

Our Forgiveness of Others

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[Scripture quotations taken from the NASB](#)

In Matthew 6:12, 14-15 and in Matthew 18:21-35, Jesus gave two teachings about forgiving others. It is clear from reading these passages that we as believers are expected and even commanded to forgive others of their offenses against us, just as we have ourselves have been forgiven our sins by our God and Father.

In considering these two passages, we should understand that forgiving others is not a work that we must do in order to obtain God's forgiveness for ourselves, rather it is evidence that we ourselves have already obtained God's forgiveness. We as genuine believers are those who have been forgiven our sins through the blood of God's Son, Jesus Christ. Regardless of our struggles or shortcomings, we will not be condemned. Rather, God's word assures us that we have already crossed over from death to eternal life (John 5:24).

We show mercy when we extend forgiveness to those who have sinned against us. Love manifesting itself through mercy is evidence that we have crossed over from death to eternal life; it is evidence that we are among those who have

received God's mercy. Love shows mercy, and mercy forgives. (Consider Matthew 5:7, Galatians 5:22-23, 1 John 4:7-8).

However, this is not to say that our forgiveness of others always comes about quickly or easily. There may be a protracted and difficult struggle with forgiving others, but we know from the Scriptures that our God will not give us any command without giving us the power to obey it; He will work in our lives to bring about our forgiveness of those who have sinned against us.

The Struggle to Forgive

As believers we will all struggle against sin of many kinds as long as we live on this earth, and at times we may find ourselves struggling with the sin of unforgiveness. In his letter to the Romans, Paul revealed his own struggle with sin, and in doing so he taught us about the same struggle that all believers will experience. Paul wrote:

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; ***for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.*** For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. ***For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members.*** Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:18-25a, emphasis added).

As believers, we have been given a heart to obey God. Therefore we also, as Paul did, will "joyfully concur" with God's law in our inner being (verse 22). And yet we may find ourselves at times experiencing what Paul did: having the desire to do what is good, but struggling to carry it out (verse 18). Though we may struggle with sin for a time, we will be given a way of escape, because as Paul taught again, no temptation has overtaken us except that which is common to man, and with every temptation God will provide a way of escape for us, that we might be able to bear it (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Who will set us free “from the body of this death” and its struggle with sin? Paul gave us the answer: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:25a). In our struggle with the sin of unforgiveness, we as believers will ultimately be given the power to obey God and forgive those who have sinned against us. We will not be left powerless to forgive as others are.

The Apostle John wrote: “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:3-5).

God’s commands are not so burdensome that we are unable to obey them. Though a struggle with sin may persist for a time, whether the struggle is with unforgiveness or some other sin, we as believers will be given the power to obey God’s commands through the power of the One living within us.

The Grievous Wrongdoings of Others

There are some offenses, some sins of others committed against us that do great damage. If we have suffered a grievous loss because of the sins of others, we could experience emotional or physical scars that may never fully heal in this lifetime. In these cases, we may feel completely justified in holding on to our anger because of the wrong that has been done to us and the great harm that we have realized because of it. We may feel that the one who caused this wrong is completely undeserving of forgiveness, and that we have every right to refuse to forgive them.

God, according to His sovereign plan for each of our lives, will sometimes allow a severe challenge to our faith. He allowed such a challenge of faith into the life of Job, to the point where he finally cried out against God in his anger and misery. As the losses that Job experienced began to weigh upon him, losses that included the death of all of his children, the loss of his material wealth and the affliction of his physical health, he came to the point where he complained bitterly to his three friends. He angrily charged God with wrongdoing when he said:

“Know then that God has wronged me
And has closed His net around me.”

“Behold, I cry, ‘Violence!’ but I get no answer;
I shout for help, but there is no justice.” (Job 19:6-7)

Job knew that he had done nothing wrong to bring all of this suffering and loss upon himself, and at this point he felt that he had been wronged by God, even abandoned by Him. The feeling of abandonment that Job experienced brings to mind Jesus’ loud cry from the cross, “...My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46).

