

e-concepts

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By Dr. David DeWitt

Forgiveness is the act of violating justice (an eye for an eye) by accepting upon ourselves the hurtful consequences of someone's action. So, if we pursue justice, seek revenge, harbor bitterness, or maintain hatred, we have not forgiven.

We should never attempt to, or claim to, forgive people of their sin against God.

Forgiveness of sin is seen in the Bible primarily as an act of God. Daniel wrote, *To the Lord our God belong compassion and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against Him* (Daniel 9:9). The reason forgiveness is up to God is because all sin is against God. By definition, sin is anything contrary to the character of God. Right and wrong are not our own inventions, they come from God.

For example, David committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband Uriah sent to the front lines of battle until he was killed. From God's perspective, there are no victims and no accidents. Uriah was not a victim. He went to heaven right on schedule. And Bathsheba's baby was not an accident. The moral evil was done against God, who commanded people not to commit adultery and murder. There is not one single command in the Bible for any human being to forgive anyone else of sin against God. (See also Luke 15:18, 21) So, like confession, the biblical concept of forgiveness is primarily a vertical issue.

We must forgive people of their sin against us whether they ask for it or not. *"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."* (Ephesians 4:31-32) There is another aspect to forgiveness. On the cross, Jesus Christ took forgiveness to a whole different level. He extended the forgiveness from those who ask for it, to those who do not ask for it or even acknowledge their sin. He said, *"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."* (Luke 23:34). To be Christlike, therefore, means to forgive those causing us suffering even though they do not ask for it and even when they feel justified in causing the suffering.

This was reiterated by Stephen when he was stoned to death. We read, *"And falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them!'"* And having said this, he fell asleep (Acts 7:60). Obviously, Stephen understood Christ's forgiveness of the unrepentant as a standard for all Christians. Remember, my forgiveness is taking on the consequences of another's sin. **It has only to do with me and God, not the one sinning.** Forgiveness does not focus on the other person. It is vertical not horizontal. Parents, children, husbands, wives, church members, neighbors, and business associates will sin against you and never ask for forgiveness. It is essential that we forgive them. The reason is not to restore fellowship with them. That may not be possible. The reason is to keep or restore our fellowship with God. We must forgive them unilateral and unconditionally because that's the standard Christ set for us.

For more information on **forgiveness** see **Conflict Resolution** on Relational Concepts web page:
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P.O. Box 141456 • Grand Rapids, MI 49514 • relationalconcepts.org