

What happens if you don't forgive someone after he repents? Simple: God won't forgive your sins!

For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions (Matt. 6:14–15).

And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions (Mark 11:25).

Pardon, and you will be pardoned (Luke 6:37).

What are these verses saying? Simply this. God's forgiveness is conditioned upon forgiving those who sin against us. In other words, a refusal to forgive those who have repented invalidates 1 John 1:9. God will not forgive other known sins when you confess them. Why? Because you're not doing for others what you're asking God to do for you. This in turn shuts down your prayer life, because God doesn't hear prayers offered in carnality.

'If I had seen iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not hear (me)'
(Psalm 66:18 RCL).

If you don't forgive others, God won't forgive you. The Lord's Prayer is a constant reminder of this principle:

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors
(Matt. 6:12).

And forgive us our sins,
For we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us (Luke 11:4).

Divine forgiveness, then, is conditioned upon two things: confessing known sins and forgiving others.

10. A refusal to forgive brings divine discipline.

This is clear from the conclusion to the Parable of the Unforgiving Slave.

So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart (Matt. 18:35).

Not forgiving one another is a serious sin. You'd better think twice before you say, "I swear on my mother's grave I'll never forgive you!" Do that and you wipe out your spiritual life! If you refuse to forgive, forget about going to church, praying, confessing your sins, or doing good works. It's all energy of the flesh. I wonder how many Christians have been carnal for years because they have refused and are refusing to forgive a person who desires their forgiveness?

11. No sins are too big to forgive.

No sins are too big for God to forgive. And no sins should be too big for you to forgive!

12. Comfort and express your love to those who sinned against you.

What should you do after forgiving someone? Is forgiving all that's necessary or is there more? Paul urged the church at Corinth to forgive, comfort, and reaffirm their love for the man who had been guilty of incest.

Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, lest somehow such a one be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him (2 Cor. 2:6–8).

Comforting is saying and doing things to make a person feel better (Gen. 37:34–35; 1 Thess. 4:18). Take the initiative in this. Be friendly. Say something nice. Give a gift. Take him to lunch. Embrace him. Let him know it's all over and forgotten. Comforting is an overt display of love and forgiveness.



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FORGIVING OTHERS



Just as the Lord
forgave you,
so also should you.
~Colossians 3:13b~

1. Forgiveness is an act of the will that takes place in the mind.

Forgiveness takes place primarily in the heart.

So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart (Matt. 18:35).

To forgive from the heart is to forgive in the mind—not just with the lips. Forgiving is more than what you say or do; it's changing the way you think. It's possible to say "I forgive you!" and not really mean it.

2. Forgiveness is separating mentally from sins committed against you.

Two verbs of separation, the Greek *ἀφιῆμι* (*aphiēme*) and the Hebrew נָסַח (*nasa'*), mean 'forgive' in the Bible. Forgiveness is completely putting an offense out of your mind, refusing to think about it any longer, not continually reminding yourself of it, and not being angry about it any more. Forget it forever.

3. Forgiveness is forgetting a wrong that can never be righted.

A wrong, once committed, can never be undone—and some can never be repaid. Those who sin may admit their guilt, apologize, and make amends—even make multiple restitution—but they can't undo the original wrong. All the money in the world can't repay the loss of an arm or a leg or a loved one. Your choice is to hold a grudge or to forgive and forget.

I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more (Jer. 31:34).

I will not remember your sins (Isa. 43:25).

You have put all my sins behind your back (Isa. 38:17 NIV).

You will . . . hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19 NIV).

As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us (Psalm 103:12).

Forgiving and being forgiven is necessary in this world because we all have sin natures.

4. Forgiveness is giving up your righteous indignation.

Who is a God like Thee, who pardons iniquity
And passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His
possession?
He does not retain His anger forever,
Because He delights in unchanging love (Micah 7:18).

Righteous anger ends at the point of the offender's repentance; after that it's unrighteous anger and bitterness.

5. Forgive as God forgives you.

And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also forgives you (Eph. 4:32).

. . . bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against any one; just as the Lord forgives you, so also should you (Col. 3:13).

Why should we forgive those who sin against us? Because we're forgiven! God forgives the sins we commit against Him! He wants us to be like Him in all His attributes. We should imitate His love, graciousness, forbearance, patience—and forgiveness. The sins we're called on to forgive are nothing compared to the great debt God forgives us (Matt. 18:23–35).

6. Forgiveness is unlimited.

How often should we forgive one another? As many times as someone sins against you! Peter asked,

"Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven" (Matt. 18:21–22).

Barclay makes this illuminating observation:

It was Rabbinic teaching that a man must forgive his brother three times. Rabbi Jose ben Hanina said, "He who begs forgiveness from his neighbour must not do so more than three times." Rabbi Jose ben Jehuda said, "If a man commits an offence once, they forgive him; if he commits an offence a third time, they forgive him; the fourth time they do not forgive." The Biblical proof that this was correct was taken from Amos. In the opening chapters of Amos there is a series of condemnations on the various nations for three transgressions and for four (Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6). From this it was deduced that God's forgiveness extends to three offences, and that He visits the sinner with punishment at the fourth. It was not to be thought that a man could be more gracious than God, so forgiveness was limited to three times. Peter thought that he was going very far, for he takes the Rabbinic three times, multiplies it by two, for good measure adds one; and suggests, with eager self-satisfaction, that it will be enough if he forgives seven times. Peter expected to be warmly commended; but Jesus' answer is that the Christian must forgive seventy times seven, that, in fact, there is no reckonable limit to forgiveness (William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, II, 212–213).

Now, let me ask you, "How many times does God forgive our sins? As often as we sin against Him? Or is there a limit beyond which there is no

forgiveness?" The answer is wonderfully clear: God is never unwilling to forgive if His conditions are met.

7. Forgiveness is conditional.

Jesus taught His disciples:

"Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him" (Luke 17:3–4).

Note carefully what Jesus is saying: "If he repents, forgive him." The clear implication of this statement is: If he doesn't repent, you don't have to forgive him! There's no forgiveness without repentance. In other words, forgiveness is conditioned upon repentance. You're obligated to forgive every time a person sins against you—even up to seven times a day—but only if he repents after each sin. There's no such thing as automatic forgiveness. Of course, you can always choose to overlook the sin and be defrauded (Prov. 19:11; 1 Cor. 6:7). If you pass over the sin, you must forgive him.

You say, "What's repentance?" It's a change of attitude. Repentance naturally leads to offering an apology or making amends. It often results in an admission of guilt through verbal confession. Isn't this the same way God treats us when we sin against Him? His forgiveness is both conditional and unlimited. The conditional aspect is unmistakable in 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." During our lifetimes we'll sin against God many times, often many times a day, and He forgives us each time—but only if we confess known sins.

It's the nature of forgiveness to be conditional. If it were unconditional, if we were commanded to forgive others automatically whether they repent or not, they could easily take advantage of us—sinning as often as they wish without restraint. In terms of fellowship, God does not forgive unconditionally. And neither should we, unless we opt to be defrauded. This condition—repentance—provides a measure of control over the committing of sins against us.

8. Make things right as soon as possible.

If you sin against someone, go to him, apologize, and, if necessary, make amends. Don't wait for him to come to rebuke you.

"If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go your way, first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering" (Matt. 5:23–24; cf. Luke 17:4).

9. If you refuse to forgive, God won't forgive you.