

**By Jeff L. Gay**

Jeff@heartprisonministries.org  
www.heartprisonministries.org  
www.davidhairabedian.com



# *As We Have Also Forgiven*

**...As We Also Have Forgiven...**

by Jeff Gay

**So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (Matthew 5:23-24, RSV)**

**Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. (Mathew 6:12, NIV)**

Forgiveness is what happens when God's grace and mercy collides with our hard, stony hearts. How often I have carried around and nursed and nurtured ill feelings towards my fellow man. In my pride, I thought, "Certainly, I was in the right, for I never make mistakes. There could never be a misunderstanding on my part. Assuredly, I could not do anything that would elicit such a venomous response from another. Why did they act like that for no reason at all?" Sound familiar? Then you are in the right place at the right time, read on.

For many of us, unforgiveness is a way of life. We expend our emotional, spiritual, and physical energy hating, despising, disrespecting, slandering, libeling, and generally trying to make life miserable for those who have crossed us in one way or another. Not only do we look for the opportunity to stick a knife in their back (sometimes, literally), but we want to be sure to give it a twist or two every chance we get. Carrying around unforgiveness is like drinking poison and hoping someone else gets sick! I know, I used to do it and am ashamed to admit that I am still guilty of this sin occasionally.

Yes, it is a sin. Sin is defined as "missing the mark or standard set by God" (see Romans 3:23). Sin is also anything that separates us from God. In Matthew 5:23-24 (above), Jesus tells us that we should not even offer a gift to God if there are issues to be resolved with a brother or sister. We are instructed to be reconciled with (make things right) and then offer our gift with a clean heart. If we are not reflecting the character of Jesus, most likely there is some sin hiding in our hearts. Though we are going to examine forgiveness in the earthly realm, we must first understand the forgiveness God has given us in the spiritual realm.

## **JESUS DIED FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF OUR SINS**

Beware of those who will tell you that God forgives our sin because He is a loving and merciful Father. It is true that He is our loving and merciful Father in Heaven, but He could not simply forgive our sins and

remain holy. In the Old Testament, a blood sacrifice was required to atone for one's sins. (Review Hebrews chapter 9.) That was God's covenant with His people, Israel. God had a better covenant in mind. He gave us His only Son, that the ransom for our sins might be paid once and for all. It is only through the blood sacrifice of Jesus that God the Father could forgive our sins and still remain holy. If this were not so, Christ's death is "much ado about nothing."

"So overflowing is his kindness toward us that he took away all our sins through the blood of his Son, by whom we are saved; and he has showered down upon us the richness of his grace—for how well he understands us and knows what is best for us at all times" (Ephesians 1:7-8, LVB). God's forgiveness of our transgressions was bought at great price. Let us not forget that many times, our forgiving of others may require a sacrifice or cost on our part. It may be costly emotionally or financially. We may have to set aside our prejudices and come out of our comfortable little boxes to be stretched and grow to the greater glory of God the Father.

To be able to forgive, we must first understand and accept God's forgiveness. If we have not experienced the Father's forgiveness, it will be difficult to forgive others. **You cannot give something you do not possess.** All we must do is to confess our sins and believe in Jesus, our Rock. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1John 1:9, RSV). When we accept Jesus as our Savior, our sins are forgiven, past, present, and future. We confess our sins to allow us to more freely enjoy our relationship with Christ. You don't need to constantly re-confess the same sins over and over, and you don't have to worry that if you forget one, you've lost your salvation. God knows your heart. He wants to forgive you through the sin-cleansing blood of His Son, Jesus. Don't believe Satan's lies that your sins are so bad that God cannot forgive them. He already has, you just need to accept in faith.

### WHERE'S THE PENNY?

Many years ago, about seventeen to be exact, a major hamburger chain in my hometown cheated me out of a penny. It seems they had changed their cash registers a week or so before the new tax rate went into effect. As a result, I paid \$1.89 instead of \$1.88 for my purchase. You see, I was also in the retail business and I knew I was right. I called the manager and basically got ignored. Now, there is no question I was right and had been wronged. The manager probably should have given me the penny back and apologized. He didn't. As a result, I did no business with that particular store for almost two decades. I carried that grudge, nursed it, and told many people about what had happened to me.

In my mind, my reaction was reasonable. I was right. But, let's look at the big picture. What are the spiritual implications of my actions? In refusing to patronize this establishment, I did miss food that I enjoyed, but how many opportunities did I miss to touch the people whom God would have put in my path? In my stubbornness, I missed the joy of fellowship with other Christians who were not caught up in my little world of offense. I was not reflecting the forgiving nature of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I spoke negatively of others. In the whole scheme of things, this situation did not affect my spiritual life in a greatly negative fashion (that I was aware of), but it did affect others. In diminishing others, I encouraged the same behavior in my brothers and sisters. In allowing one seed of unforgiveness to grow, I had allowed weeds into my spiritual garden and the yield was decreased from the highest God had planned.

