

Appendix 5 - The Choice of Forgiveness

By Tracy Joy Nyamuda

I am going to begin by recounting a small portion of the experiences that a Jewish man named Simon Wiesenthal had during the Second World War. He has written about them in his book "The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness".

Our column suddenly came to a halt at a crossroads. I could see nothing that might be holding us up but I noticed on the left of the street there was a military cemetery. It was enclosed by a low barbed wire fence. The wires were threaded through sparse bushes and low shrubs, but between them you could see the graves aligned in stiff rows. And on each grave there was planted a sunflower, as straight as a soldier on parade. I stared spellbound. The flower heads seemed to absorb the sun's rays like mirrors and draw them down into the darkness of the ground as my gaze wandered from the sunflower to the grave. It seemed to penetrate the earth and suddenly I saw before me a periscope. It was gaily coloured and butterflies fluttered from flower to flower. Were they carrying messages from grave to grave? Were they whispering something to each flower to pass on to the soldier below? Yes, this was just what they were doing; the dead were receiving light and messages. Suddenly I envied the dead soldiers. Each had a sunflower to connect him with the living world, and butterflies to visit his grave. For me there would be no sunflower. I would be buried in a mass grave, where corpses would be piled on top of me. No sunflower would ever bring light into my darkness, and no butterflies would dance above my dreadful tomb.

Wiesenthal and his group of Jewish prisoners proceed to do work in an old Polish building that has been converted into a hospital of some sort. Arbitrarily and simply because he is a Jew, Wiesenthal was summoned into a dying German soldier's room.

The dying soldier mentions a day the German SS got to Dnepropetrovsk in Russia. He describes in detail the situation that has plagued him since then and his involvement in it. A large group of Jews, mostly women, children and the elderly were forced into a three-story house. The men among the Jews were forced to carry cans of petrol to the top floors. The house door was locked and a machine gun

aimed at the door. Hand grenades were thrown through the windows and the house burst into flames.

But he (the German soldier) continued: "We heard screams and saw the flames eat their way from floor to floor... We had our rifles ready to shoot down anyone who tried to escape from that blazing hell... "The screams from the house were horrible. Dense smoke poured out and choked us..." ... "... Behind the windows of the second floor, I saw a man with a small child in his arms. His clothes were alight. By his side stood a woman, doubtless the mother of the child. With his free hand the man covered the child's eyes... then he jumped into the street. Seconds later the mother followed. Then from the other windows fell burning bodies... We shot... Oh God!" The dying man held his hand in front of his bandaged eyes as if he wanted to banish the picture from his mind. "I don't know how many tried to jump out of the windows but that one family I shall never forget— least of all the child. It had black hair and dark eyes..."

"We were approaching Taganrog, which was strongly held by Russians. We lay among the hills, barely a hundred yards from them. Their artillery fire was incessant. We cowered in our trenches and tried to conquer our fear by drinking from brandy flasks passed from hand to hand. We waited for the order to attack. It came at last and we climbed out of the trenches and charged, but suddenly I stopped as though rooted to the ground. Something seized me. My hands, which held my rifle with fixed bayonet, began to tremble. "In that moment I saw the burning family, the father with the child and behind them the mother— and they came to meet me. 'No, I cannot shoot at them a second time.' The thought flashed through my mind... And then a shell exploded by my side. I lost consciousness. "When I woke in hospital I knew that I had lost my eyesight. My face and the upper part of my body were torn to ribbons. The nurse told me that the surgeon had taken a whole basinful of shell splinters out of my body. It was a miracle that I was still alive— even now I am as good as dead..."

"I know that what I have told you is terrible. In the long nights while I have been waiting for death, time and time again I have longed to talk about it to a Jew and beg forgiveness from him. Only I didn't know whether there were any Jews left... "I know that what I am asking is almost too much for you, but without your answer I cannot

die in peace.”

I stood up and looked in his direction, at his folded hands. Between them there seemed to rest a sunflower. At last I made up my mind and without a word I left the room.

