

What Does the Bible Say About Forgiveness?

Forgiveness stands at the center of the gospel. Without it, no one could be saved, no friendship could survive, and no home could hold together. The world does not know what to do with guilt. Some bury it and pretend it is not there. Others carry it for years and never set it down. The Bible offers something better than either. It tells us how a holy God forgives guilty people, and it tells us how forgiven people must treat one another. Both belong together, and we cannot have the one without the other.

God Is a Forgiving God

Forgiveness begins with the character of God. He is not looking for reasons to condemn us. David said, *"For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee"* ([Psalm 86:5](#)). When God revealed Himself to Moses, He described Himself as *"merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth... forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin"* ([Exodus 34:6-7](#)).

And when God forgives, He does it thoroughly. *"As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us"* ([Psalm 103:12](#)). Through Micah He promised to *"cast all their sins into the depths of the sea"* ([Micah 7:19](#)). This is the God we have sinned against, and He is ready to pardon.

Forgiveness Cost the Blood of Christ

Forgiveness is free to us, but it was not cheap. It cost the blood of the Son of God. The law had long taught the lesson, *"without shedding of blood is no remission"* ([Hebrews 9:22](#)). Sin must be paid for, and at the supper Jesus held up the cup and said, *"this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins"* ([Matthew 26:28](#)).

This is why Paul could write that *"we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins"* ([Ephesians 1:7](#)). God did not simply overlook our sin as though it did not matter. He dealt with it at the cross, so that He could *"be just, and the justifier"* of the one who comes to Him ([Romans 3:26](#)). When we make light of sin, we make light of the blood it took to forgive it.

Forgiveness Requires Repentance

God is ready to forgive, but His forgiveness is not unconditional. It rests on repentance. A man must turn from his sin before God will take it away. Jesus warned, *"except ye repent, ye shall all*

likewise perish" (Luke 13:3), and Paul told the men of Athens that God "now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30). Repentance is more than regret. It is a change of heart that turns from sin and forsakes it. Solomon said, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Proverbs 28:13). Mercy is promised to the one who forsakes his sin, not to the one who hides it or holds onto it.

God is patient, *"not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Peter 3:9). But patience is not approval. He will not forgive a sin a man refuses to give up. The door stands open, yet a man must turn around to walk through it. This is the order Scripture always keeps. First repentance, then forgiveness.

How God's Forgiveness Is Received

What, then, must a person do? To the one who has never come to Christ, the terms are the same now as on the day the church began. The crowd at Pentecost was told to *"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38), and Saul was told to "be baptized, and wash away thy sins" (Acts 22:16). That is where a sinner first meets the forgiving grace of God.*

The Christian who falls into sin is forgiven on terms just as plain. He confesses it and turns from it. John wrote, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). When Simon sinned, Peter told him, "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God" (Acts 8:22). Forgiveness is always there for the asking, but it is for the penitent, not for the man who intends to keep his sin.*

When God Forgives, He Forgives Completely

Many who have obeyed God still walk under a cloud, sure that their old sins are somehow still counted against them. God's word says otherwise. He promised, *"their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Hebrews 8:12). Long before, He had said, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins" (Isaiah 43:25).*

A sin that God has blotted out is gone. He does not bring it up again, and neither should we. Our assurance does not rest on how we feel from one day to the next. It rests on what God has said in His word. If you have done what He commanded, then believe what He promised, and stop carrying what He has already taken away.

We Must Forgive Others

Here the matter turns, and it turns on us. The God who forgives us commands us to forgive each other, and He ties the two together so tightly that we cannot pull them apart. Jesus said, *"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses"* ([Matthew 6:14-15](#)). Read that again slowly. The man who will not forgive will not be forgiven.

Jesus drove it home with a story. A servant was forgiven a debt he could never repay, then went out and seized a fellow servant over a small one, and would not show the mercy he had just received. His lord called him wicked and delivered him to the tormentors, and Jesus ended with a warning, *"So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses"* ([Matthew 18:35](#)). We have been forgiven a debt past counting. To hold a grudge after that is to forget what we ourselves were given.

So we forgive as we have been forgiven, and we forgive the way God forgives. The Lord made the pattern plain. *"If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him"* ([Luke 17:3](#)). We do not wink at sin and call it forgiveness, for God does not. But neither do we hold a grudge. We are to be tenderhearted, *"forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you"* ([Ephesians 4:32](#)), always ready to forgive, keeping no bitterness while we wait for a brother to turn. *"And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any"* ([Mark 11:25](#)). A heart set on revenge cannot pray clean, and a brother who repents must find us willing, even *"until seventy times seven"* ([Matthew 18:22](#)).

Forgiven, and Forgiving

So the two halves of forgiveness meet in you. On one side is a God who paid with the blood of His Son to take your sins away and remember them no more. On the other side are the people who have wronged you, waiting to see whether you will do for them a little of what God has done for you.

Have you received God's forgiveness on His terms? If not, the blood has already been shed, and the invitation still stands. And is there a grudge you are nursing, someone you will not forgive? If God has forgiven you a mountain, you cannot stand before Him clutching someone else's molehill. Lay it down. Be forgiven, and be forgiving. There is no other way to walk with a forgiving God.

Every Scripture reference in this study links to the King James Version. Open it and read for yourself.