

FORGIVENESS

THE NECESSITY OF FORGIVENESS

- Forgiveness is important...because a believer is most like God when they forgive...a Christian is at their best when they forgive because no act is more divine than forgiveness
- “A person who forgives is a person who emulates godly character. Nothing so much demonstrates God’s love as His forgiveness. A person who does not forgive is therefore a person lacking in godly character and without Christlike love, no matter how orthodox his theology or how outwardly impeccable his morals appear to be. A Christian who will not relinquish a hateful, resentful attitude toward someone who has wronged him is a person who knows neither the true glory of his redeemed humanity nor the true glory of God’s gracious divinity. An unforgiving Christian is a living contradiction of his new nature in Christ. It is central to the heart of God to forgive, and only the Christian who radiates forgiveness radiates true godliness.”¹
- This is why Scripture is filled with texts about the need to be forgiving people

Matthew 6:9-15 ~ Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. 10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. 11 Give us this day our daily bread. 12 And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. 13 And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.’ 14 For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

Matthew 18:21-35 ~ Then Peter came and said to Him, “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. 23 “For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. 24 When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. 25 But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. 26 So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you everything.’ 27 And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. 28 But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay back what you owe.’ 29 So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, ‘Have patience with me and I will repay you.’ 30 But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. 31 So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. 32 Then summoning him, his lord said to him, ‘You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33 Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?’ 34 And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. 35 My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.

Ephesians 4:32 ~ Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Colossians 3:12-13 ~ So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

- These texts demonstrate that personal forgiveness is the key to good relationships
- We know experientially the blessing that comes when we do forgive others...there is reconciliation... and restoration...and joy...and a renewed health to that relationship with the other person
- Cognitively we know just how important forgiveness is for healthy relationships
- But forgiveness is hard...especially when the offense has hurt deeply...it is not natural to us...it does not come easy...it is hard

¹ John MacArthur, *Matthew*, 143.

- “Forgiveness is excruciating. Who wants to pardon the perpetrator who maliciously wounded us?”²
- It is foreign to fleshly human nature...it does not come automatically...in fact, for many believers, some of the hardest words they can utter are “I forgive you”
- For many of us, there is a struggle to forgive others...for many reasons
- Sometimes we think our case is special...that what the other person did to us is uniquely bad
- In other cases, unforgiveness is easier than forgiveness...it becomes something that salves our consciences
- In still other situations, we want to have something to hang over their head
- But often the real reason we have a hard time forgiving is because the pain, the wounds, the hurt can be so great that there is an emotional barrier
- Just the thought of the sin against us elicits cascading emotions of hurt...and we become more interested in self-preservation than relational reconciliation
- There can be a flood of emotions that prevent us from extending the forgiveness that is necessary
- For all these reasons, this is a subject that hits home and hits hard for all of us
- It is something that we must address because forgiveness is the key to spiritual unity in the church
- Forgiveness is the key to all meaningful relationships because only forgiveness can break down the barriers that sin erects between people
- Only forgiveness can heal and restore broken relationships
- Only forgiveness can prevent a root of corrosive bitterness from springing up in our hearts

Hebrews 12:15 ~ See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled

- Therefore, it is critical that we understand what forgiveness is and how to practice it

THE NATURE OF FORGIVENESS

Its Definition

- What forgiveness is not:
 - It is not the same as reconciliation and restoration – forgiveness can be immediate but it may take time for the relationship to be healed
 - It is not the same as trust – believers must forgive but the offender must earn back the trust they lost as a result of their sin, a process which can take time
 - It does not mean there may not be consequences for the sin – a person can be truly forgiven but may have to still experience the consequences of their sinful actions
 - It does not necessarily remove the need to make restitution
- Forgiveness is a decision in which we choose to cancel the relational debt of another who has sinned against us...a decision to not hold that person’s sin against them anymore
- “Forgiveness is the gracious canceling of debt amassed by sin and choosing to relate to that person as forgiven.”³
- “A commitment by the offended to pardon graciously the repentant from moral liability and to be reconciled to that person”⁴
- To be forgiven is to be released from a debt or liability

² <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/forgive-offender-repent/>

³ <https://thementoringproject.com/field-guides/forgiveness/>

⁴ Chris Brauns, *Unpacking Forgiveness*, 55.