The crux of the matter is, of course, the question of forgiveness. Forgetting is something that time alone takes care of, but forgiveness is an act of volition, and only the sufferer is qualified to make the decision. You, who have just read this sad and tragic episode in my life, can mentally change places with me and ask yourself the crucial question, “What would I have done?”

Wiesenthal, Simon. *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness* (p. 100). Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

What would you have done?

We dare not judge Wiesenthal. Who can possibly know the road that he walked seeing so many family members and loved ones, friends mistreated, tortured and murdered at the hands of the Germans, even his own experiences in the concentration camp. Yet his question is valid for all of us. What will you do? What are you choosing?

You see we all have experienced injustices. We can all recount being hurt, misjudged, treated unfairly, intentionally mistreated or even betrayed by family members, authority figures, close friends, acquaintances, work colleagues, business partners, and so forth. There is no person immune to this choice. We will all have to make the decision, to forgive, or not. Jesus once said to his disciples,

"It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come!" Lk. 17:1

They will come. What will you choose? They have come. What have you chosen?

I want to look at another account. Where a man experienced much injustice, misunderstanding, envy, betrayal, false accusation, hatred, and mockery. He tasted torture and pain and death at the hands of his accusers. We will see what He chose.

I will pick up his experience in a garden late at night. This man had been in prayer for a period when someone whom he had walked with for a no of years arrived leading a crowd armed with swords and clubs sent from the respected religious authorities and elders. They arrived to falsely accuse and arrest Him.

- He had been in prayer. He was doing the will of God. With pure motives. He had done nothing wrong. Some people have taken up offense at God because they were doing His will minding their own business and have been attacked.
- A “friend” led the crowd that came against Him. Some of you have taken offense at friends that turned against you.
- The crowd came with swords and clubs. Ever felt that pre-meditated powerful weapons have been taken up against you, when you never indicated or desired to fight?
- The crowd was sent from the respected religious leaders. From the authorities of the day. Ever felt attacked and hurt, even falsely accused by authority figures, even religious ones?

The authorities wanted to arrest him at night. They feared the crowds would riot if they did it in the day (Mk. 14:1-2).

You must have guessed who this man was? Jesus.

Upon His arrest on a Thursday night, He was taken to Annas’ home. Annas was not the current high priest, his son-in-law Caiaphus was. However, Anus held the real power. This was an illegal court gathering.

He was then taken before the Sanhedrin (religious leaders) in Caiaphus’ palace between midnight and dawn for another illegal inquisition. The authorities were looking for false evidence against Jesus. They even rounded up a string of false witnesses and listened to their false testimony. After coaxing what they misinterpreted as a blasphemous confession out of Jesus, they condemned him as worthy of death. Only, they did not have the authority to pass a death sentence, and so they needed a Roman court to do so. But before they could do this, they needed

to ratify their condemnation in daylight.

You see, Jesus' first 2 trials were conducted under the cover of darkness. Jewish law quite plainly required that trials be conducted during the day. The chief priests and elders of the people organized a brief trial to take place during the day simply to reaffirm and legitimize the decisions that had already been made. The hate of the religious leaders for Jesus meant that they even violated their own rules of legal procedure to ensure Jesus' condemnation.

After these 3 religious trials, the first 2 being invalid and illegal, the third being a bogus trial, Jesus then faced 3 Roman trials. This was all because the religious authorities did not have the power to sentence Jesus to death, only the Roman authorities could. But the religious authorities wanted to ensure he would die.

In the religious trials, the accusations were religious in nature, particularly blasphemy. However, the Jewish leaders knew that this would not interest a Roman court. They therefore tried to portray Him as a rebel claiming to be king and inciting the people to rebel against Rome.

Jesus first Roman trial was before Pilate, who was governor of Judea. His second trial was before Herod who was the ruler of Galilee. Herod knew about Jesus' reputation as a miracle-worker and wanted Jesus to cooperate and entertain him. When Jesus wouldn't comply with his demands, Herod mocked him and sent him back to Pilate.

