Biblical Counseling

Fundamentals Course Session 8 2026-2027 – FORGIVENESS

Key Scripture passages to guide our discussion:

Matthew 6: 12-14

Matthew 18:21-35

Luke 17: 3-4

Ephesians 4:32

1 John 1:9

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance - Matthew 6; 18; Luke 17; 1 John 1:9 – Forgive - Properly, send away; release (discharge). The verb regularly conveys one of three closely related ideas: (1) forgiving sin or debt, (2) releasing or permitting a person or thing, and (3) leaving or abandoning someone or something.

Old Testament Foundations - The Septuagint often uses the verb to translate Hebrew נָשָׂא (lift away guilt), חָטָא (pardon), or שָׁלַח (send away). Day of Atonement imagery (Leviticus 16) and Jubilee release (Leviticus 25) prepare the way for New Testament fulfillment, locating ultimate remission in the Messiah's substitutionary sacrifice.

Ephesians 4:32 - To grant, to give freely, to extend grace, to forgive, to show favor

Theological Significance

1. Divine grace initiates forgiveness; human response must mirror that grace.

2. Forgiveness is judicial (removal of guilt) and relational (restoration of fellowship).

3. Releasing possessions and earthly securities is integral to authentic discipleship.

4. Refusal to forgive contradicts the gospel, invites divine discipline, and endangers assurance.

5. Eschatological "leaving" underscores the final separation between the redeemed and the rebellious.

I. FORGIVENESS

We struggle with forgiving others

We struggle with our need for forgiveness and asking for forgiveness

SHADES MOUNTAIN COMMUNITY CHURCH

Biblical Counseling

Until we die or Christ returns, we will have to confess our sins daily, repent, and ask forgiveness from God.

Until we die or Christ returns, we will have to practice forgiveness in our relationships with others.

Forgiveness cancels a debt.

Forgiveness requires either the one who sinned to make amends or the one sinned against must bear the pain and loss themselves. The offense cannot be minimized or ignored.

The person who forgives no longer expects to be repaid for what he has suffered or lost.

Forgiveness brings the gospel to life, yet there is an undercurrent of fear in regards to forgiving.

Four common responses that evidence the fear of forgiving that we will address here:

If I forgive, there is no justice and the one who sinned against me will go free.

Forgiveness means I pretend nothing every happened.

If I forgive, I will be vulnerable to the same thing again.

My unforgiveness is justified because I am right.

II. Why is forgiveness important?

Man's greatest need is forgiveness. Without forgiveness, man is doomed to eternal punishment. Romans 6:23, Revelation 20:11-15.

Salvation requires forgiveness –

Colossians 2:13 - *When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,*

III. What is forgiveness?

Definition of forgiveness:

"*Forgiveness is a lifting of the charge of guilt, a formal declaration of that fact, and a promise (made and kept) never to remember the wrong against that person in the future*." (Jay Adams, *Theology of Christian Counseling*).

SHADES MOUNTAIN COMMUNITY CHURCH

Biblical Counseling

To forgive as the Lord forgives, we must release the person who has wronged us from any penalty that separates. Forgiveness may be described by the following four promises to forgive as God does (The idea of forgiveness promises comes from Ken Sande's *The Peacemaker*):

Four Promises of forgiveness

1. "In my thoughts I will not dwell on the incident or replay it in my mind."

2. "In my speech - I will not talk about the incident with the forgiven person or with others."

3. "In my actions - I will not allow the incident to embitter me against the forgiven person and use it to hurt them."

4. "In my relationship – I will not allow this incident to stand between us or hinder our personal relationship.

By making and keeping these promises, you can tear down the walls that stand between you and your offender.

You promise not to dwell on or brood over the problem or to punish by holding the person at a distance.

You clear the way for relationship to develop unhindered by memories of past wrongs.

This is exactly what God does for us, and it is what he calls us to do for others.

Why must we forgive? (Matthew 6; 18 and Ephesians 4:32)

We are able to forgive only when we have confessed our own sin and have been forgiven. An inability to forgive means we do not view our own sin against God as seriously as we view others' sin against us.

God commands us to forgive others as He has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32). Jesus said that if we don't forgive others, we will not be forgiven (Matthew 6:14-15). Sin requires forgiveness if reconciliation/restoration is to occur.

Apologies like "I'm sorry," or responses like "That's OK" don't settle sin issues.

Sin must be confessed (e.g. God has convicted me of my sin of… I confess it to Him and to you) and forgiveness sought (e.g. I want to ask your forgiveness for… Will you please forgive me?).

Biblical Counseling

Sin must be forgiven – either before God and/or to the offender as appropriate – forgiveness promises made and kept

To forgive is a duty, a commandment – forgiveness is the evidence that I understand my forgiveness from God (RG 11/21/2021).