- It is an act of the will...a conscious choice to no longer hold your offender's sins against him, to cancel the relational debt of another who has sinned against us
- It is a promise to no longer charge them for what they have done...the matter of sin has been dealt with once and for all
- This means you don't allow yourself to dwell on the offense...you refuse to cultivate seeds of hurt...you relinquish all "rights" to get even...you choose not to bring up the offense again...you promise not to tell anyone else about the offense
- You credit your offender's account with your forgiveness
- This is why forgiveness is not a feeling...or an emotion...it is done even if the feelings aren't there...it is an act of your will in obedience to God
- "By making and keeping these promises, you can tear down the walls that stand between you and your offender. You promise not to dwell on or brood over the problem or to punish by holding the person at a distance. You clear the way for your relationship to develop unhindered by memories of past wrongs. This is exactly what God does for us, and it is what he calls us to do for others."⁵
- Believers are to pursue both forgiving and being forgiven
- On the one hand, if they have offended others, they are to pursue forgiveness and reconciliation

Matthew 5:23-24 ~ Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

- On the other hand, if someone has sinned against a believer the offended party is to lovingly confront

Matthew 18:15 ~ If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.

Its Limits

Matthew 18:21-22 ~ Then Peter came and said to Him, "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.

- Peter thought he was being exceedingly generous in offering to forgive seven times since the rabbis taught that a person could be forgiven three times but not more than that
- "Peter may have been of the opinion that Jesus would praise him for this bigheartedness. If so, his expectation was not fulfilled. There was something wrong with Peter's approach. It smacked of rabbinism. It sounded as if the forgiving spirit were a commodity that could be weighed, measured, and counted; as if it could be parceled out little by little up to a certain well-defined limit, when further distribution would have to stop."⁶
- Jesus' response indicates that forgiveness is to be limitless, wholehearted, constant, extravagant, generous
- All limits on human forgiveness must be done away with...because forgiven people must be willing to forgive
- Believers are expected to be seeking forgiveness regularly

⁵ Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker*, 209.

⁶ William Hendriksen, *Matthew*

Its Connection to Reconciliation

- Scripture speaks of two levels of forgiveness: 1) Attitudinal forgiveness; 2) Reconciled forgiveness
- Attitudinal forgiveness describes a heart attitude in which we forgive people, regardless of whether they have repented or not
- As soon as a believer find unforgiveness in their heart, they confess it and ask the Lord to grant them a heart of forgiveness, a heart which is free from vengeance and genuinely desires to see the offender made right with God

Mark 11:25 ~ Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.

- Reconciled forgiveness involves extending forgiveness to a repentant offender which begins the reconciliation process
- Reconciliation is the process whereby we learn to relate to the person we have forgiven in such a way that rebuilds trust, heals wounds, and strives for peaceful relations
- The pace of reconciliation can be quite brief or quite long, depending on the severity of the offense and the demonstration of ongoing repentance

Luke 17:3-4 ~ Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. 4 And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”

- “Restoration is the result of forgiveness and reconciliation. It is a relational state of healing in which the pain no longer dominates, healing has happened, and trust has been rebuilt. Not all relationships that have been fractured by sin can be restored. But many can. The power of the gospel is able to raise dead sinners to life, and it can heal even the most wounded of relationships.”⁷

Forgiveness → Reconciliation → Restoration

Forgiveness	Reconciliation	Restoration
Decision	Process	Result

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THE OUTWORKING OF FORGIVENESS

- The discussion about the practice of forgiveness has swung back and forth between conditional and unconditional forgiveness

Conditional Forgiveness?

- The term “conditional forgiveness” means to forgive based on the confession and repentance of an offending party...forgiveness cannot be granted to them until they have first repented of their sin
- In this view, forgiveness is based on the conditions of confession and repentance (also called “transactional forgiveness” because forgiveness cannot be granted to someone until they have first repented of their sin, and then forgiveness is given as a transaction to the offender)

⁷ <https://thementoringproject.com/field-guides/forgiveness/>

⁸ Ibid.

- This view equates the way God forgives us with how we are to forgive others...obviously, there is a parallel

Ephesians 4:32 ~ Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

- However, advocates of conditional forgiveness suggest that, since God forgives only those who repent of their sin, so we too must wait until the offender repents and asks for forgiveness
- Conditional forgiveness bases forgiveness on how God has forgiven us at salvation
- “God expects believers to forgive others in the way that he forgave them. That is, we should define forgiveness between ourselves and other people the way God defined it in forgiving us...Christians are to forgive others as God forgave them. Graciously, willingly, and freely, they should offer a costly present to any who offended them. Those who do repent and unwrap the offered package will find forgiveness and reconciliation inside... God’s forgiveness is conditional. Only those who repent and believe are saved... God’s forgiveness is a package that he wraps up and offers. But the package of forgiveness must be opened. The Bible teaches that the way that the package is opened is through repentance and faith.”⁹
- Thus, in many cases, forgiveness is withheld until the sinning party seeks reconciliation and takes the first steps of repentance...if someone is not repentant, then there is no forgiveness
- This view of usually substantiated from the following texts:

