

Dartmouth

Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Forgiveness (lesson 2)

Scripture: Matthew 18:21-35

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What IS Forgiveness?

Matthew 18:21-35 (NASB)

²¹ Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" ²² Jesus *said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. ²³ "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴ "And when he had begun to settle *them*, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵ "But since he did not have *the means* to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. ²⁶ "The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.' ²⁷ "And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ "But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and *began* to choke *him*, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' ²⁹ "So his fellow slave fell down and *began* to entreat him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' ³⁰ "He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. ³¹ "So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. ³² "Then summoning him, his lord *said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. ³³ 'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴ "And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. ³⁵ "So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

Introduction I believe that one of the most basic and foundational human emotions is the feeling of guilt. Guilt is defined as

"the fact of having committed a breach of conduct especially violating law and involving a penalty," or

"feelings of culpability especially for imagined offenses or from a sense of inadequacy."¹

Guilt is a strong elixir. It involves fear of punishment, loss of self-esteem, and feelings of loneliness, rejection and isolation. In general, people *will do a lot* to avoid feelings of guilt.² And we have often heard people use the expression, "Don't put me on a guilt-trip." We don't like guilt, and we want to avoid it. But sometimes the word is appropriate because, we are guilty. The feeling of guilt then, is part of what our conscience provides for us. When we are truly guilty of

something, then one of two things need to happen—payment for the offense, or forgiveness of the offense. Today we want to think about what forgiveness of an offense means—what, in fact, forgiveness IS?

Two men from recent history come to mind. Each is a profound example of guilt displayed publicly before the world. One is a man named Albert Speer. Speer was Hitler's architect and one of his most trusted followers. He was captured at the end of World War II, tried at Nuremberg, and given a 20 year sentence—he was released from Spandau prison in 1966. He was released, wrote books and then died in 1981. Speer is often thought of as the most forthright and honest of the captured Nazi commanders. He admitted his guilt and his complicity in the overall plan of Nazi Germany. He is said to have donated about 80% of the royalties from his books to Jewish charities. He spent two decades in prison, and then resumed his life at 61 years old.

A second example of deep guilt comes from the man Theodore Robert Bundy (1946-1989) who between 1973 and 1978 killed at least 30 women and girls—estimates range from 30 to 100. Typically, Bundy would bludgeon his victims, then strangle them to death. He also engaged in rape and necrophilia. The night before his execution, Bundy said he would allow an interview with Dr. James Dobson of *Focus on the Family*. That interview is fascinating and can be viewed on YouTube. Bundy describes how destructive pornography was in his life and how while in prison every single violent criminal he met had experience in porn. He had come to the place where he openly admitted his crimes, and while he said that he did not want to die, he knew his crimes warranted his execution. Bundy was executed in the electric chair for his last murder by the state of Florida on January 24th, 1989.

Jesus was crucified along with two robbers. Both scoffed at Jesus but then one said to the other, ***“we are [condemned] justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds...”*** (Luke 23:41a). Guilt is a common thing with people—sometimes deep guilt, and with crimes and with sins, payment must be made. And we could cite many examples of guilt and guiltiness in famous people's lives or in our own lives. You and I are guilty of sin, of specific sin, and sometimes even crimes. We may work hard to convince others of our innocence. We may even hire lawyers to prove our innocence. And sometimes we *have* been falsely accused or misunderstood. But sometimes we are just plain guilty. We know it, and when others come to know it, we feel humiliated.

And there the human condition would lie—guilty party bumping into guilty party; God's law a broken and smashed chandelier on the floor and a bunch of guilty partiers standing around looking at it, saying, “I didn't do it” and looking at each other. The Bible says that

- **THE fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good. ² The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men, To see if there are any who understand, Who seek after God. ³ They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one.** Psalm 14:1-3
- **All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.** Is.53:6
- **Both Jews and Greeks are all under sin** Romans 3:9
- **All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God** Romans 3:23
- **...sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—**Romans 5:12

And so humankind’s greatest need, is forgiveness by a holy God. And this, in essence, is what the Bible tells us the story about... The Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, tells the unfolding and continuing story of a holy God who offers complete forgiveness of sin. So what IS forgiveness? Is the thing we need from each other, the thing that we sometimes struggle to GIVE to each other, the same thing that we need from God? What IS this thing called forgiveness?