Jesus found himself back before Pilate again for his third and final Roman trial. Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent but felt the pressure that the Jews were putting on him. He was afraid that the Jews would riot if he didn't do their bidding, and as it was Passover, the Jewish population in Jerusalem had swelled by a few hundred thousand. Even though Pilate knew Jesus was innocent, even though he knew the Jewish authorities were jealous of Jesus, even though his wife warned him against it, he washed his hands of the situation and allowed an innocent man to be murdered because of false accusation.

Jesus suffered humiliation, mockery, torturous beatings and pain on his way to the crucifixion. At the crucifixion, abandonment looked on,- the only one of his 12

disciples whom he had poured his life into for the past few years who was anywhere near was John. Resentment looked on. Pride looked on. Mockery looked on. Malicious intent laughed. Misunderstanding looked on, triumphantly, with false accusation and envy and hatred. Jesus had many opportunities to harbour unforgiveness, resentment and bitterness. But what did He choose? The first of his last seven statements from the cross before He died was,

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” Lk. 23:34

This is an extremely challenging example He left us.

“To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you”.

Lewis. B. Smedes

Forgiveness is a key which Jesus holds out to us. It's a key that unlocks our own prison gates. Unfortunately, unforgiveness blinds, and often it blinds us to our own imprisoned status. Forgiveness is a weapon of warfare. It's a weapon we are to use over our own hearts and lives. Failure to do so has multiple consequences. We can hold unforgiveness toward ourselves, others, or towards God. Unforgiveness often leads to bitterness and offense when it is not given.

A. What is forgiveness not?

Forgiveness is not:

- Saying what you did was acceptable
- Saying I will trust you fully again and not put in place requisite boundaries to protect myself
- Saying I condone your actions/attitude
- Saying I agree with what you did/said/didn't do
- Being a doormat
- Being permissive
- Being weak

“I never knew how strong I was until I had to forgive someone who wasn't sorry and accept an apology I ever received”

B. What is forgiveness?

Mat 6:12-15

(12) and **forgive** us our sins, as we have **forgiven** those who sin against us....

(14) "If you **forgive** those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will **forgive** you. (15) But if you refuse to **forgive** others, your Father will not **forgive** your sins.

Forgive – “aphiēmi”

Thayer Definition:

- to send away
- to send forth, yield up, to expire
- to let go, let alone, let be
- to disregard
- to leave, not to discuss now
- to omit, neglect
- to let go, give up a debt, forgive, to remit
- to give up, keep no longer
- to permit, allow, not to hinder, to give up a thing to a person
- to leave, go way from one in order to go to another place
- to depart from any one
- to depart from one and leave him to himself so that all mutual claims are abandoned
- to go away leaving something behind
- to leave one by not taking him as a companion
- 3i) abandon, leave destitute

English definition:

The word “forgive: means “to cancel or pardon.”

To forgive is to absolve from liability to punishment for a crime or fault committed.

Forgiveness is the voluntary release of a person over which one has legal control.

C. What does God's forgiveness toward us look like?

Firstly, it is important to note that God is forgiving by nature. He is love. He is inherently patient, longsuffering and kind.

Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" Jn. 14:9

In Jesus we see the Father. Jesus forgave. This is the heart of the Father.

When our Father in heaven forgives us:

1. He remembers our sins no more.

"For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." Jer. 31:34

2. He removes our sins as far from Him as the east is from the west.

As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. (Psa 103:12)

3. He casts our sins into the depths of the sea, never to be retrieved again

*Who is a God like You, Pardoning iniquity And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in mercy. (19) He will again have compassion on us, And will subdue our iniquities. **You will cast all our sins Into the depths of the sea.** (Mic 7:18-19)*

When God forgives, it does not mean that He temporarily suspends punishment which He may at some later time inflict. God's forgiveness is complete and it is eternal.

The nature of God's forgiveness is reflected in the Presidential Pardon.

In the United States there is a prerogative that only the President has. It is called the "Presidential Pardon." God's forgiveness is very much like the presidential pardon.