The best thing that happened was when our youth pastor found out. He said, "Get over it! It's a stinking penny!" I took that as God's message that I needed to let it go. (What are you holding onto that you need to let go?) Now, I have one less ugly little imp to pop up and annoy me and distract me from doing the Lord's business. This is just a story about a penny, but it is from such innocent distractions that attitudes grow. Be quick to forgive.

### FORGIVING OTHERS

In the course of everyday life, there are an uncountable number of opportunities to be wronged or offended. It might be an unpaid loan, an unreturned favor, another driver cutting you off in traffic, or someone slipping into line ahead of you in the chow hall, someone snitching on you or lying about you. It

could be more serious, someone hurting or abusing you or a loved one. At worst, some family member is murdered. Life will undoubtedly deal each of us a share of sorrows and hurts. There is no question on this point. The measure of your character is not whether troubles come, but **how you choose to deal with them**. Holding onto unforgiveness is like leasing someone space in your mind, knowing you'll never receive a rent payment.

In Paul's letter to the Colossians, he clearly outlines how we are to deal with each other. "As the chosen of God, then, the holy people whom he loves, you are to be clothed in heartfelt compassion, in generosity and humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive each other if one of you has a complaint against another. The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same" (Colossians 3:12-13, NJB). In Matthew 6:14-15 and Mark 11:25-26, Jesus explains that we must be willing to forgive others if we are to receive God's forgiveness. Jesus gives us the ultimate example on the Cross. After having been beaten, mutilated, humiliated, and hung on the Cross to die, He pleads, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34, RSV). Peter calls us to forgive others that we might be blessed. "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing" (1Peter 3:9, NIV). Throughout the Bible, we are called to be a forgiving people, a reflection of Christ in us. Jesus explains in the following parable:

"Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the reckoning, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents [millions of dollars]; and as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him the lord of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But that same servant, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred *denarii* [a few dollars]; and seizing him by the throat he said, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison till he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, till he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart." (Matthew 18:23-35, RSV)

In days of old, the rabbis taught that people should be forgiven only three times. In an attempt to be especially generous, Peter asked Jesus if it was enough to forgive someone seven times. Jesus replied, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven." (See Matthew 18:21-22). That's four hundred and ninety times. In essence, Jesus is saying that we are to forgive again and again, forever. If we expect the Father to forgive us again and again, forever, we should be prepared to do the same for our fellow man. That's the beauty of Kingdom life, as God shines us, refines us, and polishes us, we are better able to reflect His character and glory.

## FORGIVING OURSELVES

Sometimes, we need to forgive ourselves. Many of us are too hard on ourselves. We are not Jesus Juniors. We are going to miss the mark, a lot! When we fall short of God's holy standard, we must first repent and seek His forgiveness. He will grant you forgiveness and cast your transgressions into the sea of forgetfulness. "Where is another God like you, who pardons the sins of the survivors among his people? You cannot stay angry with your people, for you love to be merciful. Once again you will have compassion on us. You will tread our sins beneath your feet; you will throw them into the depths of the ocean!" (Micah 7:18-19, LVB). God has hurled your sins into the depths of the ocean, so they will never again be washed up on shore. And, he doesn't want you to go deep-sea fishing for them. Leave them where He has buried them, that's His plan and His mercy. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:1, NKJV).

We must accept that God has a plan and knows what is best for us. Now, just because we have forgiven others or ourselves, doesn't always mean that we will forget. Many times, God will grant that grace over time, but we may always carry the memory of a hurt or a misstep for the rest of our lives. We have a choice. We can set up a memorial gravestone to be revisited over and over and keep the wound fresh and bleeding. On the other hand, we can choose to turn it into a **learning experience**, making it a milestone in our journey with the Lord. We can move onward and upward, or we can live in the graveyard of memories. We have the choice.

## FORGIVING GOD

Are you holding a grudge against God? Is there anything you blame God for? Has something happened to you or a family member which you believe God to be responsible for? Let's see what the Bible has to say on the subject. God's own people, Israel, are held captive in Babylon and no doubt placed the blame on God for their great misfortune. (In truth, it was the result of their own sinful ways, not God's hand.) Jeremiah reveals God's heart for His children; "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11, NIV). God's promise is as true today as it was 2600 years ago. Throughout the Old Testament, we find the Israelites walking with God in victory, and then turning from Him and encountering disaster. God's plan for us is good, but too often we wreck it with our better ideas.

Even when we are beaten, abused, and sold down the river, God can redeem it and use our tragedy to His glory. Study the story of Joseph (Genesis chapters 37-50) and see how God can work out His plans through the most difficult of circumstances. Joseph forgave His brothers, who had sold him into slavery, and told them, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Genesis 50:20, NIV). What a testimony Joseph had! (God took Joseph from the prison to the palace and saved a whole nation through him. What is God's plan for you?) Paul, in his letter to the Romans, assures 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, NIV). We can't always see the big picture, but God is sewing all our circumstances together to make a wonderful quilt to glorify Himself (see also John 11:4)

God doesn't need our forgiveness. He is holy and pure and blameless. However, we may need to forgive him for the sins of others that we have laid at His feet. They do need to be laid at His feet, but for forgiveness, not blame. Unforgiveness toward God is a sin, because it separates us from His love. If you need to, take a moment right now and forgive God for whatever you blame Him for. He doesn't need it, but you do. God wants to take that burden from you, all you have to do is give it to Him. He won't take it from you, but he will joyfully accept it, because He wants a restored relationship with you, today!

## WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

**For starters**, you are being obedient to God. Obedience brings blessings (see Deuteronomy Chapter 28) into your life. *If you would like a reprint of our teaching, Obedience – Kingdom Currency, please write or email our ministry).* **Secondly**, you are relieving yourself of carrying around the baggage of the past. You can let go of the hurt, anger, pain, hate, bitterness, and loneliness you feel. You can begin to heal. **Thirdly**, when you forgive others or yourself, you grant the freedom to live in peace and change for the better.

## FORGIVENESS POWER POINTS

Here are a few important points to remember about forgiveness. 1) Forgiveness is not forgetting, it is actively choosing to overlook memories. Many times after forgiving someone, we will forget, but not always. We do always have the choice to take our thoughts captive and turn them over to God. "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2Corinthians 10:5, NIV). 2) Forgiving will not necessarily relieve the pain of a hurt or loss. Wounds and damaged relationships will take time to heal. 3) Finally, forgiveness doesn't deny responsibility for behavior. You have simply chosen to release the other person from any debt

to you. The other person may still suffer the consequences of their actions (legal, financial, emotional, etc.), but they no longer owe you.

Paul instructs us, "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:17-21, NIV). Forgiveness is a primary hallmark and cornerstone of the Christian life. "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!" (Romans 5:8-9, NIV). If you have received God's GRACE (**God's Riches At Christ's Expense**), how could you not want to pass it along through forgiveness? We are called to love others, not because of their shortcomings, but in spite of them.

Forgiveness is a foreign concept to many outside the Kingdom of God. People sue each other at the drop of a hat. If you are offended, sue them. If you are injured, sue them. Give me my rights. File on that staff member. Give them what they deserve. Sounds like the evening news. In Christ, we are called to lead a different life. Forgiveness can break the cycle of retaliation and lead to restoration. It may help your enemy see that there is a better way. It frees you from the burden of bitterness.

### HOW DO I DO IT?

We must first understand that forgiveness is an act of will. You must choose to do it. You may not feel like forgiving, but you can choose to and then follow up with actions. Many times our emotions will follow our actions. If appropriate, approach the other person, expressing your desire to heal the relationship. Send them a gift or lend a helping hand. Smile at them. Treat them as a valued friend (and child of God). You may be surprised to find that **right actions lead to right feelings**.

Here is an exercise you can do. (This is adapted from [www.positive-way.com](http://www.positive-way.com).) Pick a quiet time and place and sit down with pen and paper. You are ready to begin. 1) Write down all the things you have done wrong. (Do not use a typewriter or a word processor, write it.) 2) Read the list aloud, confessing your sins and shortcomings to God. 3) Pray, "Father, forgive me. I did the best I could with the knowledge I had at the time. I now forgive myself and accept the freedom you offer me." 4) Destroy (burn, shred, or tear up) the list, signifying your release and forgiveness. 5) Repeat this exercise for each person who has hurt you or your loved ones. 6) Now, proceed down life's road, free from the burden of unforgiven pain.

### CLOSING THOUGHTS

God wants to forgive you, and He wants you to forgive others. Forgiveness releases both you and the other person. It allows each a new start. It can; restore love, release the past, reconstruct relationships, reopen the future, and reaffirm relationships. Quite simply, there is no downside to forgiveness. It is an action we must choose to take. Sometimes, it is difficult, but the rewards are great. Sooner or later, in every situation, you will be brought to forgiveness. Why not make it a habit to forgive immediately rather than carrying around your pain and hurt? With a heart of forgiveness, you can even choose not to take offense in the first place! That's the Kingdom living!

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if anyone would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:38-45, RSV).

## **PRAYER FOR FORGIVENESS**

Heavenly Father, I thank you so much for your gift of forgiveness through Your Son, Jesus Christ. You loved me before I was even born. You loved me enough that You sent Your only Son to suffer and die that my relationship with You could be restored. I long to be more like Jesus. Help make me a reflection of His love that I might be a bright light in a dark and stormy world. Father, there are people I have refused to forgive. I have chosen to harbor negative feelings toward them and have not accepted and treated them as Your children. I have acted in a decidedly un-Christ-like manner. Help me to forgive them and bring healing and restoration into their lives. I have confessed my sins and shortcomings to You and accept Your forgiveness. Help me to forgive myself, to learn, and move on to bring You glory. Father, there are things that I blame You for and I renounce this lie from Satan. I forgive You, not because You need it, but because I do. I know You only want the best for me. Take my life, mold me and form me more and more into Your likeness. I pray You would guide my steps and lead me always to act for Your greater glory. I worship You, I magnify You, I exalt You, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, God above all other gods, Lord of the Universe. I praise You and thank You, in Jesus' Mighty Name. Amen and amen.