Job also, as one of God’s people, was enduring a share in this aspect of the sufferings of Christ long before the actual events occurred in the life of Jesus during His time on earth. By suffering through no fault or wrongdoing of his own, and enduring the desolate feeling that he had been abandoned by God during this time of tremendous adversity, Job was enduring in some small measure a share in the suffering that Jesus experienced as He hung on Calvary’s cross, bearing the punishment that was due for the sins of others, and not for any sin of His own.

Speaking through the prophet Ezekiel, God referred to Job as being one of His most exemplary servants, along with Daniel and Noah (Ezekiel 14:12-20). These men also suffered great trials in their lives according to the will of God. When we consider the undeserved suffering in the lives of many of God’s servants as recorded in the Scriptures, we might conclude that those individuals whom God has set apart as His most exemplary servants are the ones who are called upon to endure such tremendous suffering and loss.

Many times great harm comes into the lives of believers through the sin of an unbeliever. In such cases it may help with forgiving the person through whom the sin comes when we understand that an unbeliever is a slave of sin, and he can do no better than to sin. Unregenerate men are powerless to escape the sin which ensnares and enslaves them (Romans 6:16-18, 2 Timothy 2:26). On the other hand as believers, God has chosen us for something far better. We have been chosen to receive a share in the glory of His Son Jesus Christ and eternity with Him in Heaven.

We can take comfort in knowing that we do not have to be concerned about obtaining justice for ourselves when we have suffered some great offense, because our God has promised to avenge us of any wrongdoing that we may suffer as a result of the actions of evil men. In Romans 12, Paul used quotations from Deuteronomy 32:35 and Proverbs 25:21-22 to convey his exhortation in this matter: “Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight

of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.” (Romans 12:17-19).

Paul exhorted us not to seek our own vengeance for wrongs done to us, but to “leave room for the wrath of God”. God is able to inflict far greater vengeance upon those who have wronged us than we can, and vengeance belongs to Him. He has promised us that He will repay our enemies for the evil they have done to us.

Jesus warned of the punishment coming to those of the world who sin against those who believe in Him, causing them to stumble and sin. In Matthew 18 we read: “but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!” (Matthew 18:6-7).

In reading this passage believers can be comforted and encouraged, knowing that our God will repay those who of the world have sinned against us, perhaps causing us to stumble into sin. At the same time, we might wonder why Jesus taught that “it is inevitable” that these stumbling blocks will come into our lives.

These things that can cause us to stumble must and will come into our lives because God has ordained that all of us who serve Christ must follow Him, experiencing a share in His sufferings (John 12:24-26, Romans 8:17). Jesus suffered temptation (Hebrews 2:18), and He also suffered as a result of the wrongdoing of others. God has ordained that we will all experience reflections of Jesus’ sufferings in our own lives in some measure, in order that we may also share in His eternal glory. We will consider these things in much greater depth in chapters to come.

In Conclusion

Jesus taught us in Matthew 10:29 that not even a sparrow falls to the ground apart from the will of our Father. From Jesus’ teaching here, we learn that nothing in God’s creation happens apart from His knowledge and His will, not even an event as insignificant as the death of one sparrow. Nothing touches our lives apart from the will of our sovereign God and Father, who sometimes allows suffering and loss to come into our lives through the sins of others.

When we endure unjust suffering because of the transgressions of others, whether the offense comes through an unbeliever or through another believer, such sufferings are for us a share in the sufferings of Christ. He suffered at the hands of evil men, though He had done nothing to deserve it. And He also suffered because of the sins of those who would be reconciled to God through His suffering and death. Jesus' sufferings occurred according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God our Father (Acts 2:23-24), as do the sufferings of every one of us who is called to follow Him.

As recipients of His mercy and forgiveness, God requires that we in turn must extend our forgiveness to others. This can be a very hard thing when we have suffered a great loss through the wrongdoing of others. Though we may struggle with unforgiveness for a time, we will ultimately be given Christ's grace and strength in a measure sufficient for our need to forgive those who have sinned against us.

As long as the struggle with unforgiveness persists, let us continue to pray to our Father, asking for His help in forgiving those who have sinned against us. It is His will that we obey Him in this matter, as in all others, and therefore we can be assured that we will receive the help we ask from Him (1 John 14-15).