

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS *about God's forgiveness*



"To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him."

DANIEL 9:9

The forgiveness that God offers to people remains a mystery to us. How does it work? Why does God give forgiveness? Who does He give it to, and why? What things does He grant forgiveness for, and how do I know that I am forgiven? We are briefly going to look at some of these things:

- 1 Why does forgiveness exist and is it needed?
- 2 What is forgiveness?
- 3 Who receives God's forgiveness?
- 4 Are there sins that God does not forgive?
- 5 Is there something like big and small sins?

Why does forgiveness exist and what is it? Who receives forgiveness? What is being forgiven? In this article we get an overview about how God's forgiveness works.

BY REV HANNES LEE

1 WHY DOES FORGIVENESS EXIST AND IS IT NEEDED?

We must certainly first look at the origin of forgiveness: Forgiveness exists because sin exists. If it was not for sin, then forgiveness would not be necessary.

Scripture makes it apparent to us that sin occurs when we miss the purpose for which God created us; when our deeds do not glorify him and when we are disobedient towards him and do not practice his precepts.

Along with the sin that we commit each day, there is also the fact that humanity is born in sin as the Bible reveals. Mankind shares in the guilt of Adam and Eve when they rebelled against God (Genesis 3:1-14). The rebellion against God is fueled by the devil and mankind further caused it through his own free will.

This guilt of sin alone was enough to curse all mankind, to rob them of the glory of God and to shower them in eternal death (Romans 3:19, 23; 6:23).

2 WHAT IS FORGIVENESS?

Eternal death would have been the only end for all mankind if it were not for God's forgiveness, because God's justice requires that all sin be punished with death.

Forgiveness is the pardon and removal of the guilt of sin, so that we are no longer punished for it, but are absolved. And because our sins are forgiven, we have the expectation that after this life we will enter the heavenly kingdom of God.

God's forgiveness, and our release from sin, is given to us based solely on the merits of Jesus Christ. He died on the cross and with his blood paid for the guilt of God's children. The punishment that we were supposed to receive for our sin, He took on himself. He has fully paid for all the sin of all God's children.

Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is the only way in which we could be saved. As we read in Ephesians 1:7: "In him (Jesus Christ) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ..."

Continue on page 2

In this issue...

HOW AND WHY WE MUST BE AWARE OF BITTERNESS – PAGE 3.

DO A BIBLE STUDY ABOUT DAVID ASKING FOR FORGIVENESS – PAGE 4.

LEARN HOW TO ASK FOR GOD'S FORGIVENESS ON PAGE 5

HELP YOUR CHILDREN FORGIVE OTHERS – PAGE 7.

3 WHO RECEIVES GOD'S FORGIVENESS?

This is a very important question. Does God forgive everyone's sins in Jesus Christ? The answer that the Bible gives us is no. We have already referred to the fact that "God's children" are the ones who receive his forgiveness.

Who are God's children? This we find among others in Ephesians 1:4-5, just before verse 7 which we have already read. There it says that God has chosen us to be holy and without defect before him, and that He has through Jesus Christ predestined us to be adopted as his children, according to the pleasure of his will.

What does this mean? God has chosen some to be forgiven through Christ and thereby receive salvation, and others not. This decision to pardon some and not others is not unfair because everyone deserves the eternal judgement for their sins.

Those who are chosen for salvation receive extraordinary and undeserved grace according to the merciful decision of God. To those who are not chosen, the gospel is served just as intensively as to the elect, and they are just as seriously called by God, but they pay it no mind.

God's children, those who are chosen, are pardoned by the Holy Spirit to believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ and his saving actions. Along with this faith, forgiveness is also eternally gifted to them by God.

4 ARE THERE SINS THAT GOD DOES NOT FORGIVE?

There is only one sin that God does not forgive, and it is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:31-32; Mark 3:29; Luke 21:10). What is this sin? Simply stated: It is the unwillingness to accept the gospel of Jesus Christ and to not believe it.

Why is this a sin against the Holy Spirit? Because the Holy Spirit is the Great Proclaimer of the gospel. Anyone who refuses to believe what the Word states about Jesus Christ makes the Holy Spirit a liar and in this way slanders his work.

