

Forgiveness

As Christians, are we required to forgive those who wrong us if they show no remorse? Forgiveness is never required unless asked for. There is no biblical example where forgiveness is required without repentance. Repentance means “to change one’s mind.” In essence, I have offended another, and now I am changing my mind towards him and asking for forgiveness.

Every example given to the contrary by people is taken out of context. And context is always king.

- 1) Jesus on the cross said, “Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do’” Luke 23:34. People will say that Jesus forgave them, so you must too. First, Jesus didn't forgive them, He asked the Father to. Secondly, the sin was unintentional (“they know not what they do”). Third, after Jesus' ascension, Peter explained what occurred and said to these same people that they must repent (change their mind about who Jesus is) or be destroyed and cut off. He even called them a “wicked generation.” Their destruction occurred 40 years later when Israel was destroyed and the Jews were dispersed, just as Jesus predicted.
- 2) “But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins” (Matthew 6:15). This is taken entirely out of context. The context is the time of the law, and it is speaking of matters under the law of Moses.
- 3) “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32). Again, “even as in Christ God forgave you” is the key. We had to receive Christ and believe the gospel first. Our forgiveness in Christ is potential only until we ask for it. It is only actual after that. Anything else is Universalism – a heresy.
- 4) “Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. ⁴And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him.” (Luke 17:3,4). In this verse, which is Jesus speaking to Israel under the law, forgiveness clearly is based on repentance.
- 5) In a comparable passage in Matthew 18:35, people tend to only quote the forgiveness part – “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses” However, the entire parable

is based on one getting on his knees and first asking forgiveness.

- 6) "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the *sins* of any, they are retained" (John 20:23). Pretty clear here. Jesus' disciples could retain the sins of others, and they are not forgiven.
- 7) We are not (clearly not!) forgiven by God until we turn to Him and accept Jesus as Lord. The forgiveness is unconditional and offered to all -

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32)

"And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses" (Colossians 2:13).

However, this is not in effect without turning to God through Jesus Christ. To teach otherwise is Universalism, which, as noted above, is a heresy. In other words, the forgiveness of Jesus Christ is POTENTIAL to all, but ACTUAL only to those who accept it when the gospel is believed, meaning that Christ died for our sins. In essence, "O GOD, FORGIVE ME... A SINNER."

- 8) When one says the Lord's Prayer concerning the forgiveness of debts, it is an acknowledgment of God as Forgiver. It is asking for that forgiveness. It, therefore, would logically be the same with those who "trespass against us."

The problem with the incorrect doctrine concerning forgiveness among Christians is that they confuse the offering of forgiveness with the granting of forgiveness. According to Paul in Ephesians 4 (above), we are obligated to offer it in the manner in which it was provided to us. We acknowledged our sin, and then God forgave us.

Christians are not required to forgive when there is no acknowledgment by the one who sinned against us, even though the state of forgiveness (willingness to) exists. We must keep the boxes separate, or we fall into sloppy, emotion-based theology.

Does God hold us to a higher standard than He has set between us and Him? No.

Again, Matthew 6:15 is not referring to those in the church. In Christ, we have been forgiven. Now, we are to forgive others in the manner in which we have been forgiven. That is proper church-age doctrine.