There are five characteristics of a presidential pardon:

- It must be exercised by one who has the power to pardon.
- No other judge or magistrate can overturn the pardon.
- The crime for which the pardon is granted is completely erased from all police or FBI records
- You can never be tried for that crime again.
- That crime can never be held against you again.
- In other words, it is just as if the crime never occurred. Even on a job application that asks for whether you have ever been convicted of a crime, you can legally say “NO!”

D. Considerations around receiving forgiveness from God?

1. We must release forgiveness towards those who have wronged us.

Mt. 6:14-15; Mark 11:26; Luke 6:35-37

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matt. 6:14-15)

Other scriptures: Ps. 18:25; Mt. 5:23-24; 6:12-15; Mark 11:25; Luke 6:37; Col. 3:13

2. How many times must I release this forgiveness?

Then Peter came to Him and said, “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.” Matthew 18:21-22

If we are forgiving the way Jesus suggested that we forgive, we cannot keep track of the number of times the offense has happened. Once we forgive it the list is cleared and we go back to number one.

Surely the culprit should ask for forgiveness first?

Jesus taught that forgiving others was not dependent upon their asking for our forgiveness

"And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. (26) But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses." Mar 11:25-26

3. Forgiveness from God must be received.

Jesus speaking to Saul on the road to Damascus:

*I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, (18) to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that **they may receive forgiveness of sins** and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.' Act 26:17-18*

The gift

I can know God has forgiven me and never receive it for one reason or another. Most often this happens because of an inability to forgive ourselves, or a feeling of unworthiness towards receiving forgiveness.

George Wilson

In 1829 George Wilson of Pennsylvania was sentenced to be hanged for robbing the mail and murder. President Andrew Jackson pardoned him but Wilson refused the pardon. Wilson indicated that the pardon was not valid unless it was accepted. The Supreme Court was called upon to decide the matter. Chief Justice John Marshall gave the following decision: "A pardon is a piece of paper, the value of which depends upon its acceptance by the person implicated. It is hardly supposed that one under sentence of death would refuse to accept a pardon, but if it is refused, it is no pardon. George Wilson must be hanged!"

How do I receive Forgiveness?

- We must **call upon the Lord** (Ps. 86:5). The Lord is abundant in mercy to all who call upon Him. Even though we have offended or sinned against others,

we have first and foremost sinned against God (Ps. 51:4). Forgiveness depends on the one who has been sinned against. Against you and you only have I sinned...

- We must **confess our sin** (1 John 1:9). If we confess our sin, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
- We must **repent of our sin** (Acts 8:22). To do this you must have a change of heart and mind and godly sorrow for sin. We must see the damnable nature of what we have done.
- We must be willing to **forsake our sin** (Pro. 28:13). Whosoever confesses and forsakes his sins will have mercy.
- We must be willing to **forgive others**.

4. We must be willing to forgive ourselves.

“Here is a saying that you can rely on and nobody should doubt, ‘that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners’ (1 Tim. 1: 15).

Unglued and undone by personal experience of the Messiah of sinners, who searches the noisy streets of large cities and the unpaved roads of small hamlets, the ragamuffin walks the way of ruthless trust in the irreversible forgiveness of the Master. The defenses he has erected against his own truth as a saved sinner wither in the maelstrom of mercy flashing like lightning across his life. “If the Lord Jesus Christ has washed me in his own blood and forgiven all my sins,” the ragamuffin whispers to herself, “I cannot and must not refuse to forgive myself.” Brennan Manning.

Accepting our forgiveness is to do with forgiving ourselves. Forgiveness is completed by our acceptance. If we do not accept God’s forgiveness we stay in our prison.

