

# Forgiveness

## The Two Parts to Forgiveness

### Positional Forgiveness and Transactional Forgiveness

Forgiveness *must* be extended to all who say they repent - even if the offence has been repeated (cf. Luke 17:3). But it is only to be granted to those who confess wrongdoing, claim to be repentant and ask forgiveness (Proverbs 28:13). In Mark 11:25, Jesus tells you to forgive those who wronged you when you *pray*, thereby avoiding bitterness and resentment (Ephesians 4:32). But that is very different from granting the wrongdoer forgiveness. You do that *only* when repents. Forgiveness of others must reflect God's forgiveness; He forgave you *when you repented* [Jay Adams, *Forgiveness*, Evangelical Times, 1997].

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Ideally, repentance should precede forgiveness (Luke 17:3). As we saw in chapter 4, however, minor offenses may be overlooked and forgiven even if the offender has not expressly repented. Your spontaneous forgiveness in these cases can put the matter behind you once and for all and save you and the other person from needless controversy.

When an offense is too serious to overlook and the offender has not yet repented, you may need to approach forgiveness as a two stage process. The first stage may be called *positional forgiveness*, and the second *transactional forgiveness*.

#### ***Positional forgiveness*** ***(between the offended person and God)***

Positional forgiveness is unconditional and is a commitment you make to God (see Mark 11:25; Luke 6:28; Acts 7:60). You promise to strive to maintain a loving and merciful attitude toward someone who has offended you. It is a decision to make the first promise of forgiveness ("*I will not think about this incident*"), which means you will not dwell on the hurtful incident or seek vengeance or retribution in thought, word, or action. Instead, by God's grace you will keep yourself in a 'position of forgiveness' in which you pray for the other person and are ready to pursue complete reconciliation as soon as he or she repents. This attitude will protect you from bitterness and resentment, even if the other person takes a long time to repent.

#### ***Transactional forgiveness*** ***(between the offended person and the offender)***

Transactional forgiveness is conditional on the repentance of the offender and takes place between you and that person (Luke 17:3-5). It is a commitment to make the other three promises of forgiveness ("*I will not bring up this incident again and use it against you*" / "*I will not talk to others about this incident*" / "*I will not allow this incident to stand between us or hinder our personal relationship*") to the offender. When there has been a serious offense, it would not be appropriate to make these promises until the offender has repented (see chapter 6). Until then, you may need to confront the offender or seek the involvement of others to resolve the matter (Matt. 18:16-20; see chapter 7 and 9). You could not do this if you had already made the last three promises. But once the other person repents, you should complete the transaction of forgiveness, closing the matter forever, the same way that God forgives you.

Both stages of forgiveness were vividly demonstrated by God. When Christ died on the cross, He took on the position of forgiveness, maintaining an attitude of love and mercy toward those who put Him to death. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). At Pentecost, the Father's answer to Jesus' prayer was revealed. Three thousand people heard Peter's Pentecost message and were cut to the heart when they realized that they had crucified the Son of God. As they repented of their sin, the transaction of forgiveness was completed, and they were fully reconciled to God (Acts 2:36-41). This is exactly the pattern you should follow, "forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Eph. 4:32) [Ken Sande, 'Forgive as God Forgave You', *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*, pp 189-191]

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