Put another way: It is the rejection of the grace of God that the Holy Spirit serves through the gospel. It is a lifelong sin, leading to the damnation of those who persevere towards it to their last day. Those who come to repentance while they are still alive, are not considered blasphemers

against the Holy Spirit, because otherwise there would be no chosen ones.

God's children, the chosen ones, do not have to fear that they will ever commit that sin, because the faith that is gifted to them through God's eternal mercy protects them from it.

5 IS THERE SOMETHING LIKE BIG AND SMALL SINS?

We love to make a distinction between so-called "big" and "small" sins. Sins are weighed against each other, and sin that according to people's judgment causes greater harm in society is seen as serious, while those that cause less to no harm and disruption are seen as lesser sin and not addressed as seriously. Many times, this distinction is abused to justify sinful actions, because "at least it is not so serious".

From God's point of view there is no such thing as big or small sins. Thus in James 2:10 we read:

"For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it."

The only distinction God makes is between the sin committed by his children and the sins of those who are not his children.

Let's look at the differences between the sin of God's children versus those of the lost ones:

Characteristics of the sins of the elect are:

- ➔ It is completely forgiven by God.
- ➔ It is ignorantly done as a consequence of the weakness of man.
- ➔ There is an actual intention led by the Holy Spirit to stay away from willful sin.
- ➔ The Holy Spirit also guides the elect to repentance and remorse of their sins.

Characteristics of the sins of the lost ones, on the other hand, are:

- ➔ The persistence in unbelief makes them blaspheme against the Holy Spirit, so that their sin is not forgiven.
- ➔ Sins are visible signs of ongoing resistance against God.
- ➔ Sins are often done on purpose and deliberately.
- ➔ There is no talk of repentance and remorse of their sin. †"

Editor's note

You might think it strange that we can do a whole issue just on the topic of forgiveness. But once you dive into it, you will see that there is a lot to know. And when we realize why we are given the task of forgiveness, we see that it is very important to know how forgiveness works.

In a way, explaining forgiveness explains the whole gospel. It starts with sin: As believers, we know that we are all born in sin. This means that we are more than likely to do things that will need forgiveness. And that is why we need Jesus Christ, our Saviour. Thankfully we have the amazing grace that Jesus died for us on the cross. By faith, through grace, our sins are forgiven.

For us this means that a) we have to know and acknowledge our sins, b) ask forgiveness for our sins, and c) forgive others who have sinned against us. Forgiveness is definitely not an easy task.

I would urge you to think even further, and ask yourself: How do I live because I receive forgiveness? Does the way I live my life show that I am thankful for the gift of grace I received?

May we all strive to live a life of gratitude and obedience as the saved children of God! †"

About us

- EDITOR: WILNA MYBURGH
- TRANSLATOR: THANDEKA MAHLANGU
- EDITING: WILNA MYBURGH & THANDEKA MAHLANGU
- LAYOUT: WILNA MYBURGH

The Cross Courier is the English magazine of the Reformed Churches in South Africa. Copyright is reserved. It is funded and driven by the Youth Deputies who wish to spread the gospel to English-speaking Christians of all ages.

Find all our contact details here:

🌐 WWW.CROSSCOURIER.CO.ZA

📱 THE CROSS COURIER

☎ 018 297 3986

✉ OFFICE@CROSSCOURIER.CO.ZA

Donations are welcome:

GKSA ADMIN BURO ABSA BANK

BRANCH CODE 632005

ACCOUNT NUMBER 670 140 040

REFERENCE: CROSS COURIER

All Bible verses are from the ESV translation.

DO NOT let BITTERNESS paralyze you!

Not only do we have the task to forgive, but not forgiving can lead to bitterness. Learn more about bitterness from the story of Naomi and learn how to prevent yourself from becoming bitter.

BY REV JAN-LOUIS LEE

In Ruth 1 we read about an interesting family: Elimelech with his sons and wife, Naomi – who go and find a home in Moab. It is a well-known story; in the end Naomi and her daughter-in-law return to Bethlehem without a single cent. Then we read something very striking:

"She said to them, 'Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty.

Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?'"

RUTH 1:20-21

The circumstances in which Naomi (which means "pleasant" or "gentle") now finds herself in, make her bitter – so bitter that she herself arrogantly accuses God of turning against her.

THE MEANING OF THE WORD BITTER

The word bitterness or bitter is used several times in Scripture, usually in the sense of a disappointment, a bad experience, or heartache and anxiety. Some dictionaries also associate this word with the word poisonous – a deadly substance that causes death.

