

Forgiveness – What the Bible Teaches

1 Introduction

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| Justice | = | getting what you deserve |
| mercy | = | not getting what you deserve |
| grace | = | getting what you don't deserve |

2 Mercy triumphs over judgement (James 2:13)

- God calls us to holiness (the threshing floor – Luke 3:16-17)
- Reality check one
 - ✓ we harbour grievances
 - ✓ critical thoughts and words – 2 Corinthians 10:5; Galatians 5:15; James 3; 1 Corinthians 11:23-29
- Reality check two – we judge one another wrongly
 - ✓ Matthew 7:1-5
 - ✓ Luke 6:37-38 / Galatians 6:7-8
 - ✓ Romans 2:1-5
- We have a choice – justice or mercy
 - ✓ Justice is good. It is God's law. It is fair.
 - ✓ But none of us has a hope of eternity if we receive the justice we deserve

3 Jesus calls us to exercise forgiveness, mercy and grace - how?

- consider your debt to Jesus & your response (Job 9:14-15)
- choose to forgive, refuse to take offence, and refuse to 'nurse' grievances (we only nurse things we want to grow stronger)
- we can have justice without mercy or mercy without justice
 - Matthew 18:21-35
 - Matthew 6:9-15
- refuse to take offence unless it is clearly intended
- choose to speak life – bless, don't curse; forgive, don't accuse (Matthew 5:43-45a)
- understand how hard it can be to move from judgement to mercy
 - some of us are so very deeply wounded
 - the truth is that people hurt people
 - often the people who hurt us most are those to whom we are closest
 - no one **has** to forgive – it is our choice
 - We feel the call to forgive is unfair. Correct – Grace is totally unfair & that is why the gospel has always been a 'scandal', whether when Paul preached it or today

The key is to accept that forgiveness does not have to wait until we 'feel' like forgiving. That may never happen. Forgiveness is an act of the will, and can begin with the prayer, spoken through gritted teeth, 'Lord, I want to forgive. I don't want to live in the prison of bitterness. Send your Spirit to give me the strength to let go of the things I hold against ...'

The only safe place is the place of mercy and grace, where we let go of and lay down our claims for justice and repayment. All our injustices are laid at the foot of the cross, at the feet of Jesus, who prayed for his murderers, "Father, forgive them"

4 Scripture verses to consider

God's nature to forgive

The Lord, the Lord, compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness ... forgiving wickedness (Exodus 34:5-7 – also see Psalm 103:3; 1 John 1:8,9)

God's promise to forgive

I will ... remember their sins no more (Jeremiah 31:34 – also see Hebrews 8:12)

Forgiveness in the life of Jesus

Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them' (Luke 23:33-34)

Our need of forgiveness

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:9,23 – also see 1 John 1:8, 9)

The means of forgiveness

In Jesus we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us (Ephesians 1:7,8 – also see Colossians 2:13-15)

The assurance of forgiveness

If we confess our sins, God ... will forgive us our sins and purify us (1 John 1:9 – also see James 5:13-16; Hebrews 9:14)

The call to exercise forgiveness

- as a principle of life : 'Do not judge and you will not be judged. Do not condemn and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. (Luke 6.37 – also see Matthew 5:38-48; Matthew 7:1-5; Romans 2:1-5)
- within the church:
 - ✓ forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another (Colossians 3:12-13 – also see Ephesians 4:32)
 - ✓ Don't grumble against each other, or you will be judged (James 5:9 – also see Romans 14:1-4, 10-13; 1 Corinthians 10:10; Galatians 5:15; Philippians 2:14-16)
 - ✓ Get rid of all bitterness (Ephesians 4:31 – also see Philippians 2:14; 2 Timothy 2:24)
- towards enemies ... I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Matthew 5:44)

Our forgiveness is dependent on our forgiving others

If you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins (Matthew 6:14-15 – also see Mark 11:25-26)

Forgiveness to be without limits

Forgive, not seven times, but seventy times seven (Matthew 18:22 – also see Luke 17:3-4)

The way of mercy

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law of freedom, because judgement without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgement (James 2:12-13 – also see Matthew 6:14-15; Romans 5:8; 14:9-13; 1 Corinthians 13:4-5)