

Is Total Forgiveness Realistic?

- *Ephesians 4:29-32*

- **We have spent several weeks discussing the subject of forgiveness, the necessity of forgiveness in a Christian's life, and the depth of God's forgiveness towards us as an encouragement to forgive. But we are talking about real world situations, circumstances surrounding our own lives, and the question arises, "Is Total Forgiveness Realistic?"**
 - We know that the right answer is "Yes", but how do we get to "Total Forgiveness" in our lives? The answer is we can't get there on our own. We need God's help if we ever hope to reach "Total Forgiveness" in our lives.
 - **As we have seen, the Bible has a lot to say about forgiveness & it is one of the major Biblical doctrines because this is where salvation begins.**
 - Psalm 103:12 – "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us."
 - Psalm 130:3-4 – "If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared."
 - Isaiah 38:17 – "thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back."
 - Micah 7:19 – "He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."
 - Ephesians 1:7 – "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;"
 - I John 1:9 – "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
 - **I hope you understand how significant forgiveness is in each of our lives. If God did not forgive us, we would have to shoulder our sins forever & live under a load of guilt.**
 - **But the Bible also has a lot to say about our forgiveness of the sins of others against us. Here are two examples:**
 - Mark 11:26 – "But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses."
 - Ephesians 4:32 – "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."
 - **Since the days of Adam, we have wrestled with the problem of sin & God only has one solution to the problem of human sin—the act of forgiveness.**
 - If we do not accept His solution, no other will be offered. God has shown us how to forgive others. We are to do for others what He has done for us.
 - **READ SCRIPTURE**
 - **The subject of forgiveness is about to take another testing turn in our lives. The Bible tells us that we are to forgive others as God has forgiven us.**
 - The word translated "forgive" is actually a Greek word meaning, "be gracious." It includes forgiveness but is actually a much broader concept. We are to extend grace to others as God has extended grace to us. We, the undeserving who have been showered with God's grace in Christ, are to give to other undeserving sinners (who have sinned against us) the same outpouring of grace.
 - **So now we come back to our original question. Is Total Forgiveness Realistic? Is this standard too high for us to live by? Can anyone really live this way in the world we are living in? When Paul says, "forgiving each other," what does he mean?**
1. **What is forgiveness?**
 - a. **"Blot Out"**

- i. One of the terms of forgiveness that we are very familiar with is the term, “to blot out,” in the sense that God erases the record of the sins we commit.
 - b. **“Remove or Carry Away”**
 - i. Another common Hebrew word means “to lift and carry away,” speaking of the complete removal of our sins from us, as if a heavy load had been lifted from our shoulders.
 - c. **“Release from debt”**
 - i. This term indicates the punishment for sin has been canceled.
 - d. **“To Show Grace”**
 - i. And then the meaning we will discuss tonight, “to show grace to one who has sinned greatly,” speaking of the undeserved nature of forgiveness.
- **The Bible gives us many word pictures to describe forgiveness.**
 - "To forgive is to turn the key, open the cell door, and let the prisoner walk free."
 - "To forgive is to write in large letters across a debt, 'Nothing owed.'"
 - "To forgive is to pound the gavel in a courtroom and declare, 'Not guilty!'"
 - "To forgive is to shoot an arrow so high and so far that it can never be found again."
- **Forgiveness in its most general sense is a choice, not a feeling, we make.**
 - God never says, “Forgive them if you feel like it.” Forgiveness is not about your feelings. If you have been deeply hurt, you will probably never “feel” like forgiving someone. Forgiveness is a choice, a decision you make in your heart. It is a choice to release others from their sins against you.
 - Forgiveness means letting go of the anger and the desire for revenge. Seen in its true light, forgiveness is an act of mercy toward the offender.
 - Forgiveness isn’t earned, and if a person could “earn” forgiveness, he wouldn’t need it in the first place. It is a gift of mercy that you give to someone who has hurt you.
- 2. How do I know when I have truly forgiven?**
 - **This is a somewhat tricky question, but part of the answer lies in the answer to these questions:**
 - Do you continue to think about it day and night?
 - Do you have to talk about it all the time?
 - Do you feel the need to seek revenge?
 - Do you live in bitterness and anger?
- 3. Does forgiveness always lead to reconciliation?**
 - The answer is no. Forgiveness is one thing; reconciliation is something else. Reconciliation requires forgiveness, but forgiveness does not demand reconciliation.
 - I will put it to you this way. Forgiveness depends on you. Reconciliation depends on you plus the other person. It implies confession, repentance, forgiveness, restoration of trust, and the passing of time plus a mutual desire to reconcile.
- 4. What about the person who says, “I can forgive but I can’t forget?”**
 - **As I told you before, I used to think you couldn’t forgive without forgetting until I experienced true forgiveness from others.**
 - We all understand that God “forgets” our sins when he blots them out, puts them behind his back, and casts them into the depth of the sea. He can “forget” our sins because He’s God and has the power to do things like that.
 - But we’re not God, and our painful memories often return to haunt us.
 - But even when God forgets, He does so b/c He chooses not to remember our sins.
 - Hebrews 10:17 – “And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.”
 - Though we aren’t God, we should still strive to put the wrongs of others in the past & leave them there.
 - **Forgiveness is a choice we make. It is not a feeling or a mood or a passing notion. Forgiveness does not mean we somehow wipe out of our mind the record of what happened. Forgiveness means we choose not to remember it. There is a big difference between remembering something**

