

Toward Understanding Forgiveness

Introduction:

Someone once said, “Nearly all the personal problems that drive people to seek pastoral counsel are related in some way to the issue of forgiveness. Some need to understand how God’s forgiveness is extended to sinners, and there are others who need to learn to be forgiving.”

While this certainly seems accurate, there is a great deal of confusion as well as just plain bad teaching about forgiveness. This series of lessons is designed to bring clarity to our thinking on this topic with the goal that God will be glorified as we better understand, experience, and practice forgiveness.

The three best resources currently available on the topic of forgiveness are: *Unpacking Forgiveness* by Chris Brauns (2008); *The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness* by John MacArthur (1998); and *From Forgiven to Forgiving* by Jay E. Adams (1989)

Part 1—The forgiving God

The God who forgives

- 1) The **revelation** of forgiveness
 - a) This truth is not found in *general* revelation.
 - b) This truth is found only in *special* revelation contained in the Bible.

- 2) The **Person(s)** who forgive
 - a) Unspecified—Daniel 9:9, 19; Amos 7:2
 - b) God the Father—Matthew 6:12, 14-15; Mark 11:25-26; Luke 11:4; 23:34; Acts 5:31; Ephesians 1:7; 4:32; Colossians 1:14; 2:13; 1st John 1:9
 - c) God the Son—Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12; Luke 5:17-26; 7:47-50; Colossians 3:13; James 5:15?
 - d) God the Spirit—is never recorded in Scripture as forgiving

- 3) The **meaning** of forgiveness
 - a) Lexically
 - i) Old Testament
 - (1) Cover—*kasah* [# 3680]—Nehemiah 4:5; Psalm 32:1; 85:2; Proverbs 10:12
 - (2) Provide atonement—*kaphar* [# 3722]—Deuteronomy 21:8-9; Psalm 78:38
 - (3) Blot out—*machah* [# 4229]—Nehemiah 4:5
 - (4) Take away—*nasa'* [# 5375]—Genesis 50:17; Psalm 99:8
 - (5) Pardon—*salach* [# 5545]—Numbers 30:5; Psalm 25:11
 - Always used of God forgiving people, but never of people forgiving
 - (a) Ready to forgive—*sallach* [# 5546a]—Psalm 86:5
 - (b) Forgiveness—*selichah* [# 5347]—Nehemiah 9:17
 - ii) New Testament
 - (1) Forgive, dismiss, set free—*apoluo* [# 630]—Luke 6:37
 - (a) Pictured in Pilate’s release of Barabbas at Passover (cf. Matthew 27:15-26)
 - (2) Forgive, release, cancel—*aphiemi* [# 863]—Matthew 6:12, 14; 9:2, 5-6; 12:31-32; 18:21, 27, 32, 35; 1st John 1:9

- (a) Forgiveness, remission—*aphesis* [# 859]—Matthew 26:28; Mark 1:4; 3:29; Luke 1:77; 3:3; 4:18; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 26:18; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; Hebrews 9:22; 10:18
- (3) Forgive, deal graciously with—*charizomai* [# 5483]—2nd Corinthians 2:7, 10
- b) Theologically: “A commitment by the one true God to pardon graciously those who repent and believe so that they are reconciled to him, although this commitment does not eliminate all consequences.” (Brauns, 51)
 - i) God’s forgiveness is gracious but not free.
 - ii) God’s forgiveness is conditional. Only those who repent and believe are saved.
 - iii) God’s forgiveness is a commitment.
 - iv) God’s forgiveness lays the groundwork for and begins the process of reconciliation.
 - v) God’s forgiveness does not mean the elimination of all consequences.
- 4) The **ground/basis** of forgiveness
 - a) God’s character—Exodus 34:6-9
 - i) God’s compassion [*racham*]—Psalm 78:38; Daniel 9:9
 - ii) God’s grace [*chanan*]—
 - iii) God’s slowness to anger—
 - iv) God’s abundant loyal love [*chesed*]—Psalm 86:5b
 - v) God’s truth/faithfulness [*emeth*]—
 - vi) God’s goodness [*tob*]—Psalm 86:5a
 - b) God’s gifts exercised
 - i) Repentance—Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 5:31; 26:18
 - ii) Trust—Acts 10:43; 13:38
- 5) The **process** of forgiveness
 - a) A sin is committed
 - i) Not just a matter of having our likes or preferences unmet
 - ii) A violation of God’s standards, resulting in genuine guilt
 - b) Repentance
 - i) Acknowledging that what God says about my sinful behavior is accurate and just—Psalm 32:5; Jeremiah 14:20; 1st John 1:9
 - ii) Confessing—Psalm 32:5
 - (1) To God
 - (2) To those against whom I have sinned
 - c) Forgiveness is granted
 - i) See above.
 - d) Choosing not to remember
 - Forgetting is generally passive while choosing not to remember is active
 - i) Old Testament—Isaiah 43:25; Jeremiah 31:34
 - ii) New Testament—Hebrews 8:12; 10:17
- 6) The **purpose** of forgiveness
 - a) Immediately
 - i) Removal of sin’s guilt
 - ii) Release from sin’s penalty
 - iii) Restoration of broken relationship