

Forgiveness Kept Simple

*Forgiveness? With **simple**!?!?*

*How can “forgiveness kept **simple**” even be possible? I struggle to forgive others!*

Only because of Jesus and His death and resurrection.

When I have a knotty problem to solve, it’s usually because several closely related sub-problems have become **bundled** together. As we focus on one, the others rush in to interfere with resolving the first.

*The solution is to **unbundle** the closely related topics, then resolve each in order.*

This is true with forgiveness. As I listen to forgiveness taught, it seems complex because we fail to distinguish the differences. Let’s focus on one after the other of the three closely interrelated emphases on forgiveness.

1. **God Forgives Us:** Because of the cross and resurrection, God instantly forgives all who have placed personal faith in Jesus Christ. **All**, no matter how egregious. We are **fully** and **forever** forgiven of all our sins, past, present and future, and all sins’ accompaniments, like guilt and shame, condemnation and judgment.
2. **We Ask Forgiveness from God & Others:** Now we are able to honestly face our failure and personal sin. We learn to keep short accounts with God and with others. We **ask forgiveness**, first of God and then of people **we sinned against**, so we now keep our relational connections free from rubbish.
3. **We Forgive Others:** And we also **fully forgive** from our heart all who have sinned **against us**, even repeat offenders, just like Christ has forgiven us. The power of forgiveness in Christ breaks off our bondage to harmful events and relationships from our past so we may live in His freedom.

When we allow past events to dam up, the dam often breaks under the stress of the next relational disagreement. Then the unresolved, stored up issues flood the current disagreement as we get “*historical*,” greatly complicating the current issue.

*Forgiveness is **simple** because Jesus has made full provision for all three aspects. No longer allow **un**forgiveness to dam up. However, are we fully aware of these resources flowing from forgiveness? Do we utilize the power in forgiveness quickly by partnering with the Spirit?*

God so longs to keep relationships clear and free that He’s **always** initiating. Since God wants relationship even more than we do, that’s why this Christian life can be **simple**, yet neither simplistic nor without our effort to partner.

First, We Are Fully & Finally Forgiven in Christ by Faith

Why would Jesus die such a painful death to remove your sins and mine?

When Jesus saw those unclean by Jewish standards, for instance the lepers and the prostitutes, His **first impulse** was compassion, moving Him to help. This compassion rises up in wave after wave in Jesus’ ministry (Matthew 8:2-3; 9:36; 14:14 as examples). Their need and responsiveness qualify them.

This is the heart of Jesus.

And Jesus is the same today (Hebrews 13:8). The Son of God moves toward, touches, heals, embraces, forgives those who least **deserve** Him yet truly **desire** Him. Divine mercy is ready to burst forth at the slightest prick. And this goes for you and me today.

Jesus has already paid in full for every sin we have ever committed or that has been committed against us. Forgiveness through Jesus is available for all. Lean close into Jesus. Acknowledge the pain and loss in order to embrace the abundance of a God who delights in us.

Let's quickly glance at the unassailable basis for our full forgiveness.

Jesus died in our place on the cross, as our substitute, His life for ours. He took *once* for *all* time *all* the punishment for *every* one of your sins and mine. Through our active choice of faith, He removes **all** grounds for condemnation for sin *forever*. He restores us to *intimacy, acceptance* and *adventure* with our Family-of-Three, Father, Son and Spirit.

*Are you aware of even **one** of your sins that Jesus has **not** taken on Himself?*

[When Jesus] had offered for **all** time **one** sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God [since] by **one** sacrifice he has **made perfect forever** those who are being made holy. [Where] these have been forgiven, there is **no longer** any sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 10:10-18, **emphasis**).

Chew on these verses. We earned separation from God as the just wages for our sin (John 3:16). Another must pay for our sins. *We cannot*. One sacrifice. For all times. No longer any other possible sacrifice. Made perfect forever, even as we are growing more like Jesus in our lives.

I was born spiritually dead, separated from God. I owed God a debt beyond any possibility of repaying for the sins I committed (John 3:16). Christ took each one of these upon Himself ("*Himself for me*," Galatians 2:20), along with all our guilt and shame...past, present, and future. In this Great Exchange ("*Himself for me*"), Jesus takes our sin from us and gifts us a new, cleansed life with a new identity in Him.

*We are now **free indeed!***

The death of Christ is the only place in the universe where this debt against the Father's love can be paid **in full**. Only the Creator could pay in full for creation's sins against Him. Only the perfect man Jesus could die for other men and women since He was sinless (1 Peter 1:19).

So all authentic forgiveness is based on Christ's merit and works, not on anything we do, thank God. The Father, Son and Spirit yearn for a deepening relationship with His treasured children. Out of His loving heart, He therefore provides a sure way to remove all the barriers blocking the way into fullness of life in His presence. Any other view of our God is a false image.

