

Forgive and Forget?

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Eighteenth-century English poet and essayist, Alexander Pope, is credited with penning the phrase: "To err is human, to forgive divine." There is a lot of truth to be found within that statement. We are all human; we all have weaknesses and occasionally we stumble and fall.

Romans 3:23

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

When we confess our sins to God and repent, He is quick to forgive us and to forget our sin. Jesus Christ, God's own Son; gave his life as a sacrifice to cover our sins and make forgiveness possible for us.

1 John 1:9

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

Without forgiveness, there would be no hope for any of us to make it into God's kingdom. It is not possible for us in this human form, to go through life free of sin. God is able to not only forgive us completely for our wrongs, but to forget them as well. Are we able to completely forgive those whom we come into contact with, that may commit wrongs against us and also to forget those wrongs? Is it really only a divine directive to forgive?

Should We Forgive?

Sooner, or later, we will all come into contact with someone who will cause us trouble, offend us in some way, or commit some type of wrong against us. It is our normal human nature, along with Satan's influence, that causes us to react by becoming upset, or angry, and to assume a "get even" attitude. Many people hold grudges against others, sometimes for years and years. In some cases grudges are held openly and at other times grudges are held secretly behind someone's back. We see this attitude reflected in the world around us all the time. There are many examples all around us, of the inability of people to extend forgiveness to others.

“Road rage” is becoming a very serious problem on the nation’s highways and city streets. Recently, in the area where I live, a young man was shot several times in broad daylight on a city street. He had become involved in an altercation with another driver. The other driver pulled up beside the man’s car, pulled out a revolver and emptied it into the vehicle the man was driving. The man had to be hospitalized for his injuries; he was hit in the chest and leg, but miraculously survived. The man stated that he had learned his lesson and that no matter what sort of wrong another driver might commit against him in the future, he would never react against them again!

These sorts of altercations are becoming all too common. Another man locally, was ran down on his motorcycle by an irate driver and drug several hundred feet, after the driver of the car had already fired a shotgun at the motorcycle driver twice and hit his passenger! If any of these persons had shown a little forgiveness and forgotten the other drivers’ transgressions, these incidents need not have happened. Instead they chose the get even attitude and paid a price for their inability to overlook a real, or perceived wrong that someone else had done to them.

The lack of forgiveness has become very prevalent in our society. We have all probably witnessed some sort of public scene where a person in a service type job, such as a cashier, or food server, has borne the brunt of a customer’s frustrations. I saw one person in tears after being abused by a customer who had no mercy, or compassion, despite the fact that the person was doing the best that they could under difficult conditions. Would these same people, who have no qualms about abusing others, appreciate being treated in the same manner? I **seriously** doubt it.

Sadly, this same attitude has permeated many of the organizations that call themselves by the name Church of God today. There are those that lack mercy, forgiveness and who sometimes blatantly dole out abuse to the people of God. Where does the truth lie? Are we really required to forgive everyone? Completely? Must we forget every wrong committed against us, over and over again?

Forgiveness Is Required!

Without the forgiveness of sin, made possible by the death of God’s own son, Jesus Christ, it would not be possible for any of us to enter into God’s kingdom. We all seek forgiveness and the cleansing of our sins, so that we may claim the reward that God has promised to us, eternal life as glorified spirit beings in God’s kingdom.

But, it is absolutely essential that we extend forgiveness to others, if we are to receive forgiveness ourselves. Jesus Christ made it very plain that **we are** to forgive others, for wrongs committed against us.

Matthew 6:15

¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Christ's words are **perfectly clear** here, there is no mistaking what his intent is. We cannot receive forgiveness for our sins, if we do not extend forgiveness to others. Notice what Christ said in the verse just prior to this one:

Matthew 6:14

¹⁴ "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

The forgiveness of our sins **depends** on our **willingness**, **desire** and **ability** to forgive others for any wrongs committed against us, or our loved ones.

Forgiveness does not always come easily and many times it provides a huge obstacle that we must overcome. God requires us to forgive, because he knows how harmful it is for us if we do not. Our human nature is naturally inclined to demand revenge, or a reckoning, for wrongful acts real, or perceived, that are committed against us, or those that we love. Harboring ill will, thoughts of revenge and holding grudges against others, becomes a large festering wound within us. If left untended, these thoughts create an open door for Satan to inject wrong attitudes into our minds. But, if we forgive and forget, the situation is over with and we can be about the most important goal in our lives, seeking the kingdom of God.

We always need to be mindful that we are far from perfect ourselves; we are all growing and striving to overcome our human nature. We all have enough spots and blemishes in our own lives to deal with, without worrying about trying to remove the spots and blemishes of others. Everyone has their imperfections and we have to overlook and forgive when we are affected by others imperfections. Christ says that we must forgive even when we are wronged repeatedly:

Matthew 18:21-22

²¹ Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" ²² Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

When we sin and come before God and repent, he is quick to forgive us. Should we do any less? How can we be developing Godly character in our lives, if we are lacking in this most important attribute, the ability to extend forgiveness. It is a **crucial** and **vital** part of our growth! We **cannot afford** to become mired down with the **unwillingness** and **inability** to forgive!

Judging Others

Being forgiving, also includes not being judgmental of others. We are all in different stages in our spiritual growth. We are all striving to become spiritually mature, but it takes time! Some of us grow, or mature faster than others. How are those who are spiritually immature ever going to grow into maturity, unless allowed the latitude to do so? We can become judgmental to the point of ignoring our own faults:

John 8:2-11

² Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. ³ Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, ⁴ they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. ⁵ Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?" ⁶ This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear. ⁷ So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." ⁸ And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. ¹⁰ When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" ¹¹ She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more."