THE BITTERNESS IN NAOMI

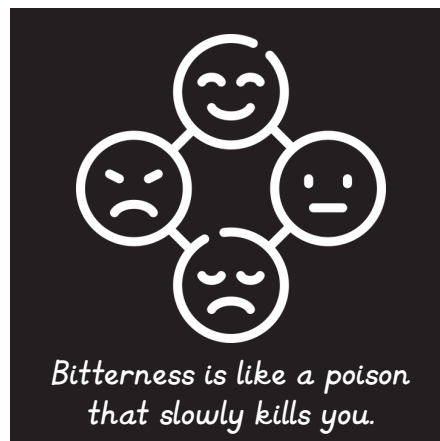
Naomi in Ruth 1 becomes consumed by bitterness, even crippled. So much so that when she returns to Bethlehem, she is no longer pleasant or gentle. It is like she underwent an identity change, and is now a bitter, angry, old woman.

Bitterness occupied her heart so much that she experienced every negative thing around her. She feels she is the target of God's judgment; and she cannot move forward from the bitterness.

These events teach us something about the way in which bitterness weighs down our hearts and occupies our thoughts.

HOW BITTERNESS IS PARALYZING

- ➔ Bitterness weighs you down because it causes a type of tunnel vision where your life is absorbed by a single matter or incident.
- ➔ Bitterness makes you distressed and anxious because you worry about things you have no control over.
- ➔ It is an unwelcome visitor that occupies your thoughts and makes any positive thoughts impossible.



WHAT CAN LEAD TO BITTERNESS?

In this world there are awful things that happen to people. Great injustice, heartache, pain. Such as when a friend or loved one disappoints or hurts you. When that happens, it feels like a bridge that burned, your trust is broken, and you struggle to carry on with the relationship.

Other times there are things that happen to us from an unexpected angle: A drunk driver causes the death of loved ones, a farm murder takes the life of family members, a swindler steals your hard-earned money.

These incidents can leave you shocked about what one human can do to another. It can also make you extremely sad and make it hard for you to forgive.

A lot of people, even believers, sit in a spiral of shock, sadness, anger, and finally, bitterness. This bitterness makes them refuse to forgive. But what is really sad about bitterness, is that it has no effect on the target. They remain – free of charge – in your thoughts, but it hollows you out bit by bit.

FORGIVENESS IS NOT OPTIONAL

Our Lord Jesus gives a command that we cannot evade or overlook: We must forgive each other. In Matthew 18:21 and further Jesus teaches us that we must forgive each other in love. Just after the command is the parable of the servant who was pardoned by the king but did not pardon those who owed him. This reminds us about our own forgiveness: Christ's sacrifice came to reconcile us with him.

He truly has written off the deepest and most serious debt that could ever be written off: God forgave us unconditionally. Therefore we pray: "...and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:12).

FORGIVENESS IS A PROCESS

We can never forgive from our own might; it is a process: Ask God in prayer every day that He may help you in such a way that you are able to forgive – even if it seems impossible to you.

Forgiveness does not suggest that we must become best friends again; that we carry on as if nothing happened. It means that you give up thinking of payback and leave it to the Lord, who knows our hearts and sins (Psalm 139).

Sometimes it means to forgive, even if forgiveness was not asked for, even if that person denies that he or she has hurt you. It also means that you guard your heart, just as the poet teaches us in Proverbs 4:23-24: "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you."

Someone once said not to forgive is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die. Bitterness is a poison that washes over your whole being, takes away your joy and completely destroys your ability as an instrument in the Lord's kingdom.

By forgiving and giving up the hold of bitterness on your life, you unlock your heart to see the grace of Christ once more. †



PSALM 51 (ESV)

Create in Me a Clean Heart. O God

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

- ¹Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.
- ²Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!
- ³For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.
- ⁴Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.
- ⁵Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.
- ⁶Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.
- ⁷Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- ⁸Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice.
- ⁹Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.
- ¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.
- ¹¹Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
- ¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.
- ¹³Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.
- ¹⁴Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.
- ¹⁵O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.
- ¹⁶For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.
- ¹⁷The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
- ¹⁸Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; build up the walls of Jerusalem;
- ¹⁹then will you delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Repenting our sins LIKE DAVID DID

We need to follow the example of David we read about in Psalm 51: Recognise your sins and ask God for forgiveness.

