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## Forgiveness Part VIII

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### Forgiveness Is Continual

#### Psalm 32; Matthew 18:21-35

Luke tells us, “If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.” (Luke 17:3b-4, NIV)

For the Hebrew, seventy times seven meant infinity, not just 490, because 490 has a limit. For Christ, there is no point beyond which our accumulation of sins becomes unforgivable. So, our response is to forgive others, as there is no cap, or limit, or expiration to forgive. As followers of Christ, neither the intensity of, nor the number of wrongs should have an impact on us. If we were to place a limit, then our effect of building relationships would have a chain attached to it, instead of having a chain reaction to grow. With a limit, you cannot grow. We must have the realization and capacity to understand how much we have been forgiven by Christ in order to forgive each other; this is crucial to the Christian experience. As our Lord continues to give us grace and forgiveness, are not we to do the same with each other? We show ourselves to be extremely selfish and prideful when we do not practice continual forgiveness!

God’s forgiveness is not some cheap markdown or bargain; His cost was immeasurable. Paul, in Colossians 3:13, tells us to forgive freely, as Christ has forgiven us. We must be willing to forgive as Christ has forgiven us. We must be willing to bear the cost, just as our Lord did. Forgiveness demands a substitution. So, how could we ever back away from forgiving each other? If we do, it is a bigger insult to our Lord than for the non-Christian to turn his or her back on His grace—*because we know better*. Remember, knowledge brings responsibility.

### What Forgiveness Is Not

In 2 Timothy, we are told, “Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message.” (2 Timothy 4:14-15, NIV)

We know *why* we must forgive. So, the question is, *what* must we forgive? I do not believe we need to forgive trivialities, because, forgiveness is not trivial; its cost is high. So, things like bumping into someone, or typos and minor mistakes, should not call us to forgive. Just a simple, polite apology is given, and then, you move on. If a person was offended by an honest mistake, such as his or her name being misspelled in the church bulletin, he should not expect forgiveness, because it was an honest, un-purposed mistake, with no malicious intent. There must be a reason for forgiveness, such as a hurt, where malice and forethought were at work.

Forgiveness does not minimize the offense. When we forgive, we are not saying, “Hey, that was OK.” The offense does not need to be accepted; however, we are to embrace the person who committed the offense. It is like sin; we are to hate sin but we

are still called to love the sinner—unless it continues, and they refuse to repent. Forgiveness is not the approval of the wrong; it only offers the grace of love, rather than vengeance. Forgiveness may not bring us to the level of trust that we had before. If a spouse cheats on you, you are called to forgive and reconcile. But, that trust will be eroded, and will take time to rebuild. Just forgiving the offender will not bring instant restitution of the relationship; perhaps the relationship will be severed completely. Perhaps a business partner embezzles and causes you to lose the business. You are to forgive that person, as we previously discussed, but this does not mean you would enter into a business relationship with that person again.

Forgiveness is directed to people, not causes or institutions. I, as a pastor, cannot forgive the victims of the Medieval Church for some of its notorieties, such as the Inquisition. If I worked for McDonalds, I could not forgive them for someone slipping on their floor, unless I represented them in a legal capacity. Forgiveness will not erase the past. As for that man in last month's article who lost his wife, he will suffer greatly in her absence until they meet again in Heaven. She will not be brought back to life. We are to forget the past, so the resentment will not build up, but, we also need to realize the event will not be undone.

“Not just human fairness, but excusing those things that could not be excused...”  
(C.S. Lewis)

When we do not forgive, we walk a path of self-destruction, brought on by the build up of resentment, and the unfulfilling nature of revenge. Nothing will wither our soul more than storing up this disease of *unforgiveness*. Pride and arrogance will take over, control, and ruin you. A Chinese proverb says, “First, before seeking revenge, you must dig two graves.” The cost and pain of forgiveness—even though we may be the victims of it—will be far easier than the path of not seeking the forgiveness. We read in Job 5:2, “Resentment kills a fool, and envy slays the simple.” The goal of forgiveness is allowing Christ to transform us to our full potential. Because we may go through bad stuff in life, it is not meant to be a personal attack, rather, a strengthening of our character so we can be better used by our Lord. Consider this, Christ has defeated Satan, so the sins we incur can be turned around to His glory. Forgiveness will refocus God's plan, and make it our plan. Then, our sufferings will not be in vain, and can be turned around to further the Kingdom of God. The joy and happiness of who we are in Christ will bubble over, covering the pain and hurt.

Romans tells us, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.... (Romans 8:28-39, NIV)

### **Questions**

1. When you forgive, you feel what?
2. Jesus seeks we who are unworthy to receive Him, and then He forgives and heals us. Why does Jesus do this for us?
3. Do you agree that Sin is the ultimate cause of spiritual paralysis? If not, why not?

4. Is there something worse, such as an infection or illness, that we can be confined to, other than sin? Then why do most Christians rarely acknowledge their sin or seek to deal with unforgiveness?
5. Nothing will wither our soul more than storing up this disease of *unforgiveness*. How have you seen this in you or others? What can you do about it?
6. How does forgiveness release your hurt and bitterness in you so it does not fester and distort or even destroy you?
7. How do you feel that forgiveness does not minimize the offense you have been dealt? Can this biblical point help you be more willing to forgive?
8. When something comes your way, whether it is a blessing or a problem, how can you take it, handle it with excellence, and learn and grow from it?
9. How would your walk with Christ grow and in turn be a blessing to others if you did this? How does forgiveness help in this?
10. How does your church recognize Christ's holiness and in so doing exercise forgiveness, because of the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ is Holy and true?