

A Biblical Understanding of Forgiveness

1. The Meaning of Forgiveness in the Scriptures

a. Hebrew words associated with forgiveness.

- 1.) כָּפַר kaphar (kaw-far') means to cover, atone, propitiate (Ex. 25; Lev. 16) [Ps. 79:9]
- 2.) נָשָׂא nasah (naw-saw') means to lift up, to carry, or to take up or away [Hos. 14:2; Is. 53:12; Ps. 25:18; Mic. 7:19]
- 3.) סָלַח salach (saw-lakh') means pardon or forgive. [Ex. 34:9; 1 Ki. 8:30; Ps. 103:2-3; Is. 55:7]

b. Greek words associated with forgiveness.

- 1.) χαρίζομαι charizomai (khar-id'-zom-ahee) means to be gracious; to give freely. [2 Cor. 2:7, 10; Eph. 4:32; Col. 2:13, 3:13]
- 2.) ἀφίημι aphíemi (af-ee'-ay-mee) means to send away, release. [Mk. 2:5, 7, 10; Ro. 4:7; Ja. 5:15; 1 Jn. 1:9; 1 Jn. 2:12]
- 3.) ἄφεσις aphesis (af'-es-is) [noun of aphíemi] means an act of sending away; an act of releasing someone from obligation or debt; the cancellation of punishment or guilt. [Mt. 26:28; Mk. 1:4, 3:29; Lk. 1:77, 3:3, 24:47; Ac. 2:38, 5:31, 10:43, 13:38, 26:18; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:22, 10:18]
- 4.) ἀπολύω apoluó (ap-ol-oo'-o) means to let loose, unbind, relieve from, set free. [Mt. 18:27]

c. Scriptural Word Pictures of God's Forgiveness

1.) Psalm 103:8-12

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

2.) Micah 7:18-19

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love (he delights to show mercy). He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

3.) Isaiah 38:17

Behold, it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness; but in love you have delivered my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast all my sins behind your back.

4.) Isaiah 43:25

I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will remember your sins no more. [See also Jeremiah 31:34 and Hebrews 10:17.]

d. Biblical forgiveness should be understood to be a gracious act of the will, motivated by love and mercy, where the forgiver expresses his forgiveness by promising his offender that he will no longer hold his sin against him.

1.) God's forgiveness is grounded in His character. Exodus 34:6-7

2.) God granting forgiveness to sinners is made possible because of His justice.
Isaiah 55:5, 10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:19, 21; Ephesians 1:7

2. The Scriptural Command to Forgive

a. Matthew 6:14-15

d. Luke 6:37

g. Colossians 3:12-13

b. Matthew 18:21-35

e. Luke 17:3-4

c. Mark 11:25

f. Ephesians 4:32

3. The Expression of Forgiveness for Reconciliation and Restoration

a. "Heart" forgiveness Matthew 18:35

- Implicit in the heart attitude of being forgiving is the purpose not to hold the sinner's sin against him any more. Mark 11:25

- Forgiving someone from the heart does not require repentance on the sinner's part.

> With God: Ex. 34:6-7; Ro. 5:6-11; Eph. 1:4-7 > With Man: Mt. 18:35; Mk. 11:25

b. The "transaction" of repentance and forgiveness. Luke 17:3-4

- Implicit in the expression of forgiveness is the promise not to hold the sinner's sin against him any more. Luke 17:3-4

- Granting forgiveness to someone is conditional upon the repentance and confession of the sinner.

> With God: 1 John 1:9; Revelation 3:19-20 > With Man: Luke 17:3-4

4. Refusal to forgive is disobedience to God and results in consequences.

a. Matthew 6:14-15; Mark 11:25

b. Luke 17:3-4

c. Matthew 18:32-35

5. Granting forgiveness when someone is not repentant and has not confessed is contrary to the instructions of the Lord.

a. Luke 17:3-4

b. Matthew 18:15-20

6. Our motivation for forgiveness should be grounded in:

a. Love for our brothers and for our enemies.

John 13:34; 1 John 4:7-11, 19-21; Matthew 5:43-48

b. A biblical understanding of God's sovereignty.

Genesis 45:5; 50:19-21

c. Our understanding of the great debt for which God has forgiven us.

Matthew 18:21-35; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13

d. Obedience to God's command to forgive. (See #2 above.)