BY REV BRAHM ROBINSON

James 1:14-15 explains the path and direction in which sin moves: "... but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."

David's life is an excellent example of this. We read about David's sin with Bathsheba and Uriah in 1 Kings 15:5: "For David had done what was right in the eyes of the Lord and had not failed to keep any of the Lord's commands all the days of his life—except in the case of Uriah the Hittite."

David's sin was a spiral from dark to even darker: It starts with him coveting his neighbour's wife, which leads to him committing adultery, and eventually it leads to murder.

You can read more about David's story in 2 Samuel 11, which is also the background to Psalm 51. Our Bible study will be focussing on Psalm 51.

- 1 What is usually our first reaction when we realize that we sinned? Read Genesis 3:8.
- 2 What happens if you try to cover sin with more sin?
- 3 How, and why, does a believer become aware of his sin?
- 4 How did David realize that the Lord knows all his sins? How does the Lord bring you to the realization of your sin?
- 5 What is the obedient response of a believer to sin in his life?
- 6 Read verse 4. What does it mean that David has sinned against the Lord alone?
- 7 What was the Lord's just verdict? Read 2 Samuel 12:10-12.
- 8 What does David mean in verse 5 when he says that he was already guilty when he was born, sinful even when his mother was pregnant?
- 9 How can I know how the Lord wants me to live? Look at verse 6.

DAVID'S PRAYER FOR A DEEP CLEANSING

David prays that God will cleanse him from his sin. Cleansing with hyssop alludes to the ceremonial cleansing, such as the cleansing of a leper, or those who have touched a corpse. After being cleansed, a person may join the people again. David prayed that the Lord will not only clean him ceremonially, but give him a deep cleansing within, where people's hands cannot wash; where the consequences of sin cannot be taken away by people; where God's hand rests heavily on him.

- 10 How do you feel when you hide your sin? Why? See verse 8.

CONFESSING YOUR SINS

Nathan had already reassured David at the first visit that his sin was forgiven and that he would not die, and yet praying for forgiveness was part of his prayer (2 Samuel 12:13). David realizes that it is about recognizing and confessing his guilt before God. Don't keep the remorse of your sin to yourself, but rather open it up to God.

- 11 Why does David pray that the Lord should not take his Holy Spirit away from him? What does the Holy Spirit do?
- 12 What does a sacrifice of humiliation look like?
- 13 How should we feel about our salvation in Christ? See verse 12.
- 14 What does your commitment to the Lord look like? See verse 14.
- 15 Why is it important that God must give us the words with which we should praise him?

In these Bible verses in 1 Samuel and Psalms we read about David's spiral into sin. However, what is important for us is David's acknowledgment of his sins and his eventual repentance for what he did.

Pray that you may know all your sins. We can only ask God's forgiveness for our sins after we acknowledge our deeds as sin and repent. You must pray that you will have great remorse and openly confess your sin to God. Pray that the Lord will forgive all your sin. †

[as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.]

(PSALM 103:12)

How do I ask for forgiveness for my sins?



We must realize, acknowledge, and confess our sins. Read here about why we can pray over our sins with confidence.

BY REV WERNER BROTHERTON

Sometimes one of the most difficult things we can do is to acknowledge that we have made a mistake. In marriage it is often needed that you admit that you have done something wrong. A lot of the time it is the beginning of the road to understanding. That's how it is with the Lord's Prayer when we ask for forgiveness. We must firstly realize, then acknowledge, and finally confess that we have sinned.

THE SIN OF DAVID

In 2 Samuel 11 we read that David sinned by laying with Bathsheba. After that he also had her husband Uriah killed. The Lord sends his prophet Nathan to speak to David and make him realize that he has sinned.

Psalm 51 is a confession of this sin, and a call for forgiveness from the Lord. Read Psalm 51 and 2 Samuel 11 and 2 for more background. On the previous page you can read Psalm 51 and do a Bible Study about David's sin and his asking for forgiveness.

What is forgiveness?

The word for forgiveness in Hebrew means to forget, or to not count someone's sin against him. What we therefore do when we ask for forgiveness is that we ask the Lord that He will forget our sin.