Forgiving ourselves is just as important as forgiving others. Paul indicated that in order for us to win the race that we are running, we must have the ability to forget some things

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. (13) Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, (14) I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (15) Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. (Php. 3:12-15)

- Forgetting is not a normal human ability. The New Testament word for “forget” means “to neglect or no longer care for.”
- Forgetting means that we are to no longer nurture certain things in our mind.
- There are certain things that we are to disregard and no longer care for in our minds.
- There are certain things that we are not to let predominate our thinking or thought life.
- There are certain things upon which we are not to fix our attention or gaze.
- There are certain things that we are not to cultivate, water or feed.
- There are certain things that we must let starve to death for lack of nourishment.
- Forgetting involves the discipline of one’s thought life

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy— meditate on these things. (Php. 4:8)

E. Consequences of not forgiving

Jesus taught that if we do not forgive we will experience negative fruit.

1. Our prayers will be hindered

And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. (Mark 11:25)

2. Our gifts and ministries will be rendered ineffective

Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (Mt. 5:23-24)

3. God will withdraw His forgiveness

So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses. (Mt. 18:35)

This does not mean we lose our salvation or don't go to heaven. It does mean that we live in a prison where we do not fully receive and experience His grace in our lives.

4. We will personally suffer and dwell in a prison house of our own making

Then Peter came to Him and asked, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?" (22) "No, not seven times," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven! (23) "Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. (24) In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. (25) He couldn't pay, so his master ordered that he be sold—along with his wife, his children, and everything he owned—to pay the debt. (26) "But the man fell down before his master and begged him, 'Please, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.' (27) Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt. (28) "But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment. (29) "His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it,' he pleaded. (30) But his creditor wouldn't wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full. (31) "When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened. (32) Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, 'You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. (33) Shouldn't you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?' (34) Then the

*angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt.
(35) "That's what My heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your
brothers and sisters from your heart." Mat 18:21-35 NLT*

We will personally suffer and dwell in a prison of our own making if we do not forgive.

Jesus told the parable of the unforgiving servant. From this parable we learn many things:

- There is no possible way that we could ever repay God the debt that we owe to him.
- The forgiveness that we received from God is totally undeserved because our debt was real.
- What others owe to us is totally insignificant when compared to the debt that we owed to God.
- By not extending forgiveness to others we demonstrate a lack of true appreciation for and gratitude concerning God's unspeakable gift to us.
- God is further offended when we do not reciprocate His generosity. We are viewed as a "wicked" servant.
- When we refuse to forgive, this implies that God will withdraw His forgiveness from us.

5. We will experience the fruit of bitterness

Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled... (Heb. 12:14-15)

When we do not forgive others physiologically and psychologically we experience some negative reactions. This has been demonstrated from a medical point of view.

- High blood pressure
- Increased levels of stress
- Hostility in relationships
- Anger and intolerance
- Increased heart rate

- Higher instance of substance abuse
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Difficulty in developing wholesome friendships
- Headaches and chronic pain
- Inability to commit to others

When we have a revelation of our own need for forgiveness, our own short fallings, and God's forgiveness for us, we come to a place of humility and it becomes easier, or more apparent why I should release others who have short fallings as well if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.

The Holy Spirit spoke this to me when I was preparing:

"There is a lot of unforgiveness harboured within the context of marriages, work contexts and even towards the church (leaders, members, and the church as a body). I want to bring freedom to my people. Freedom to see a right. Where there is unforgiveness, bitterness and offense, there is spiritual blindness. The unforgiveness opens a door. Just as forgiveness unlocks the prison door, unforgiveness locks that door and opens another door for evil. Unforgiveness is a place of pride and self-righteousness. If this is not dealt with, it becomes a spiritually barren place, devoid of life.

F. A Key to help us Forgive

Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: (15) looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; Heb 12:14-15

Jesus speaking of the end of the age:

*And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. (11) Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. (12) And because lawlessness will abound, the **love** of many will grow cold. (13) But he who endures to the end shall be saved. (Mat 24:10-13)*

Love – agape

This love is the love that is found in the hearts of believers. Or the love that should be found in the hearts of believers:

*...we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; (4) and perseverance, character; and character, hope. (5) Now hope does not disappoint, because the **love** of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Rom 5:3-5)*

Love = agape.