and dwelling on it. We can all remember (if we try hard enough) things in the past that have hurt us deeply. Forgiveness means we choose not to dwell on those things. It also means we choose not to hold a grudge against someone who has wronged us.

- Clara Barton, founder of the Red Cross, was talking with a friend one day. The name of a person they both knew came up. Years before that person had done some very mean things to Clara. The friend asked Barton, “Don’t you remember when she did that to you?” “No,” she replied, “I distinctly remember forgetting that.”

5. How do you forgive if they do not confess?

➤ **So let’s answer this tough question. How in the world do you forgive those who do not, will not, or cannot own up to the wrong that they have done? If they don’t ask for forgiveness, how can you forgive them?**

- There are folks out there who will stomp on you and walk away laughing. And they’ll do it again and laugh again. You may work with someone like that. You may be married to someone like that.
- There are people who may hurt you & never have the opportunity to right their wrong.
- And still there are others who will disappoint or harm you & never realize it. How do you forgive them?
- Let me answer that question by asking another question. Did Jesus really forgive those that crucified Him as He was hanging on the cross? How?
 - They never asked for forgiveness.
 - They never repented.
 - They never stopped the beating or the crucifixion.
- Yet He forgave them b/c He chose to forgive them & not be overcome with anger & bitterness & be chained to their wrong.
- We can do the same. If they have moved away & we can’t reach them, if they have already passed away & they never confessed ... you can still forgive & be set free from the bondage of anger by not living as a prisoner to their sin.
- You can make the choice to wipe the slate clean so that your life is free from bitterness.

➤ **VIDEO**

➤ **So now we come back to the original question, “Is Total Forgiveness Realistic?”**

- On a purely human level, the answer is no. In our own strength, we will never be able to forgive others as God forgives us—completely, absolutely, freely, immediately, graciously, with no strings attached. As long as we live on the human level, total forgiveness will be beyond our grasp.
- But once we bring God into the picture, everything changes because with God, all things are possible.

➤ **Total Forgiveness is nothing less than a miracle of God.**

- It is a miracle that Jesus would die for our sins & love us when we were unlovable & continue to love us as Christians when we sin & turn our backs on Him.
- Yet the Bible reminds us that He is longsuffering towards us & is willing to forgive. Shouldn’t we do the same with others?

God Moved the Fence for Us

During World War II, as Allied soldiers fought their way across France, a soldier died during a bloody firefight. After the battle was over, his buddies wanted to find a way to give him a decent burial. The only cemetery in the closest village was a Catholic cemetery so they approached the priest, asking for permission to bury their fallen comrade there. “Is he Catholic?” the priest asked. “No, he’s Protestant,” came the reply. With great regret, the priest said, “He cannot be buried here. This cemetery is reserved for baptized members of the Catholic Church.” So the soldiers found a suitable place outside the fence that

marked the border of the cemetery. With great sorrow, they buried him and then went back to the war. Some months later, the soldiers returned to the tiny village, hoping to provide a suitable marker for their friend. To their surprise and consternation, when they came to the burial spot, they could not find the grave. Not knowing what else to do, they asked the priest if he knew what had happened. He told them after they had buried their friend, he could not sleep at night. So one morning he got up early and moved the fence to include the body of the much-loved soldier who had died for his country.

That's what God did for us. He could not rest while we're on the wrong side of the fence. He wanted so much to bring us into his family that he sent his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who through his death on the cross "moved the fence" so that we would have a place in God's family.

- **If God has "moved the fence" for us, can we not do the same for others? If God found a way to include us in his love, can we not reach out to include those who have sinned against us? This is the very heart of the gospel. What God has freely done for us, we are called to do for others.**