In Psalm 103 we learn that the Lord removes our sins so far from us as the west is from the east (Psalm 103:12). Feel free to read the entire Psalm 103 and see the wonder of the Lord's forgiveness.

ASKING FOR FORGIVENESS IN PRAYER

What Psalm 51 teaches us is that we must realize our sin and confess it to the Lord. It is important that we know what we are asking forgiveness for, Whom we ask it from, and on which grounds:

- ➔ We must call on the one true God as He reveals himself in his Word.
- ➔ We must properly and thoroughly know our distress and misery so that we can be humbled before God's majesty.
- ➔ We have the firm ground, although we do not deserve it. God wants to answer our prayer for the sake of Christ, just as He promised us in his Word.

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!

For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

PSALM 51:2-3

THE CONFIDENCE TO PRAY OVER OUR SINS

Prayer should be the most important part of a believer's life. We must learn how to pray, and if we do not know what to pray, we can pray the Psalms. The Psalms is also known as the prayer book of Christ; we can just look at how much He prayed the Psalms.

It is sometimes very intimidating for us to pray, especially to acknowledge that we have sinned, but in Christ we have the confidence that our prayers will be answered.

- ➔ In Romans 8 we learn that the Holy Spirit purifies our prayers. It means that our prayers look different than how we pray them, they are purified prayers.

- ➔ Our boldness goes even further. The book of Hebrews teaches us that Jesus is our high priest who intercedes for us with the Father. Through his mediation He brings our prayers before the Father. The Holy Spirit therefore purifies our prayers and Jesus Christ brings them before the Father. It awakens in us a great confidence in the Lord!

What if I forget to pray for a sin?

Does it mean that some of my sins stay unforgiven? No! Mercifully not. May we never think so little of Christ's works. Our prayers do not determine if we are saved or not.

Look at the murderer hanging next to our Lord Jesus on the cross (Luke 22:33-49). He did not pray. He only asked Christ to think of him in Paradise. And yet our Lord Jesus says that he will be with him in Paradise. He realized who Jesus was and by asking Jesus to think of him, he is saved. It is also a form of confession.

Why do we ask for forgiveness?

We ask for forgiveness because we are dependent on the Lord, and He wants us to realize that. We must also realize how great our sin is, so that we know how urgently we need salvation.

Prayer is part of our life of gratitude. And in gratitude for Christ's works, we confess our sins before the Lord and ask that the Lord will carry us in Christ. We may ask that He does not make us bear our sin, but rather bear Christ's works. †

RECEIVE AND GIVE *forgiveness*

Explore the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer and apply it your own prayer life.

BY REV JANRÉ VAN JAARVELD

The Lord's prayer are words that every Christian should know. But our prayer should never be empty words that we pray by routine. We must remember that it is Jesus Christ, our King, who teaches us to pray. The Lord's prayer is important in our own prayer lives, because we gain the wonderful comfort of the gospel from it. In this article we explore the fifth petition:

"and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

MATTHEW 5:12

WE HAVE ALL SINNED AGAINST GOD

You might be wondering what this fifth petition has to do with the gospel. Everything! Did you know that you have sinned against God? Yes, you did. We have, all of us, sinned against God as Romans 3:23 teaches us:

"... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God ..."

When we pray the fifth petition, we realize once more how precious our salvation and justification in Jesus Christ is. We cannot pay for our debt of sin before the Lord. We cannot save ourselves. But here is our comfort: you and I are absolutely saved by grace alone through faith.

WE CANNOT EARN THE GRACE OF GOD

God's way of doing things and man's way of doing things differ greatly. From a young age we get used to the fact that we must work and pay for everything, but God's way is the exact opposite. We receive his grace and eternal life for free; we cannot earn it. This is not my own opinion, it is a precious comfort from the Word of God. As Paul teaches us in Ephesians 2:8: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing: it is the gift of God ..."

So, we are saved and washed clean in Jesus Christ because we believe, even though we have sinned against God. It is a precious gift of grace. Every day we say thank you to the Lord by living for him and by doing what is right in his eyes. And we also pray the fifth petition every day.

This petition is an absolute plea that God will still not hold us accountable for our sins, but have mercy on us because of Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE 5TH PETITION

In the first part of the petition we ask God's forgiveness. In the next part we pray that we forgive those who sin against us. This is a very difficult thing to do. When someone wrongs you, they hurt you and sometimes make you suffer terribly. You might even want to get back at them, rather than forgive them. But that is not how a Christian lives!