*However, it's also not enough to know truth. **Respond!***

I amplify on all three aspects of forgiveness in my devotional book, *Times of Refreshing*.

Second, So, Ask Forgiveness of Others

Before sin entered the world with its spiritual death, all humanity lived in innocence (Genesis 2:25).

When Eve and Adam went rogue, they died spiritually. As God warned (Genesis 2:17), death is separation. Spiritual death is separation from God. Immediately after their sin, Adam and Eve covered themselves, hid from God and blame-shifted. *Guilt* (for what we do) and *shame* (for who we are) results from our separation from God. Since Jesus bridged this separation forever for those who embrace Christ through faith, the just penalty for sin has been removed forever, along with separation from God.

When we received Jesus' life by faith, we instantly reconnected with the Father, Son and Spirit. Our relationship is restored...permanently. God promises to never leave us. Even in those times

we sin against God and others, no separation occurs. We are no longer orphans (John 14:18). We just don't experience the full flow of His blessings. The connected relationship still remains forever intact. The only one with any possible right to condemn us says there is no longer **any** condemnation in His people (Romans 8:1+8:33-34).

Yet I still sin against God and others on my journey. How do I then respond?

Keep short accounts because we have been so freely forgiven in Christ.

All sin is first and foremost against God. Rush to our faithful God and deal with it quickly. Confess our sin (1 John 1:9). "*Confess*" literally means that we "*say the same thing about sin as God does.*" Acknowledge how destructive your sin is. "*I did it*" without excuses or blame-shifting or minimalizing. Don't downplay, ignore, brush off, or marginalize our sin. Own all our transgressions yet **only** our part in the event. That's what we are first responsible for.

Then thank God because He fully and completely dealt with **that** sin 2,000 years ago on the cross. Even though God has forgiven that specific sin over 2,000 years ago, yet whenever we sin, confess or acknowledge or admit that we see the response like God does, as sin, harmful to us and to our relationship with God and others.

Reconciliation takes two parties. So, we fully address our side, asking for forgiveness (Matthew 5:23-24) or our worship is disturbed by this barrier. However, only one side of reconciliation lies within our control...in this case, *asking the other to forgive us*. We come to them with *godly sorrow* (not guilt or shame), grieving for how we hurt them (2 Corinthians 7:10). When the other also responds and accepts our forgiveness, the circle of life is then reunited through reconciliation, restoring unity to the body (John 17:20-23). Let it begin with us.

We do our part quickly and leave theirs with God.

As a practical tip, face-to-face is normally best to ask for forgiveness.ⁱ Focus on your personal actions. Perhaps something like this may work for you: "*God showed me that I was wrong when I _____ (action). I'm so sorry that I hurt you. Will you forgive me?*"

In Psalm 32, King David transparently writes from firsthand experience about **not** forgiving others he sinned against. He sketches some of the wonderful spiritual **benefits** flowing from acknowledging our sins (Psalm 32:1-2+5) writing about the dire consequences of **refusing** to forgive.

When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer (Psalm 32:3-4).

Why would any sane person not quickly ask forgiveness from those we sin against, so a loving Father is free to inundate us with His benefits?

"He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy" (Proverbs 28:13).

Third, So, Forgive from Our Heart those Who Sin Against Us

Forgiving others who **owe us** forgiveness is a heart-matter between us and God. Forgive from our heart, the core of who we are, the seat of our mind, emotions and will. The **process** of experiencing restful freedom from forgiving may take time. The **act** of forgiving **must** happen quickly for **your** optimum spiritual health. The longer we delay, the more the termites of unforgiveness eat away our inner life.

Jesus provides a powerful parable about the dire consequences of **not** forgiving. Take time now to read this crucial passage in **Matthew 18:21-35**, Jesus' graphic, pointed story about forgiving others. First make it your own. Jot down your thoughts and reflections before continuing.

In unmistakable terms, Jesus illustrates the core meaning of forgiving others. "*Personally take on ourselves the legitimate debt incurred by another against us.*" Then stamp "*Paid in Full!*" on their obligation.

Of course, our prison for **un**forgiveness is different as God's people. Jesus has already given us the one and only key to freedom. We simply need to use the key. Forgive others from our heart because Christ has forgiven us, take on ourselves their debt incurred by their actions to us and bring it to the cross, the *toxic waste dump* for sin. If God stirs up any reminder of a person you have not forgiven from your heart, quickly apply the key to the lock of past **un**forgiveness...**now**.

Forgive **as the Lord forgave you** (Colossians 3:13, **emphasis**).

