

FORGIVENESS IS NOT OPTIONAL!

We tend to end the Lord's instructions on prayer at the end of Matthew 6:13, but in truth, His thought in verses 14-15 on forgiveness carries through from verse 12. Thus, verses 12-15 are really a unit dealing with the KEY issue of FORGIVENESS. In our spiritual lives, this is a KEY issue as emphasized by the Lord.

In this vein, note that verse 13 is not to be understood in isolation. The KEY issue in context is temptation related to forgiveness, or better stated, the temptation to not be forgiving. We all feel this pull. Someone does something, and we are tempted to NOT FORGIVE them. We don't want to let it go. We need God's help with this.

2 Corinthians 2:10–11 (NKJV)

10 Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ,

11 lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.

How does Satan seek to tempt us? What are his devices? Well, in context, they are his temptation strategies to influence us to be UNFORGIVING! When we are unforgiving, Satan has his way. And this is a KEY play that he runs time and time and time again. It never ceases to be effective. This is right out of Satan's playbook – the sin of UNFORGIVENESS! This is why Ephesians 4:26-27 says not to let the sun go down on your wrath lest you give place to the devil. If we are not quick to forgive it quickly turns into bitterness and resentment, which can destroy us.

And we all struggle with this. It's easy to preach forgiveness – just not so easy to practice.

“Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive.” – C.S. Lewis

And so, Jesus is not quite done making the emphasis on the need for forgiveness. It is not optional. If you are going to truly be right with God you have to forgive!

“An unforgiving spirit is sin, and any continued sin affects the relationship between God and His children.” -*Ed Glasscock*

Matthew 6:14–15 (NKJV)

14 “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Jesus states it both positively and negatively. He states it both ways so that there is no way we can miss the emphasis.

“Notice that the only point the Lord emphasizes in the prayer is the necessity for forgiving one another.” – **Charles Ryrie**

A trespass is an offense or a wrongdoing of some kind. This person has wronged you – it wasn't right. So what should you do? Worldly wisdom says: “When life gives you lemons, freeze them and throw them as hard as possible at the people who are making your life difficult.”

But that's not what Jesus says: Jesus says to forgive men their trespasses, and your heavenly Father will also forgive you. Again, note this is speaking to those who know God as their Father. This is spiritual maintenance in the life of a believer.

God expects you to forgive – not retaliate. Yes, they wronged you. Now, how should you respond? With forgiveness. You want God to forgive you – right? Then you should be willing to forgive those who trespass against you? That is God-like. That is becoming of those who are God's children and know Him as Father.

But what if you refuse to forgive? Well, Jesus is very clear: **“But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”** If you aren't willing to forgive, then you will wander outside the will of God in the wearisome never-never land of unforgiveness.

That is a miserable place to be. The joy is gone. The peace is gone. The blessing of God is gone. The sweet fellowship with God is gone. There are few things more miserable than a Christian who is unforgiving and out of fellowship with God.

Such people become bitter – not better. They are spiritual cranks who waste away in the barrenness of unforgiveness, ever reliving how they have been mistreated. They refuse to let it go, and therefore, it never lets them go.

Forgiveness is one of the most God-like things we ever do.

1 Peter 4:8 (NKJV)

8 And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins."

I went to Bible school with a gal named Susan. Her mom recently passed away, and she recounted this memory. "*Whenever Mom played the game Sorry with my girls, anytime they'd say "Sorry" and move her player back to home, Mom would always say..."I forgive you!"* Isn't that precious?

What a great illustration for life. Whenever someone wrongs us, what should our response be? "***I forgive you!***" That is precious before God. And those quick to forgive are also forgiven by God when they ask. I don't know about you, but I regularly need God's maintenance forgiveness; therefore, I must be quick to forgive. Happy is the person who can go to sleep every night saying, "*All is forgiven! I bear no grudges against anyone.*"

"The voice of sin is loud, but the voice of forgiveness is louder." – D.L. Moody

Footnote: What about accountability? Mart De Haan wrote: "*With a few well-chosen words, the tables are turned. Like a wrestler doing an escape and reverse, an offender regains the upper hand. His victims are now expected to forgive and forget.*"

As we consider the whole counsel of God, we need to recognize the place of accountability. In Matt. 18, Jesus said if a brother refuses to repent, then a process of confrontation and Church Discipline is to be applied.

It is true that until there is repentance, fellowship cannot be truly restored as it should be. And you can't help what the other person does. However, you are responsible for your own attitude and should always seek to have a spirit of "forgiveness". Remember the example of Jesus on the cross, when He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." (Lk. 23:34).

Thus, we too should continually have a spirit of forgiveness, while at the same time recognizing that unless there is biblical repentance, there can be no real reconciliation.

As believers, we should constantly have a spirit that desires to forgive and desires that people be forgiven. However, we also realize that unless there is REPENTANCE, people are never really right with God or with those whom they have wronged.

Romans 12:18 (NKJV)

18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.