When we think about our relationships and especially think of the people who have wronged us, then as Christians we must always keep in mind how mercifully the Lord works with us and how He forgave us. He gives us the precious gift of eternal life, even though we have sinned against him.

THE HOLY SPIRIT WORKS IN US

The fifth petition is also a sign of God's gracious work in our lives through his Holy Spirit that makes us new. God does not only restore our relationship with him in Jesus Christ, but also our relationships with each other. May you always remember this when you hold a grudge against someone or when someone wrongs you. Let us treat and approach one another with the same mercy with which God serves us.

Every time we sing and pray the Lord's Prayer and come to the fifth petition, may we remember that a Christian who has received forgiveness, is also a Christian who shows forgiveness to others. †

Jesus prayed FOR US *on the cross*

In the Gospels we read Jesus Christ's last seven words or sayings before his death. The first of these is a prayer:

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

LUKE 23:34

If you really want to understand the power of Jesus' prayer, you must reflect on all the events that led to this point. Jesus is severely abused by his enemies. Many things are taken from him – his freedom, his clothes, his dignity. But, his answer to mockery and false accusations is a prayer to his Father for sinners. He begs his Father, not for relief from his own suffering, but for the forgiveness of his enemies.

The last words that Jesus said on the cross are very important to us. We must learn from his words and live by them every day.

REVISED FROM A SERMON BY REV. COEN VREY

JESUS DOES WHAT HE TEACHES

In Matthew 5:44 He says: "But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you," and this is exactly what He does. Even in the humiliation of the cross He did the will of God by loving his enemies. We must also follow the example of Jesus – love our enemies and pray for them.

JESUS' PRAYER IS FOR EVERYONE

The "they" in the prayer means everyone who has been born again through the Holy Spirit. The only condition is faith.

Everyone who is enlightened by the grace of God and recognizes the terribleness of their sin as rebellion against God is part of this "they". We must pray to God to help us acknowledge our own sins so that we may also be saved.

JESUS' PRAYER IS ALSO FOR EVERYTHING

Jesus does not mention anyone by name, nor does He mention only certain sins. In

love, He includes all the transgressions, accusations and mockery, and all the rejection of God's grace in his prayer. All our sins are included in this prayer, so that no one should ever say in doubt that their sin is too great to be forgiven. But remember, the only sin that is not included is the sin against the Holy Spirit.

LOOK TO THE CROSS FOR FORGIVENESS

Even before your birth, even when we were still enemies and unknowingly rejecting Christ, He had already prayed for us. His prayer was already being answered.

To this day the Father answers Jesus' prayer on the cross. As believers we have to understand the power of this prayer. Jesus died for our sins on the cross. He prayed for us.

We must live a life of gratitude. Live every day with the understanding that even on the cross, even in his darkest hour, Jesus was praying for each and every one of us. †

Children's Corner

I CAN FORGIVE OTHERS because God forgives me!

Memory verse

EPHESIANS 4:32 (ESV)

"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. "



Ask God to help you forgive

Sometimes it is very hard for us to forgive someone else. Or you might forgive, but still remember what they did. God can help you! Pray that He will help you to forgive and forget.

Parables are simple stories that teaches us something. In Matthew 18 we read the parable about the unforgiving servant. This parable teaches us that we have to forgive others who have done something to us, just as God forgives us all our sins.

Describe the following words in your own words:

- 1 Parable
- 2 Mercy
- 3 Forgiveness



How many times should we forgive someone?

"Then Peter came up and said to him, 'Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times'" (Matthew 18:21-22).

Jesus does not want us to do maths here. It is not about the number, but about what we learn. Jesus asks us to not count the times that we forgive someone. The lesson is that we should not be keeping score. We must forgive others over and over again just like He does for us.

We read the story of a servant who owed money to the king. When the king wants to collect the money, the servant begs him to give him more time. The king agrees. Later, the servant meets another servant who owes him money. His fellow servant begs him for more time, but the unforgiving servant does not want to give him more time. When the king hears about this, he is very angry and sends the servant to jail.

What do we learn?

Mercy is when we do not get the punishment we deserve. When someone shows us mercy, we have to show that same mercy to someone else. God shows us mercy by forgiving our sins. That means we have to show mercy to all other people by forgiving them.