“Agape denotes an undefeatable benevolence and unconquerable goodwill that always seeks the highest good of the other person no matter what he does. It is the self-giving love that gives freely without asking anything in return, and does not consider the worth of its object. Agape is more a love by choice than “philos” or phileo love, which is love by chance, and it refers to the will rather than the emotion. Agape describes the unconditional love God has for the world.”

Agape does not require any reciprocation, whereas phileo, or philos, does.

Without God, we cannot love with agape. Our love will require reciprocation of some sort.

Agape loves regardless of the response. This is the love Jesus showed when He forgave from the cross.

- Judas betrayed Jesus
- Peter denied Jesus
- All his closest friends abandoned Him, only John followed from afar.

From his friends who had deserted Him, to the Roman guard who had crucified Him, Jesus forgave them all. They didn't ask for forgiveness and may not have recognised their wrong doing, but He gave it anyway.

*But God demonstrates His own **love** toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Rom 5:8*

We can feel so justified in harbouring unforgiveness. Truth be told, we may have been treated unjustly or unfairly. We may have been made a scapegoat, maliciously wronged, abandoned, taken for granted, misunderstood, falsely accused, and so forth. At the end of the day, Jesus requires that we forgive, as He forgave. Without strings attached. We can only do this with God's assistance,- with God's love. It doesn't have to be a feeling. It is simply a decision. Once we have made the decision we may have to choose not to pick up the offence on a regular, minute to minute basis.

G. What does it look like when I have extended forgiveness?

Extending God's forgiveness includes several things:

- we **express our forgiveness in words**.
- we **refuse to bring the matter up** to the offending party again.
- we **treat the offending party** as if it had never happened.
- we **refuse to talk to others** about it anymore.
- we **refuse to dwell on the offense** in our minds.

H. What are the results of forgiveness?

When forgiveness is granted and received it brings forth some wonderful results.

These results include:

- **Justification** (Acts 13:38-39).

In other words we are justified before God and man. We can go forward just as if nothing had happened.

- **Clearing of the Conscience** (II Cor. 7:11).

In other words we can be healed from within and the past does not need to leave its mark on us.

- **Joy** (Ps. 51:12).

This means instead of bitterness there can be joy. The joy of our salvation returns.

- **Restoration** (Acts 3:19).

This means that our relationship with God and our relationship with others are restored back to where they were prior to the offense.

- **Love for God** (Luke 7:36-48)

One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to have dinner with him, so Jesus went to his home and sat down to eat. (37) When a certain immoral woman from that city heard He was eating there, she brought a beautiful alabaster jar filled with expensive perfume. (38) Then she knelt behind Him at His feet, weeping. Her tears fell on His feet, and she wiped them off with her hair. Then she kept kissing His feet and putting perfume on them. (39) When the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, He would know what kind of woman is touching Him. She's a sinner!" (40) Then Jesus answered his thoughts. "Simon," He said to the Pharisee, "I have something to say to you." "Go ahead, Teacher," Simon replied. (41) Then Jesus told him this story: "A man loaned money to two people—500 pieces of silver to one and 50 pieces to the other. (42) But neither of them could repay him, so he kindly forgave them both, cancelling their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?" (43) Simon answered, "I suppose the one for whom he cancelled the larger debt." "That's right," Jesus said. (44) Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Look at this woman kneeling here. When I entered your home, you didn't offer Me water to wash the dust from My feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. (45) You didn't greet Me with a kiss, but from the time I first came in, she has not stopped kissing My feet. (46) You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint My head, but she has anointed My feet with rare perfume. (47) "I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown Me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love." (48) Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven." (Luk 7:36-48 NLT)

There is no sin so gross nor so often repeated that it cannot be forgiven. Jesus admonition about forgiving “seventy times seven” reflects the heart of God when it comes to forgiveness. God’s forgiveness extends to such things as abortion, divorce, homosexuality, adultery, fornication, stealing, and child abuse, failure in business, failure in parenting and failure in ministry. Paul reminded the Christians in Corinth that they all came from troubled backgrounds (I Cor. 6:9-11). Such were some of

you... Jesus reminded us that those who have been forgiven much, love much (Luke 7:47). Those who have been forgiven much, love much.