Because God has freely forgiven and released us, then forgive others, bearing the consequences of the debt owed us. And "*release of a legitimate debt*" is at the heart of Biblical forgiveness. When another sins against me, that person owes me a legitimate debt.

If you borrowed \$1,000 from me, you are morally obligated to repay the \$1,000 to me. If I cancel or forgive your debt, though, you are now free from that obligation. I bear the weight of your \$1,000 debt because I absorb the loss. I can never again come and try to collect on it.

Again, a friend sins against me. He *owes* me the moral obligation or debt to make this right. Instead, I forgive unilaterally, that is, between God and me alone. I release him from the obligation, carrying the weight of the consequences myself. Forgiveness then involves a four-fold willingness on my part, the same four as Jesus with us. "**AS** Jesus forgave us, **SO** we forgive those who sinned against us."

- *First*, acknowledge to God the debt he or she owes us and feel the pain.
- *Second*, bear the debt **myself**, fully releasing the person from this obligation to me.
- *Third*, leave this debt from this painful event at the cross since Jesus paid for **this** sin on the cross 2,000 years ago.
- *Fourth*, don't use this **against** them in the future since love keeps no records of wrong (1 Corinthians 13:5).

*Our senses scream, "That's **not fair!** You don't know how much he (she) hurt me. Why should I forgive?"*

Certainly, I don't understand...but Jesus does. And He commands, "*forgive like I forgive you.*" And it was also **not fair** that Jesus dies in your place. But it's the only way your sins could be removed. Do you want to walk in the rest of Jesus' **freedom**. Then forgive from your heart. Quickly.

Unilateral forgiveness of the other is **enlightened self-interest**.

Don't remain hooked through the deceit of **un**forgiveness. To refuse reveals a distorted view of God, His design and the power of forgiveness that Jesus paid for in full. Our personal growth accelerates as we quickly forgive those who sin against us since we then align with how God richly pours out His own abundant grace.

God designed our body and mind so that merely recalling a past event that made us fearful or angry in the past floods our emotions with similar physiological reactions as if the event were

again taking place. That's why it's so imperative for us to process our past well by forgiving or we debilitate ourselves in the present.

We are never more like Jesus then when we forgive from our heart those who sin against us.

I want to emphasize this again. Quickly forgiving others has **no** immediate relationship with how they have treated us or whether they have repented...or ever will repent (see Jesus' model on the cross, Luke 23:34). Forgiveness has the word "**give**" at its center. Forgiveness is a gift, freely given without any guarantee of receiving back, like Jesus.

By *unilateral* I mean one-way. It's between God and me only for now. It's a gift from us to them, freely given, even when they are unaware. My forgiving lets them off my hook. It's the only way to remove the hook the other has in me, **so I am free**. The other is however still on God's hook until they deal with their sin with Him.

These four aspects of completely forgiving others are not a vending machine. Put a dollar in and get forgiveness out. This is no formula or program or outward imitation or steps. Formulas quickly slide into the law-keeping morality of legalism. Life must flow from Christ in you. If not, our responses are mere outward observances, like OT law, with no power to change us from the inside out. Carefully read *Colossians 2:21-23*. Rules-keeping lacks "*any value in restraining sensual indulgence.*"

What we say and do flows out of the core of our being, our hearts (Matthew 12:34). Our outward responses bring into the light what is happening inside to choke the channels of God's freeing grace, if we have eyes to see. How we forgive others then tends to exposes how we **feel** Jesus has forgiven us.

Jesus therefore says to forgive from our heart, authentically. We are never more like Jesus then when we forgive others who sin against us from our heart.

It's easy for us to recite Christian stuff. How quickly and thoroughly we forgive others who have sinned against us provides eloquent proof that we have some idea of how great the price is that Jesus paid to free us.

...**forgiving** each other **just as** in Christ God **forgave you** (Ephesians 4:32, **emphasis**).

Especially when their horrific sin against us has caused deep pain. Forgiving others from our heart (the core of our inner being) is the **only** way to **free us** from our pain.

*Has the Lord convicted you of any one person or event that you have **not** forgiven?*

Perhaps recent. Maybe in the distant past. Or even mom or dad or siblings when you were a child. Or a boss.

*Unilateral forgiveness of the other is **enlightened self-interest** so you can experience **freedom**.*

For a free PDF copy of this article, **click here**. In my book, *Times of Refreshing*, I provide a larger context as I dig down into all three aspects of forgiveness in more depth.

ⁱ If we ask forgiveness with some means that's storable, like an e-mail, letter or voice mail, fallen humans being what we are, a person may go back and reengage the offense. Going over and over that again usually stimulates something negative. God's intent is always full reconciliation, not stewing in the offense.

Also in face-to-face, we can read their responses better and know how to nuance our responses. Additionally, this may later be weaponized against us.