Hebrew is the language of the Old Testament and the Hebrew words used mean PARDON, WASH, PURIFY. Forgiveness comes by means of a **ransom**. The word KOPER and it means that atonement by means of a sacrifice MUST be made for there to be forgiveness, and the pardoning of sins. It is innocent life (sacrificial animals in the OT) given for guilty life.¹

Greek is the language of the New Testament and the Greek word used means to RELEASE, LET OFFENSES GO, and to REMIT A PENALTY.

In the Bible there are many instances of both human and divine forgiveness, though this does not mean that there is a basic difference between

¹כֹּפֶר (kōper). **Ransom**. Every Israelite was to give to the service of the sanctuary the “ransom” money of half a shekel (Ex 30:12). Egypt, in God’s sight, was given as a “ransom” for the restoration of Israel (Isa 43:3). This word “ransom” is parallel to the word “redeem” (pādā, which see) in Ps 49:7. There is a warning that a man guilty of murder must be killed—no “ransom” can be given in exchange for his life (Num 35:31). The word is also used in a bad sense as a “bribe” which wrongly purchases favor (1 Sam 12:3).

From the meaning of kōper “ransom,” the meaning of kāpar can be better understood. It means “to atone by offering a substitute.” The great majority of the usages concern the priestly ritual of sprinkling of the sacrificial blood thus “making an atonement” for the worshipper. There are forty-nine instances of this usage in Leviticus alone and no other meaning is there witnessed. The verb is always used in connection with the removal of sin or defilement, except for Gen 32:20; Prov 16:14; and Isa 28:18 where the related meaning of “appease by a gift” may be observed. It seems clear that this word aptly illustrates the theology of reconciliation in the OT. The life of the sacrificial animal specifically symbolized by its blood was required in exchange for the life of the worshipper. Sacrifice of animals in OT theology was not merely an expression of thanks to the deity by a cattleraising people. It was the symbolic expression of innocent life given for guilty life. This symbolism is further clarified by the action of the worshipper in placing his hands on the head of the sacrifice and confessing his sins over the animal (cf. Lev 16:21; 1:4; 4:4, etc.) which was then killed or sent out as a scapegoat. (*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*)

them. (If you have never read the story of Joseph in the Book of Genesis, or have not done so for a long time, I highly recommend you acquaint yourself with Joseph's situation, and how he dealt with it! Forgiveness plays heavily into that story.)

God is self-existent and eternal, while man is dependent and temporal, but both are personal beings and as such are similar in their attitudes and actions. Therefore Jesus could teach His disciples to pray, **“And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors”** (Matt 6:12), and could conclude the parable of the unmerciful servant with the statement, **“So also my heavenly Father will do”** (Matt 18:35). (P.H. Monsma, below)

But even with the best examples of human forgiveness, God is far more forgiving than people are. In the story we read this morning from Matthew 18 Peter seems to be feeling pretty smug in his offer to forgive his brother seven times. The rabbis taught that a believer needed to be willing to forgive three times. Peter doubled the offer and then some. But Jesus raises the bar to either 7 times 70 or 77, depending on how you translate EBDOMÉKONTAKIS EPTA. Either way, God's standard for forgiving offenses is high.

When we enter into a real relationship with God, the gateway is forgiveness. He wipes away our sins. That is, He makes it as if we have not sinned. We know, of course, that we have—if we're honest. (Some of us are more honest than others.) We know we are desperately in need of forgiveness from God, at least. And He offers it in Christ. He doesn't offer it in just acknowledging that He exists, or that He is an intellectual possibility, or that He is seeable in any religion in one way or another. No. He offers it in Christ, His only Son, the second person of the trinity through whom we have redemption.

It is noteworthy that divine FORGIVENESS IS **DISTINCTIVELY A BIBLICAL CONCEPT.**

- Zoroaster of Persia had a high ethical concept of God but knew little of His redeeming love and mercy. According to Him there was no hope for the wicked, who in crossing “The Bridge of the Separator” fell off it into hell (see J. H. Moulton, *Early Religious Poetry of Persia*, p. 71).
- Hinduism believes in the inexorable law of Karma, according to which a man's deeds, both good and bad, work themselves out in one life after another. The only escape from the wheel of reincarnations is found in becoming wholly apathetic or in attaining insight into some allegedly releasing truth.
- Buddhism, too, has its law of Karma and knows of no such divine forgiveness as that set forth in the Bible.
- The idea is present in Islam, but not as prominent as in Judaism and Christianity.