Conclusion

Forgiveness is a key which Jesus holds out to us. It's a key that unlocks our own prison gates.

In order to receive forgiveness, I must forgive others who have wronged me. If I do not do this, my prayers will be hindered, my ministry will be ineffective, I will not be forgiven by my heavenly father, and I will dwell in a prison of my own making. However, when I do forgive others and receive my forgiveness, there are many benefits which include, justification, clearing of the conscience, joy, restoration, healing, hope, and love for God.

Added extras:

Offended at God?

"It's how John the Baptist must have felt. He languished in Herod's prison, the cost of meddling in the king's personal life, daring to denounce his brazen immorality. Herod's pride and anger and despotic power converged, and he imprisoned John. But then he froze in indecision. He hated John but also feared him: feared his holiness, his boldness, his wildness. Herod, for all his pagan ways, nursed a deep dread that John might be right, and that the wrath of God would befall him, or that the people would overthrow him, which might be the same thing. And, of course, following in the line of all the Herods, he was paranoid, and superstitious, and egotistical, and insecure, and together that concocted a potent brew of self-doubt. From prison, John hears of Jesus' comings and goings, his preaching and his miracles. This is the same Jesus whose mother's voice caused John to leap in his own mother's womb. This is the same Jesus whose sandals John felt unworthy to untie, the same Jesus he declared "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world," the same Jesus about whom he remarked, "He must increase, and I must decrease." And this is the same Jesus who declared John to be great in the kingdom

of God. But now, John's not sure. All these bold declarations seem a stretch. If all these things be true, why is he here, rotting and starving? Why does his life hang by a thread held in the hand of a vain and capricious king? If Jesus is the Christ, why is he not coming to the rescue, swooping down in retribution on Rome and all her lackeys? Surely, for the sake of his kingdom, Jesus will act. And if not for the sake his kingdom, then for the sake of John's Elijah-like status as the Messiah's forerunner. And if not for the sake of John's status, then for the sake of Jesus' relationship with him—they're cousins, after all. This is a family matter. So he waits, and his waiting turns to wondering, and his wondering to worrying, and his worrying to open doubt. He hears about all that Jesus is doing—the astonishing miracles. The people proclaim him as “a great prophet.” But something sits askew for John. Something doesn't add up. So he dispatches two of his disciples to ask Jesus a pointed question: “Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?” Luke's commentary and Jesus' reply are cold comfort: “At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. So he replied to the messengers, ‘Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.’”⁶ Jesus says, in effect, “John, I'm busy. I'm busy being the Messiah—healing, liberating, raising the dead, preaching good news—but if you're asking what this means for you, well, I've got some hard news. I'm not dropping by. Herod will have his way with you. Blessed are you if you don't fall away on account of me—if my performing miracles left and right with nary a one for you doesn't drive you into unbelief. **Blessed are you if I leave you in the dark and you still trust me.**” With that, Jesus sends John's disciples back to him and then turns to the crowd and makes these remarks: “What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’ I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”⁷ I don't think Jesus' remarks are unrelated to the message he sent John. Who is

the greatest in the kingdom of God? Who deserves God's favor? To whom does Jesus, by virtue of their faithfulness or status or kinship with him, owe a miracle? Maybe John the Baptist, maybe also the Sons of Korah, as though their closeness with God entitled them to full heavenly benefits here and now, with no deductible. So John's surprised to find himself in this prison, in this winter, lonely and afraid. Abandoned, while his own cousin saves and blesses and cures every beggar and whore and tax collector he comes across, bestows divine favor on every wayward stranger he meets. John sits in the dark, waiting, dreading, brooding. He hears the heavy footfall of the dungeon-keeper approaching, hears the clink and thud of the keys in the lock. He knows in his bones what he's come for. It's not to deliver a pardon. It's not to announce a visitor. It's not to herald a miracle. Darkness is his closest friend." Mark Buchanan – Spiritual Rhythms

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