IV. Forgiveness has two aspects: Attitudinal/Heart and Transactional

We must have a spirit of attitudinal/heart forgiveness even if there is not yet a transaction of forgiveness (Matt 18:35; Mark 11:25; Luke 23:34; Acts 7:59).

> Attitudinal/heart – from the heart and soon Matt 18:35)

> Transactional – by evidence of genuine repentance – over time (if ever) (Luke 17:3-4)

Attitudinal/heart forgiveness – from the heart and soon (Matt. 18:35).

We must have a spirit of attitudinal/heart forgiveness even if there is not yet a transaction of forgiveness (Matt 18:35; Mark 11:25; Luke 23:34; Acts 7:59).

Not necessary to communicate it to your offender unless they ask for forgiveness.

If offender doesn't ask, we don't announce forgiveness. To do so would be a method of devious and dishonest confrontation.

Attitudinal/heart forgiveness -

> Attitudinal choice, whenever you have something against someone (Col. 3:13)

> God's commandment

> My obedience to God

> Prepares my heart if my offender seeks forgiveness and repents.

> Allows for potential reconciliation on my part

> Even if a sinner does not repent, there is to be attitudinal forgiveness (Mark 11:25-26). This is what Christ modeled on the cross, and Stephen exemplified as he was being stoned (Luke 23:34, Acts 7:60).

Transactional forgiveness – offender asks forgiveness is demonstrating repentance.

Transactional – by evidence of genuine repentance – over time (if ever) (Luke 17:3-4)

> Observed genuine and sincere repentance

> Provides for reconciliation and restoration

> May be slow or may never occur

V. Misconceptions about forgiveness.

It is hypocritical to forgive when you don't "feel" like it - It is a misconception that forgiveness is a feeling. Luke 17:3-10

We can't command feelings. God commands us to forgive as an act of obedient service. John 13:17, James 1:25.

Forgiveness is to be granted repeatedly, even the same day. Luke 17:4b.

Forgiveness is not an act of emotions, but an act of the will.

Forgiveness is to be granted when a sinner repents. Luke 17:3-4a.

Christ declared that it is whom we put our faith in that determines whether we forgive or not. Luke 17:5-6, John 16:9

Misconception: We must forget to forgive.

It is a misconception that we are commanded to forget before we forgive or as we forgive.

Forgiving is active. Forgetting is passive and frequently happens when we grant biblical forgiveness, thereby choosing not to remember.

Misconception: To forgive is to excuse sin.

Forgiveness does not include excusing sin. Excusing sin is a form of minimizing sin; of not taking it seriously.

SHADES MOUNTAIN COMMUNITY CHURCH

Biblical Counseling

Forgiveness includes viewing sin the way God sees it. God paid a great price to forgive our sins, and excusing sin in effect tramples Christ's work on the cross.

You don't forgive because it's OK, but rather because of the blood of Jesus Christ. Colossians 3:13, Hebrews 9:22

Minimizing sin leads to a loss of hope for the sinner, as it stops a clear conscience.

VI. Biblically Refuting Four False Beliefs Regarding Forgiveness.

> If I forgive, there is no justice, and the one who sinned against me will go free.

1. Biblical truth—God only knows what is just and will punish all sin. Those who never confess their sin at the cross will be punished. Sin requires shed blood, either Jesus' or the sinner's.

> Forgiveness means I pretend nothing ever happened.

2. Biblical truth—Forgiveness is not denial; forgiveness is based on Christ being punished. The debt Jesus talks about is real, and is not minimized. He paid a horrible, serious payment for sin, because sin is always serious.

> If I forgive, I will be vulnerable to the same thing again.

3. Biblical truth—Forgiving doesn't mean the person is safe and must be trusted. It does mean that rather than dwelling on it or talking about it, I trust God and live according to His wisdom.

> My un-forgiveness is justified because I am right. If I forgive, the sinner will never see the wrong and repent.

4. Biblical truth—Unforgiveness only hurts me, and allows what the sinner did to control my life, instead of denying myself, taking up my cross and walking in the victory of the cross and the resurrection.

VII. Biblical practical strategies for change for a heart of unforgiveness.

- Don't turn a blind eye to sin – if offended show them their fault (Matt. 18)
- Love the sinner wisely
- Hold yourself to a high biblical standard
- Deal first with your own heart attitude.

VIII. Homework Ideas Regarding Forgiveness:

- Assign studying and memorizing Scripture
- Make a list of how God has forgiven me.
- What do I need to ask God to forgive me for?
- What do I need to ask others to forgive me for?
- Write out and personalize the benefits of forgiveness and the curse of unforgiveness