It is in the Bible that it comes to its own; and subsequently it has remained an important feature of the Hebrew-Christian tradition, one that for its adherents lifts this tradition above all other religions and marks it as definitely superior.(P.H. Monsma, below)

Forgiveness is letting go of an offense suffered. It is cutting it loose. It is not holding an offense against someone any more. It is refusal to hold a grudge or to expect repayment. It is not waiting for repayment or restitution. With God, the payment has been made.

- It is letting go of having been hurt by someone.
- It is letting go of your anger and grudge because someone disappointed you.
- It is letting go of the need to GET repayment when someone abused you.
- It is not counting against that person, that they injured you or even someone you love or care about.
- It is letting that person start over.
- It is an act of kindness and love and sacrifice on your part.
- It is cutting loose what someone owes you because God has cut loose what you owe Him, by sending His Son for you and you have come to embrace that by faith.

For us in Christ, it is knowing that OUR payment has been made by Jesus Christ and therefore no offense I might suffer or see from other people can be anywhere near how I have offended a holy God. This is going to have a lot of implications for how we live a daily life in relationship to other people—to my boss, to those who work for me, to my spouse and children, to my neighbors, to my fellow church members and friends. It is a having a high view of sin in myself, and the debt I owe. Not everyone has a high view of sin for themselves. Even Christians sometimes forget this.

We are going to basically spend the rest of this series exploring what it means to cut loose a debt owed to me. There are lots of questions and “what about this?” problems with forgiveness. As Batman says, “I’ll look into it,” so we shall look into many of these questions.

I hope you KNOW what forgiveness from God feels like. It feels wonderful. It is such a wonderful thing, that sometimes we can hardly believe it, though we have believed it. We heard about it from the writers of the books of the Bible and this is maybe the reason we love the Bible so much. We’re a forgiven people and anyone can join that club, just by stumbling in from the dark and asking God for it. He freely gives it. He loves to give it. He is like the father of the prodigal son. He says, “Let’s have a party!” I hope you have felt His forgiveness. His Son died to make it possible. He took our offenses. He paid for our sins. He did it in one act of supreme sacrifice and love. We love Him for it and will never stop loving Him for it, no matter what happens to us here.

¹ Merriam Webster On-Line Dictionary

² THE ZONDERVAN PICTORIAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE BIBLE Merrill C. Tenney General Editor

FORGIVENESS (סָלַח, H6145, *pardon, forgiveness*; also forms of נָשָׂא, H5951, *to lift up, bear, pardon*; סָלַח, H6142, *to pardon, forgive*; כָּפַר, H4105, prop. *to cover*, hence *to pardon*, and of several other terms meaning *to let pass, take away, hide, wash, purify, trample under foot*, etc.; ἄφεσις, G912, *release, forgiveness, pardon*, of sins [prop. *the letting them go*, as if they had not been committed], *remission of their penalty*; also forms of ἀφίημι, G918, *to send away, leave, omit, let go* [a debt], i.e., *remit, forgive*, and χαρίζομαι, G5919, *to show one's self gracious, grant forgiveness, bestow*).

1. Human and divine forgiveness. In the Bible there are instances of both human and divine forgiveness. This does not mean, however, that there is a basic difference between them. God is self-existent and eternal, while man is dependent and temporal, but both are personal beings and as such are similar in their attitudes and actions. Therefore Jesus could teach His disciples to pray, "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt 6:12), and could conclude the parable of the unmerciful servant with the statement, "So also my heavenly Father will do" (Matt 18:35).

2. God's greater readiness to forgive. Though according to the Bible human and divine forgiveness do not differ essentially, God is acknowledged as far more forgiving than man. The clearest OT statement to this effect is that of Isaiah 55:8, 9: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." These words are often taken to point to God's otherness, to His remoteness and inscrutability; but read in their proper context, they point to something far more comforting and thrilling. Immediately preceding them is one of the most striking assurances of God's pardon in all the Bible, and as an explanation of its truth the passage states that His thoughts and ways are higher than man's. They evidently are that because they are truer, nobler, better, wiser, and morally and spiritually more exalted. When injured or wronged, men tend to bear a grudge and seek revenge; they are apt to insist on their rights and demand restitution. Not so God: He will show mercy and abundantly pardon.

This greater readiness of God to forgive is strikingly exemplified by Jesus. When Peter asked him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven" (Matt 18:21 f.). It is also clearly evidenced by the wonderful truth declared in John 3:16 and confirmed by the cross. In the light of this truth, all human readiness to forgive fades into relative insignificance.

3. Distinctiveness of the Biblical teaching of God's forgiveness. It is noteworthy that divine forgiveness is distinctively a Biblical concept. Zoroaster of Persia had a high ethical concept of God but knew little of His redeeming love and mercy. According to Him there was no hope for the wicked, who in crossing "The Bridge of the Separator" fell off it into hell (see J. H. Moulton, *Early Religious Poetry of Persia*, p. 71). Hinduism believes in the inexorable law of Karma, according to which a man's deeds, both good and bad, work themselves out in one life after another. The only escape from the wheel of reincarnations is found in becoming wholly apathetic or in attaining insight into some allegedly releasing truth. Buddhism, too, has its law of Karma and knows of no such divine forgiveness as that set forth in the Bible. The idea is present in Islam, but not as prominent as in Judaism and Christianity. It is in the Bible that it comes to its own; and subsequently it has remained an important feature of the Hebrew-Christian tradition,

one that for its adherents lifts this tradition above all other religions and marks it as definitely superior.

4. Instances of forgiveness in the Bible

a. Human. In the OT Esau forgives Jacob (Gen 33:1-17); Joseph, his brothers (Gen 45:1-15; 50:15-21); Moses, the people of Israel (Exod 32:11-14, 30-33) and his sister (Num 12:11-13); David, Absalom (2 Sam 14:21, 33) and Shimei (2 Sam 19:18-23); Solomon, Adonijah (1 Kings 1:52 f.). In the NT Jesus and Peter speak of forgiving others (Matt 6:12, 14 f.; 18:21-35; Mark 11:25; Luke 17:3 f.); and Paul forgives, and enjoins the church at Corinth to forgive a member who has caused pain to the others (2 Cor 2:5-11). In Colossians, among the attributes of the new nature believers are to put on, Paul lists forgiving each other, if one has a complaint against another. "As the Lord has forgiven you," he says, "so you also must forgive" (Col 3:13; cf. Eph. 4:32).

In some of these instances no term signifying forgiveness is used; but the attitude and deed are there, though not in every case to an equal degree nor always for the same reason. Esau's forgiveness of Jacob seems quite genuine and wholehearted, prompted by Jacob's evident recognition of guilt and his humility and good-will. Joseph's forgiveness is likewise genuine. But Solomon's forgiveness of Adonijah is definitely conditional—likely for political reasons—and when in Solomon's opinion he oversteps the bounds laid down he is executed (1 Kings 2:22-25). Jesus characteristically expects a man's forgiveness to be from the heart and counsels Peter never to stop forgiving his brother.

b. Divine. As in the case of human forgiveness, divine forgiveness in the Bible is often implied rather than explicitly stated. In the story of the Fall of man, judgment is pronounced upon Adam and Eve and they are expelled from the Garden of Eden; but Abel presently appears as one accepted by God. Enoch some generations later walks with God. Noah is singled out as a righteous man; and after the Flood Abraham becomes the friend of God and a covenant is established with him.

In instances where forgiveness is explicitly mentioned, divine like human forgiveness is variously motivated and conditioned. There are a number of factors that are said, or assumed, to affect God's attitude. One is a man's weakness (Pss 78:38 f.; 103:12-14; Amos 7:2 f.); another, his ignorance (Luke 23:34; Acts 17:30); a third, circumstances beyond his control (Num 30:5, 8, 12); a fourth, the presence of men who do justice and seek truth in sinful communities (Jer 5:1, 7); a fifth, sufficient chastening (Isa 40:2); and a sixth, God's reputation. In Numbers 14:20 God's pardon is granted after Moses' manifest zeal for the glory of His name and God's apparent interest in it. It is true that in this case the pardon is hardly complete. Those receiving it will not see the Promised Land (Num 14:21-25). But the purpose achieved by it points to an important feature of divine forgiveness. A similar purpose is found in Psalm 25:11: "For thy name's sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great," and in Daniel 9:19: "O LORD, hear; O LORD, forgive; O LORD, give heed and act; delay not, for thy own sake, O my God, because thy city and thy people are called by thy name." The persons uttering these prayers clearly expect God to find the highest reason for His forgiveness within Himself. They assume that it is both His nature and His glory to forgive.

This is in accord with a further characterization of God's motive in forgiving. "For we do not present our supplications before thee on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of thy great mercy," says Daniel just before the prayer quoted above. Here the prophet indicates an important reason for God's forgiveness. He is merciful, compassionate (Ps 78:38), and abounding in steadfast love (86:5). Justice would warrant His rejecting, disowning, and punishing the sinner; love prompts Him to forgive (Exod 34:7; Num 14:18; Neh 9:16 f.; Pss 86:5; 103:11 f.; Mic 7:18-20; John 3:16).

5. Who is forgiven and what. From the preceding it is obvious that it is man in every instance who is forgiven, whether by God or other men. In no case does man forgive God. The presupposition throughout is that God is holy and righteous and never in need of forgiveness, while all men are sinful and in need of it. Were God in need of forgiveness He would be subject to a principle higher and more perfect than Himself, which is inconceivable, for then He would not be truly God. But men, not animals or unconscious objects, are in need here. Forgiveness in any meaningful sense of the word presupposes guilt, and guilt understanding, moral consciousness, and responsibility. As agents endowed with these qualities, men are repeatedly guilty of injury and wrong done to others and of offense given to God. Consequently bad attitudes, evil intentions, and perverse deeds on their part call for forgiveness. Admittedly, these attitudes, intentions, and deeds may largely be what they are because of what a man is due to his intelligence, disposition, experience, and training, as the latter in turn may be influenced by his heredity and environment. Yet insofar as they are not forced upon a man, but willingly accepted by him, insofar as he approves them and knowingly identifies himself with them, he is responsible for them. To this extent, he is not a helpless victim of them, but a guilty agent. It is on this supposition that the Bible judges men according to their endowments, opportunities, and knowledge (Matt 11:20-24; 25:14-30).

The analysis of the human situation and of man's need of forgiveness is not yet complete. Underlying and informing man's various evil attitudes, intentions, and deeds is apt to be a deeper factor that requires attention. It is nothing less, in fact, than a wrong commitment of life. Deuteronomy 6:5 says, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might," and Leviticus 19:18, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." "On these two commandments," said Jesus, "depend all the law and the prophets" (Matt 22:40). The very essence of sin in all its forms and the real determinant of the wrong one does to a neighbor would seem to be, primarily, the violation of the former and, secondarily, the violation of the latter of these commandments. In pride, man cherishes himself, and his ability and worth, supremely rather than God; in greed, material wealth; in sensuality, bodily desires. In all of them he subordinates his fellow man. As a result, his rights and opportunities are trampled on and curtailed. Jeremiah 2:13 states: "For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." This was true not only of ancient Israel, but also is true of men today. This is what must be forgiven. Basically sin and human wrong are a matter of living by a wrong scale of values. This scale must be changed to achieve a harmonious, meaningful life; living by it one must be forgiven, if he is to be reconciled with God and his fellow men (see Vincent Taylor, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, 3).

It has been said that nature does not forgive. Physical, mental, and social consequences of human deeds work themselves out according to dependable processes. It is to be observed, however, that even the consequences of evil deeds may in God's providence serve higher ends for one who knows he is forgiven. God ordained and ordered nature, and by anticipation, He has correlated its events with the exigencies of various human situations. Not only this: the influence of God's Spirit in men's lives can also counteract the effects of sin in them. Furthermore, a changed and forgiven man can in dependence on the same processes mentioned above initiate a new and better series of consequences. Nature in a sense may not forgive, but it will respond to new endeavor.

In Matthew 12:31 f., Mark 3:28-30, and Luke 12:10, Jesus speaks of blasphemy against the Spirit as a sin that will not be forgiven. Calvin holds that they alone are guilty of this sin "who, with evil intention, resist God's truth, although by its brightness they are so touched that they cannot claim ignorance" (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, 617). One might ask, Resist

God's truth to what extent? With what degree of evil intention and knowledge? The nature of this sin cannot perhaps be precisely stated in one short sentence. Certainly Calvin's characterization of it is not perfect, let alone complete. It would seem that the unpardonable sin presupposes such spiritual perversity and blindness that neither the truth of God appeals nor does its true light appear. It may also presuppose such indifference as cares not for forgiveness or such hostility as flippantly derides what is holy. At all events, this sin apparently implies a situation in which true repentance never eventuates. He who truly desires forgiveness and would sincerely repent, need not fear that he has committed it.

6. Conditions of forgiveness

a. Human. The foregoing notes that there were different reasons why men in the Bible forgave others. A question is, Are there any conditions according to the Bible that offending persons must meet to expect forgiveness? Some passages do not speak of any. "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?" (Matt 18:21), asks Peter, and Jesus tells him how often. There is no reference made to any condition the offender must meet. The parable that follows Jesus' answer to Peter clearly implies that forgiveness is being sought; and in a comparable passage (Luke 17:3 f.) repentance is specified as a condition. Moreover, though repentance on the part of the offender is not always mentioned, in some of the instances cited above it was evidently present. It may be concluded that a man must forgive his fellow man, if he repents; he should himself repent when he is the offender, and should in any case be ready to forgive. Should he ever forgive the impenitent man who knowingly has done wrong? Doubtless as far as personal offense or injury are concerned, though not as far as violation of moral principle goes. It was obviously an absence of personal offense and his compassion for his spiritually blind persecutors that made Stephen pray the notable prayer he did (Acts 7:60).

b. Divine. As in the case of human forgiveness, so in the case of God's forgiveness, some passages of Scripture fail to specify repentance as a ground or condition (Pss 65:3; 85:2; 86:5; 103:3, 10; Isa 46:12 f.; Jer 31:31-34; 33:1-18; Ezek 36:16-38; Mic 7:18-20; Acts 13:38 f.; Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; 2:13; 1 John 2:2). In other passages repentance is clearly called for (Lev 26:14-45; 1 Kings 8:46-50; 2 Chron 7:14; 30:18 f.; Pss 32:3-5; 51; Isa 1:27 f.; 55:6 f.; 59-61, esp. 59:20; Jer 18:7-11; 26:3; Lam 3:42; Ezek 18:31 f.; Zech 1:3; Mal 3:7; Matt 4:17; Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 5:31; 8:22; 1 John 1:9). Omission of its mention in the first instances may be explained by the fact that in these it was either understood, or God was not so much forgiving sin as achieving other ends (Ezek 36:20-23, 32, 35 f., 38). He also may have been moving His people to repentance by His action (36:31).

On this question of the condition, or conditions, required for forgiveness, recent and contemporary theologians differ. Karl Barth represented an extreme position. He held that all of life apart from God's own action in it falls under the judgment that it is sin. Christians live solely by God's forgiveness. Even repentance has been made for them (*Dogmatics in Outline*, 150ff.).

Paul Tillich spoke of the unconditional character of the divine act in which God declares him who is unjust just. Transcending justice destroys in man what must be destroyed, if reuniting love is to reach its aim. This which must be destroyed is the *hubris* of trying to conquer the evil in one's being as such, and to reach reunion with God by one's own good will. Such *hubris*, said Tillich, avoids the pain of surrendering one's own goodness to God's sole activity in a reunion with Him, a surrender that occurs in him who accepts the divine acceptance of himself, the unacceptable. The courage of this surrender is the central element in the courage of faith (*Systematic Theology*, III, 226).

Emil Brunner emphasizes the need of repentance as a condition of forgiveness (*The Divine-Human Encounter*, 98ff., 149ff.), a view shared by Rudolf Bultmann, Frederick C. Grant, H. R. Mackintosh, Ernest F. Scott, Vincent Taylor, and Benjamin B. Warfield, as well as the

Westminster Confession of Faith (ch. XV). Nor does Brunner stop here. Instead he goes on to take exception to a one-sided advocacy of the doctrine of forensic justification. He says, "God not only *declares*, He *creates* a new man....We not only believe in the new man, but in faith we put him on" (101). Repentance for him entails condemning the old man within and putting him off; it means accepting the death of Jesus Christ as a divine judgment upon oneself (101, 151).