Here Christ silenced the woman's accusers, by pointing out their own hypocrisy. They all had sins and faults of their own. Instead of being self-righteous and sitting in judgment of someone else, Jesus pointed out that they all had problems themselves that they should be working on, rather than worrying about someone else's faults and shortcomings. There is **no room** for self-righteousness in God's kingdom.

That is not to say that we are not to judge, clearly there are situations where we must make judgments as to the right and wrong of an issue. We have to make judgments as to the course of our own actions in certain situations, but Christ is very clear about the subject of judging our brothers and sisters.

Matthew 7:1-5

¹ "Judge not , that you be not judged. ² For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. ³ And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? ⁵ Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Clearly, Jesus Christ was justified in judging others while on this earth, because he was sinless. We are not and so we have enough problems of our own to deal with, without pointing to others. If we want mercy and forgiveness, we must also freely give it.

Luke 6:37-38

³⁷ "Judge not , and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. ³⁸ Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."

There are times when someone must be rebuked when a wrong has been committed, or sin is clearly involved. But, what does it mean to rebuke someone? Webster's Dictionary defines the word rebuke in the following way:

Main Entry: ¹**re·buke**

Pronunciation: ri-'byük

Function: *transitive verb*

Inflected Form(s): **re·buked**; **re·buk·ing**

Etymology: Middle English, from Old North French *rebuker*

1 a : to criticize sharply : **REPRIMAND** **b** : to serve as a rebuke to

2 : to turn back or keep down : **CHECK**

synonym see **REPROVE**

- **re·buk·er** *noun*

"rebuke." *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*. 2008. <http://www.merriam-webster.com> (25 Feb. 2008).

Jesus Christ provides us with some instruction on how these matters should be dealt with.

Luke 17:3-4

³ Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. ⁴ And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him."

Christ is giving this instruction in the context of not causing offense, notice how He begins here: "Take heed to yourselves." This is an area that must be approached with care and caution. It is a very **serious matter** to cause **offense** to others. Where matters have to be dealt with between God's people, Christ once again gives us instruction on how we are to approach the situation.

Matthew 18:15-17

¹⁷ "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' ¹⁷ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

These types of situations are very delicate and must be handled very carefully; we must have the right attitude of mercy, forgiveness and humility when we approach each other in this manner. There is really no reason why any situation should go beyond the first step, between two people who have God's spirit and are allowing it to rule in their lives.

When there is a problem between two people, it should be handled in complete confidentiality. Our problems should not be drug out into the open for others to see! Those that do become aware of problems should be careful to be unbiased and not take up one side, or the other. Even if we are invited to become part of the resolution process, we must remember that we are present as a witness, not to condemn, or pass judgment.

Offending Others

Another area, in which we must be careful, is in causing offense. But, we also must not be prone to take offense easily either. Of all people, we should be able to approach each other without the giving, or taking, of offense. We are putting into practice God's way of life now, in this human form and in this world. We have to be overcoming and getting past these types of difficulties here and now! If you are the type of person that tends to have a stronger personality, then you must take care not to offend others. Likewise, if you are a person with a meeker personality, then you must take care not to be easily offended. Remember we are all individuals and we all come from different backgrounds and have different ways of thinking. Personalities can clash and customs and etiquette can vary.

God's way is to have a balance in all things. We must remember to deal with each other with love and respect, as individuals and fellow inheritors of God's kingdom. It is inevitable that sooner, or later, we will cause offense to someone. We can even unintentionally offend someone by our actions. But, it is how we handle the matter from that point on that is extremely important.

The Apostle Paul understood this concept very well. He tried very hard to not cause offense to anyone he came into contact with. He felt that this matter was of such importance that he instructed the Corinthians in how they should treat others without causing offense.

1 Corinthians 10:31-33

³¹ Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. ³² Give no offense , either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, ³³ just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

Notice that he specifically mentions the church of God. We must be careful not to cause offense to those in the world, but also we must **not cause offense** to those in God's church! I have actually seen situations where someone has tried harder not to offend someone in the world, than their own brothers and sisters in Christ! Once someone has been offended, it is not an easy thing to regain their trust and friendship.

Proverbs 18:19

19 A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city,

Paul realized that his actions and how he handled himself around others, could very well affect his ability to minister to God's people.

2 Corinthians 6:3

3 We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed.

We are beginning to enter into very trying times for God's people. We are all going to need the support and encouragement of the rest of God's people to stand strong and finish the race. We all must do whatever we can to support and strengthen each other.

Heb 10:24-25

24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

We all must continue to grow and to make ourselves ready, so that we may be accepted by Jesus Christ and God the Father. We must forgive and forget not only each others trespasses, but the trespasses of others who are not part of God's people. We have to have mercy and forgiveness, so that we may be forgiven and shown mercy ourselves. We should especially be able to readily forgive those that are among God's called out people.

Galatians 6:10

10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

We all have the same goal, to make it all the way to the end and to rise to meet Christ above this earth when he returns triumphantly, in power, glory and majesty. There to meet the rest of the first fruits of God's plan and be transformed into glorified beings with eternal life. If we forgive and forget, we can all concentrate on staying the course and making it all the way to the end and finally enter into God's kingdom together. Learning to forgive, to forget and to have mercy is a Godly trait that **we must** all take on, if we want God to accept us into His glorious kingdom!

(All scriptural references cited from the New King James Edition of the Holy Bible)

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