

## Forgiveness

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The command to forgive others is found throughout the New Testament. Jesus considered it so important that he said, *"If you do not forgive men their sins, your father will not forgive your sins"* (Matthew 6:15).

To not be forgiven by God is a very serious matter. The Bible teaches that only those whose sins are forgiven can enter heaven.

One reason some persons find it hard to forgive others is that they don't understand what forgiveness is. Forgiveness is not accepting unnecessary abuse. The Bible teaches that we are the temple of the Lord and that we should not allow anyone to desecrate God's temple.

Persons who willingly accept abuse are saying that they deserve pain and suffering. Nothing could be further from God's intention. We are all created by God for good and not for evil.

Forgiving an abuser does not mean allowing the abuse to continue. Nor does it preclude going to the authorities and reporting the abusive person. The Bible says that governmental authorities have been placed in their position by God for the defense of those who do right.

Forgiveness doesn't always include a restoration of broken relationships. Sometimes the wisest thing to do is to forgive the other person and hope to never see him or her again. Forgiveness is not a restoration of the relationship but instead a release from bitterness because of the relationship.

Forgiveness doesn't necessarily mean forgetting what happened. If someone borrows money from you and never repays you, forgiveness means refusing to be bitter about it. However, wisdom means not loaning that person another dollar.

Many persons claim they could find peace if the offender would only come and ask for forgiveness. However, forgiveness does not initiate with the offender but instead with the offended person. Those who wait for someone to say "I'm sorry" haven't learned who is being liberated when we forgive.

Those who forgive take the matter out of their own hands and place it into God's hands. They react in a Christ-like fashion regardless of what other persons do. They refuse to let offensive persons determine their attitude or character.

An unforgiving person, on the other hand, fills his heart with hate and plots a course of revenge. In doing so, he may ruin his own health, destroy his own emotional tranquility, and eventually lose his own soul. And all the while, the person he refuses to forgive may not even know or care.

Ann Landers once wrote, "Forgiveness is setting the prisoner free and then discovering that you were the prisoner". Forgiveness neither liberates nor approves the other person. Instead, it liberates us and sets us free to find the best in life.

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