Read the whole parable in Matthew 18:21-35.

True or false

Read Matthew 18:21-35 and then mark each of these sentences as true or false:

- 1 We must forgive each other three times.
- 2 The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a servant.
- 3 The servant owed him ten thousand talents.
- 4 The king did not forgive the servant at first.
- 5 The heavenly Father will forgive every one who forgives his brother.

ANSWERS: 1. False, 2. False, 3. True, 4. False, 5. True

Can you remember the memory verse at the top of the page?

Complete the missing words:

Be _____ to one another,
tenderhearted, _____
one another, as _____
in _____ forgave you.

DOES FORGIVENESS *automatically* MEAN RECONCILIATION?



Learn what reconciliation is according to the Bible and how it works with forgiveness.

BY REV MARNIX BOERSEMA

One of the most beautiful gifts we receive from the Lord is relationships with other people. However, relationships are also one of the most difficult aspects of our lives, because sin hurts our relationships and can even end them.

The solution that the Lord gives us is to forgive each other and reconcile, but what does it mean to forgive and does forgiveness then automatically mean reconciliation?

WHY MUST WE FORGIVE EACH OTHER?

Forgiveness is a command from God to all Christians (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13). We are called, not to avenge, but to forgive. It is the Lord's "right to avenge" (Romans 12:19).

Forgiveness is not something that comes easily. That is why we must remind ourselves of the reason why we forgive. We forgive because God forgave us first:

"... forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."

EPHESIANS 4:32

It means we will only really be able to forgive if we understand the gospel! If I understand that in my sin, I am no different than the other person, I can begin to forgive. If I understand that Jesus forgave my sins, then I can share that same forgiveness with others.

FORGIVENESS MERCIFULLY WRITES OFF THE OTHER PERSON'S FAULT

Forgiveness does not mean overlooking someone else's sin against me. On the contrary, I must talk to the other person about it (Matthew 18). After acknowledging the sin, the next step is to forgive. The forgiveness that we then share does not look like the world's forgiveness, but like Jesus's.



Biblical forgiveness is to mercifully write off the fault of the other person. It is a promise that you make to the other person. A promise to not bring up the offense in conversation again. Not to think about it anymore. Not to make the other person pay for it.

FORGIVENESS MEANS TRYING TO FORGET

Once I have forgiven someone, I must not keep thinking about the offense and worry about it. The Lord, through his grace, will help you forget over time.

FORGIVENESS DOES NOT ALWAYS REMOVE THE EFFECT OF SIN

Unfortunately forgiveness does not fix a broken relationship automatically. That is because reconciliation must come from both persons. But Biblical reconciliation does not involve you waiting for the other person.

Jesus gave his life in our place and bore our sin, so that there can be reconciliation and peace between us and God (Romans 5:10). Christians must take initiative and go to extreme lengths to bring about peace and harmony in a broken relationship. In Matthew 5:23-24 we are instructed about reconciling with our brothers before coming to the altar.

HOW DOES RECONCILIATION LOOK?

Reconciliation means that you reach an understanding with the other person. It removes the wedge that came in between two people. If sin is the wedge between us, as it usually is, it must be addressed. We must repent. Forgiveness must be shared by both people.

Reconciliation requires us to work hard at repairing the relationship. Forgiveness is not always all that is needed. We must also take care not to repeat the sin, and address the effect of the sin.

Peace and harmony in our relationships with other people must be part of our worship lives (1 John 2:9-10; Romans 12:18).



If I have forgiven, then I must go to extreme lengths to also reconcile myself with the other party. Reconciliation is the ideal which Christians must strive towards - the ideal result of forgiveness.

WHAT IF RECONCILIATION IS NOT POSSIBLE?

Sometimes, like we have already said, reconciliation is not possible, even though you have forgiven the other person. Peace and harmony may not be possible because the other person does not want to forgive. Or what happened was of such a nature that you will just not be able to have the same relationship as before.

Consider every situation on its own merit in obedience to the Lord. Ask your elder or another Christian to pray with you for wisdom regarding the broken relationship. Ask for God's guidance. Pray for obedience. †

COLOSSIANS 3:13

"... if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."

LUKE 6:37

"Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven."

MATTHEW 18:15

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother."