jesus paid the price of your sin. Your sin was placed on his account and his righteousness was placed on your account. It is a double imputation.

Forgiveness leads to reconciliation and unity in relationships. Eph. 4:25-5:2; Col 3:12-14; 1 Pet 4:8 "Above all, keep fervent in you love for one another because love covers a multitude of sins." Prov 19:11 - overlook a transgression. 1 Cor 13:5 - Love "...doesn't take into account a wrong suffered."

Forgiving doesn't mean you let someone get away with it. You can forgive someone for stealing your car, but they still need to serve time.

??But don't misunderstand. *God's forgiveness* is not a denial of the severity of the offense. Don't confuse forgiving with making an excuse: *It wasn't really wrong under the circumstances. He couldn't help it.* Forgiveness is rooted in reality. Forgiveness calls the wrongdoing what it is. *It was wrong but God is a forgiving God and I'm going to extend that same forgiveness because of and by his grace.*

To forgive is hard! It's easier to *boil in bitterness* and dwell on the *poisonous pain*. The *normal* thing to have the resentment surface at inopportune times. *The natural thing* is to react to being hurt with harsh words.

To forgive *doesn't seem right*. It flies in the face of justice. We want people to *get what they deserve*. We want *other* people to experience the consequences of their choices; but we want mercy *for ourselves!* When someone crosses us, we rehearse what we should've said. We hold on to our hurts and stew over unresolved grudges. We stuff our feelings or blow our tops. It seems *neither fair nor easy* to let go of *our right to wrong* others.

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 transgressions.

To forgive doesn't mean to pretend that it didn't hurt. It *did and does* hurt. But *what we do* with that hurt is what matters.

Forgiveness is a decision that is modeled and empowered by Jesus.

1 Pet. 3:9 - Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult.

Eph 4:26,27 In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. What is that saying? Not all anger is sinful but it easily becomes so when we *stew over it*. *Unresolved anger is a tool in the hands of the enemy*. He wants the wound to fester.

1 Pet 2:21-23 - Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. ...When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. What an example: put yourself and the situation in God's hands. Trust that God will strengthen you and set things right some day. There is hope because God gives the strength.

The alternative to dwelling on disappointment is to take control of your thoughts and yield them to God. 2 Cor. 10:5 ...we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. We don't allow our minds to wander haphazardly out of bounds but discipline ourselves mentally. Have you been at the mercy of your thoughts? Now *you* take *them* captive. Break free from the bondage of bitterness. You can be free

Forgiveness is something Christ *requires* from his followers. He took it to a wild level. Luke 6:27,28 - But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who ill-treat you. Jesus asked the Father to forgive those who were killing him. He extended *undeserved unilateral* forgiveness.

We're not called to act as if nothing happened. Something did happen. It is real. It was unjust.

Forgetting can be irrational and impossible. It doesn't make sense and you can't do it anyway. Forgiving is not irrational and it is not impossible. Because what God calls you is to

forgive the guilt of the offense, not to pretend that nothing ever happened. Never think of what God calls you to do is irrational or impossible. It does make sense because it is God's will and it is not impossible because God empowers it. Luke 18:27 - What is impossible with men is possible with God.

Lord's Prayer: The act of showing mercy through forgiving does not earn salvation, but it is a manifestation of saving faith. Forgiving others is central to what it means to be Christian.

When you forgive it doesn't change the past but it sure will change the future!

Restoration isn't immediate. Do you instantly bring the person who let you down back to the same level of trust? No. Do they get all the same privileges? No.