Luke 17:3-4 ~ Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. 4 And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”

Ephesians 4:32 ~ Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Colossians 3:12-13 ~ So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

- In this view, the acts of reconciliation and restoration have been conflated with forgiveness such that forgiveness is equal to reconciliation
- This has become a very prevalent view within biblical counseling circles as it has been held up as the model for biblical forgiveness
- AW Pink stated his belief in conditional forgiveness in the 1920s: “But suppose the offender does not repent? Then I am not to forgive him...I must not treat the offender as if he had done no wrong. That would be to condone the offence, and therefore I should fail to uphold the requirements of righteousness, and this the believer is ever to do. Does God ever forgive where there is no repentance? No, for Scripture declares, “If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).”¹⁰
- Jay Adams promoted the conditional/transactional view of forgiveness in 1994 in his book *From Forgiving to Forgiven*, a view which has become the norm in ACBC
- Chris Brauns’ book *Unpacking Forgiveness* (2008) further articulates this view, although he states that there should be an offer of forgiveness that is unconditional, softening the view of Adams slightly
- Problems with this view:

⁹ Chris Brauns, *Unpacking Forgiveness*, 43, 45, 47.

¹⁰

1. It creates an environment of continual confrontation

- Since reconciliation must take place for every offense for forgiveness to occur, then each sin (no matter how serious) must be confronted

2. It requires us needing another person in order to forgive

- We cannot forgive until someone asks for forgiveness (thereby meeting the conditions), allowing us to forgive and finally allowing restoration to take place

3. It encourages harboring bitterness

- An obvious problem with this view is that it has resulted in many holding on to their sin, waiting for their offender to repent before they can forgive anyone
- They are often told to either overlook the sin...or, if they cannot, to confront the offender until they repent
- The inevitable fallout is a position which leaves people confronting every sin and holding on to wrongs until there is repentance
- This practice can lead to a harboring of bitterness while withholding forgiveness
- “I know a young man (we’ll call him Jim) who believes he was mistreated by a fellow Christian several years ago. There was a dispute about who was wrong in the incident. Jim brought the matter to the elders of his church for resolution. The elders attempted to investigate the matter but ultimately concluded there was insufficient evidence to determine who was at fault. It was one person’s word against the other’s, with no other witnesses. The elders finally advised both Jim and the other party to forgive one another and put the dispute behind them. Jim refused to do that. He had read a popular Christian book on forgiveness, and the book taught that forgiveness can never be granted until the other party repents and seeks forgiveness. Jim now believes he is justified in withholding forgiveness from his brother as long as the other man refuses to admit he was wrong. Jim is determined to see that he gets justice, and he has already spent several years seeking someone who will take up his cause. But almost everyone has given him the same advice: “The issue is petty. It’s your word against the other fellow’s. This might not be resolved until Christ Himself sorts it out and you lay your differences aside in heaven. Give it up and move on. It is beginning to dominate your life and rob you of opportunities to bear the fruit of the Spirit.’ Jim refuses to heed that advice. He believes that God, who hates injustice, would never want him to suffer an injury and simply forgive the offender unconditionally...He believes he is obeying the biblical injunction of Colossians 3:13 (“Just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you”) because, after all, God does not forgive apart from the repentance of the offender. Thus he has twisted a commandment to forgive into an excuse for withholding forgiveness.”¹¹

4. It fails to take into consideration the many examples of unconditional forgiveness in Scripture

- For example, Joseph forgave his brothers even before they asked him for forgiveness
- Christ also demonstrated forgiveness from the cross

Luke 23:34 ~ But Jesus was saying, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.

- Stephen also graciously and unconditionally forgave his tormentors

Acts 7:60 ~ Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” Having said this, he fell asleep.

¹¹ John MacArthur, *Answering the Hard Questions About Forgiveness*, 1-2.

Unconditional Forgiveness?

- The term “unconditional forgiveness” means that forgiveness is granted freely by the offended party to the offender
- It is given at any time and in any circumstance, without any prerequisite repentance necessary from the offending party
- In this view, forgiveness is by nature an unconditional release of debt
- This view of usually substantiated from the many texts that speak of forgiveness without any conditions
- The Bible predominately calls Christians to forgive unconditionally

Matthew 6:14-15 ~ For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

Matthew 18:35 ~ My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.