The late Herman Bavinck of the Netherlands, like Brunner, underscored the requirement laid down in the Bible for God's forgiveness. Specifically, he held that regeneration, faith, and conversion are conditions for the forgiveness of sins and other benefits of the covenant of grace (*Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, IV, 160). One's entry into the kingdom of heaven depends on them (202). But, unlike Brunner, he adhered to a rather strict theory of forensic justification. The forgiveness of sins is not brought about by faith nor gained by man's endeavors. It is found completely in Christ, precedes faith, and is accepted only by faith (201f.). All works are excluded from the faith that is reckoned as righteousness (168). G. C. Berkouwer of the Free University of Amsterdam seems in substantial agreement with him, except that he significantly distinguishes between works of the law and works of faith in the writings of Paul (*Faith and Justification*, 104ff.). For him, however, these works of faith give form to faith; they show its nature, rather than themselves constituting part of the basis of God's acceptance of man.

From the foregoing, the diversity of thought on this question is evident. Yet it is clear that repentance as a condition of forgiveness of sin has been, and is, widely recognized, and that it is well supported Scripturally. It is also clear in the Bible that with the advent of Jesus Christ repentance as a condition is definitely associated with His suffering and death. To His disciples on the day of His resurrection Jesus said, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations" (Luke 24:46, 47). "The blood of Jesus...cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). "He himself [Christ] bore our sins in his body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24; cf. Acts 2:38; 13:38 f.; 26:18; Rom 5:8-11; 1 Pet 1:18 f.; 3:18; 1 John 2:1, 12; 3:5).

How are such passages to be understood? In the light of them, Brunner is doubtless right when he sees the death of Jesus Christ as a divine judgment upon oneself; and one may add a judgment which the truly penitent man, when confronted with it, will accept as his due and thus be assured of God's forgiveness. The sinner can by faith take the cross of Christ into his life, he can identify himself with Christ on the cross, and so be crucified with Him (Gal 2:20). He can die to sin that he may live to righteousness (1 Pet 2:24), the righteousness that Christ has shown but he admittedly has failed to achieve, and will never achieve fully. In this way he rejects his sinful self and returns to the Shepherd and Guardian of his soul (1 Pet 2:25); he is healed by Christ's wounds and brought to God (1 Pet 2:24; 3:18).

A further condition of God's forgiveness is found in another teaching of Jesus which He stated explicitly on at least three occasions. The first statement occurs in the Sermon on the Mount. After formulating the Lord's Prayer Jesus says, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt 6:14 f.). Equally clear and unqualified is His comment at the close of the parable of the unmerciful servant, referred to earlier in this article. This servant refused to forgive his fellow servant a debt, though his master had forgiven him a much greater one. His master thereupon revoked his cancellation of the debt and delivered him to the jailers until he should pay in full. "So also," said Jesus, "my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart" (Matt 18:35). The third statement is found in Mark 11:25: "And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any one; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses." The import of this teaching of Jesus is plain: a man must forgive others to be forgiven by God. This requirement

evidently rests on the genuineness of one's repentance. A person who seeks forgiveness but does not forgive others hardly knows what he is asking for and is not worthy of it.

Ethically, too, repentance is required for receiving the forgiveness of God. God is holy and righteous. He is "of purer eyes than to behold evil" (Hab 1:13). Because He is self-existent and the great Creator and Upholder of all including the highest principles of reality and life, personal offense given Him by man can hardly be distinguished from moral violation. In view of this, for Him to forgive without requiring repentance would be like condoning sin or being indifferent to it. It would also mean that He did not deal with man as the responsible moral agent He has made him. Hence, God is for man, but not as a sinner; only as a potential saint. He accepts the unacceptable, but only as the unacceptable becomes acceptable by repenting, that is, by acknowledging God's righteous judgment of him in Christ and by committing his life wholly to God. See RECONCILIATION; REPENTANCE.

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