Mark 11:25 ~ Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.

- The predominant emphasis of Jesus’ teaching on forgiveness is the unconditional release of a sin debt made by the offended party regardless of the offender’s response
- “The emphasis is on forgiving freely, generously, willingly, eagerly, speedily – from the heart. The attitude of the forgiver is where the focus of Scripture lies, not the terms of forgiveness.”¹²
- The primary problem with the unconditional view is that often forgiveness is encouraged simply because of how it makes the victim feel...i.e. it results in a therapeutic experience
- Experience and personally felt needs shape an understanding of forgiveness
- Often unconditional forgiveness is encouraged for the sake of the offended, enabling them to take back control of their life...to be able to forget and move on
- It results in therapeutic forgiveness but doesn’t resolve the offense that actually occurred
- It encourages forgiveness so the offended can be at peace...and as a means of dealing with stress and anxiety...the result is an overemphasis on unconditional forgiveness for personal gratification

Conclusion

- The best way to properly understand what Scripture teaches about forgiveness is to see a duality having two parts...an internal and an external expression...a payment and a pardon
- It is expressed unconditionally and is experienced conditionally in reconciliation
- “Forgiveness is the unconditional release of a sin debt and is experienced conditionally upon confession and repentance. In this definition, I distinguish between the nature of forgiveness (i.e., what it is) and the experience of forgiveness (i.e., what it does in the victim and transgressor). I think most of the errors come from flattening the distinction of forgiveness in the victim and the transgressor.”¹³
- This has been helpfully described as “escrow forgiveness”
- “I propose a modified two-stage approach...In the case of unrepentant offenders, we must forgive and yet not pardon them. This seems strange because it is. Sin makes things weird. The same sinners who need forgiveness are liable to mess up their repentance, gumming up the path from confession to reconciliation. In such cases,

¹² John MacArthur, *The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness*, 119.

¹³ Personal email from Marc Wragg

we must separate the two normally united elements: payment and pardon. Forgiveness means to pardon an offender by paying/absorbing his moral debt. When an offender repents, it's clear we should both pay and pardon. We absorb the moral cost of being sinned against and assure the offender of our forgiveness. When the offender doesn't repent for whatever reason—perhaps he's hard-hearted or has died—we must separate the payment from the pardon. We don't pardon him (and gloss over his offenses), because he hasn't repented, yet we still must absorb the moral cost. During our church's discussion of forgiveness, my friend Robert Wynalda III suggested we do this by writing a moral check in the offender's name and placing it in a moral escrow account, accessible to him when he repents. This solution should satisfy those who rightly insist forgiveness requires repentance because pardon is conditional on the person declaring moral bankruptcy. No repentance, no pardon. And it should satisfy those who rightly insist the offender's impenitence is no excuse to hold a grudge, because we do more than merely prepare our hearts to forgive. We do more than stand ready to pay, pen poised over our moral checkbook. We actually write the check. We pay the debt. It's now out of our hands. It's no longer our concern."¹⁴

- “Repentance is our offender's responsibility; forgiveness is our responsibility.”¹⁵

THE QUESTIONS ABOUT FORGIVENESS

What if I Sin in My Thoughts Against Another Person?

- Only actual injuries necessitate confession of sin
- A man who has a lustful thought against a woman does not necessarily need to confess that to her; rather, his confession should be to God for his sinful thought
- However, if you slander someone, confession should be made to them even if they are unaware of the offense because the offense is real

What if a Person's Repentance is Doubtful?

- Normally love requires us to believe the best about those who profess repentance

1 Corinthians 13:7 ~ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

- However, there are times when it is appropriate to evaluate someone's repentance to determine if it is genuine
- Someone who keeps hitting you in the nose and saying “sorry” likely isn't truly repentant
- We are not to throw out discernment when it comes to evaluating a person's repentance
- It is important to be wary of feigned repentance just as John the Baptist refused to baptize the Pharisees until they exhibited fruits of repentance

Matthew 3:8 ~ Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance

- False repentance focuses on damage control, blame-shifting, and excuse-making since it minimizes and rationalizes sin...worldly grief leads to fake repentance that centers on self-pity
- However, true repentance mourns that we have sinned against God and is willing to do whatever it takes to bring healing to the offended person

¹⁴ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/forgive-offender-repent/>

¹⁵ Robert Jeffress, *When Forgiveness Doesn't Make Sense*, 80.

- “So there are times when it is sheer folly to accept a mere profession of repentance, especially in the wake of several deliberate repeat offenses. Nonetheless, even after multiple offenses, the offended person must be prepared to forgive – eager to forgive – unless there remains some very compelling reason to doubt the offenders’ profession of repentance. Even the hardest and most deliberate offender should never be permanently written off; rather, complete forgiveness and reconciliation should remain the offended person’s goal.”¹⁶
- True repentance begins with a godly grief over sin, seeing our sin as an offense ultimately against God and being grieved that we have grieved him

Psalm 51:4 ~ Against You, You only, I have sinned And done what is evil in Your sight, So that You are justified when You speak And blameless when You judge.

2 Corinthians 7:10 ~ For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.

- Marks of genuine repentance from v. 11:
 - Earnestness – a desire to clear ourselves of sin
 - Vindication – a desire to restore the trust and confidence of others in you
 - Indignation – anger over sin and the shame it brings
 - Fear – of offending God and falling into sin
 - Longing – to restore broken relationships
 - Zeal – for God and his holiness
 - Avenging of wrong – wants to see justice done and sin avenged no matter the cost

Should We Always Forgive and Forget?

- The phrase “forgive and forget” has become cliché; however, it is not found in Scripture
- Often it is said that God forgets our sins when he forgives...and reference is made to these verses:

Isaiah 43:25 ~ I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake, And I will not remember your sins.

Hebrews 10:17 ~ AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE.

- These verses do not teach that God literally has lost his memory of our sins...this is impossible since he is omniscient
- They do teach that he refuses to call them to mind and promises not to bring them up...in this sense he will not remember them...they are removed when Christ’s righteousness is credited to us in justification
- So it is a misunderstanding of forgiveness that we must forget what happened to us when we forgive
- There is no way to purge the memory of an offense committed against us...in fact, the more severe the offense, the harder it will be to not remember it
- It is impossible to truly forget sins that have been committed against us
- God does not command us to forgive and forget
- Thus, if “forgive and forget” means “I will act as if the sin had never occurred to me and will live as if I don’t remember it,” that’s not appropriate
- “For example, a rape victim can choose to forgive the rapist, but that does not mean she should act as if that sin had never happened. To spend time alone with the rapist, especially if he is unrepentant, is not what Scripture

¹⁶ MacArthur, *Answering Hard Questions*, 5.

teaches. Forgiveness involves not holding a sin against a person any longer, but forgiveness is different from trust. It is wise to take precautions, and sometimes the dynamics of a relationship will have to change.”¹⁷

- However, if “forgive and forget” means that we choose to forgive the offender and move on by not holding that offense against them, that is appropriate
- This is what forgiveness involves...a promise not to bring up the offense again with the offender, others, or yourself

What if I Can’t Forgive Myself?

- Self-forgiveness is not a biblical concept; rather, believers are to know and believe that they have been forgiven by God and must take him at his word
- “I realize there are some who teach that a kind of self-forgiveness is necessary. I find this nowhere in Scripture. I’ve met many people who claim to be unable to forgive themselves, but on careful examination this usually turns out to be a kind of sinful pride exacerbated by modern self-esteem philosophy. The person who complains about not being self-forgiving is often simply looking for flattering or consoling words from others as a way of salving the hurt that guilt has caused to their pride.”¹⁸

What if the Offense was Grave and I’m Having a Hard Time Forgiving?

- Sometimes the offense is so great and the pain so intense that some have justified withholding forgiveness from the offender
- They justify their position claiming the need for emotional healing to take place first
- However, this often leads to a deep-seated resentment that only further fuels the breach in the relationship and becomes a roadblock to forgiveness
- “Forgiveness is first of all an act of the will. It is not hypocrisy to will forgiveness when the emotions are screaming for vengeance. Be obedient to the Lord regardless of how you feel. If you refuse to harbor spite or dwell on the offense, evil emotions will be starved. Moreover, the Lord Himself will set your heart right. Right emotions will eventually come if you surrender to Him.”¹⁹

What if the Person Who Sinned Against Me is Dead?

- While we long for sins to be repented of the relationship restored, death does not rob us of the opportunity to extend forgiveness
- Forgiveness is a choice to cancel another person’s relational debt and, although the offender may have died, forgiveness can still be granted
- Although reconciled forgiveness is impossible after death, attitudinal forgiveness is still possible since it involves forgiveness from the heart

¹⁷ <https://www.gotquestions.org/forgive-forget.html>

¹⁸ MacArthur, *Answering Hard Questions*, 7.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 8.