

# Dartmouth

## Bible Notes



Notes From the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Forgiveness (lesson 3)

Scripture: Matthew 6:15 etc.

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## The Cost of Not Forgiving

### Matthew 6:9-15 (NASB)

“Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. <sup>10</sup> Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. <sup>11</sup> ‘Give us this day our daily bread. <sup>12</sup> ‘And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. <sup>13</sup> ‘And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.]’ <sup>14</sup> “For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. <sup>15</sup> “But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

**Introduction** Of all the aspects of the Christian life, one of the most key things that we work on is to forgive. It isn’t always easy to forgive. It was not easy for the Lord Jesus to say, from the cross, “Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” In fact, it can be quite difficult to let loose of something that you really feel you have suffered from someone else. And so we learn to go to the Lord for help in forgiving.

R.T. Kendall tells about Corrie ten Boom, whose sister Betsie died in the concentration camp, especially punished and tormented by one particular Nazi prison guard. Betsie died in her sister Corrie’s arms. Years later when Corrie was speaking in a church, she noticed there in the congregation was the same prison guard who had been so mean and wicked to Betsie. As she passed him after the church service, he looked at her with a distinctly smug look on his face, she reported. This was her illustration of how hard it was to forgive people. It isn’t easy to forgive people some times, especially when we are talking about forgiving people *for doing something to someone we love!*

I knew a married couple and the husband, for whatever reasons, strayed and chose to have an affair with a woman he met while jogging. When it became known, the man was humiliated and embarrassed to have been found out. He withdrew from the people he knew for the most part. But the wife was *more* humiliated. Her husband had abandoned her for the arms of another woman. His affair was not drawn out. But he had been unfaithful to her and hurt her as deeply as can be done. The couple ended up moving from their town to a new city and the wife ended up forgiving her

husband, who has since been faithful. The choice to forgive was one of the hardest choices she has ever been faced with. She had to let go of her anger, release the desire for vengeance and learn to treat her husband as if she trusted him again. It didn't happen overnight, and so very clearly he did not deserve this kind of love.

A friend of mine who was a pastor, spent ten years ministering in a church. He said, "Its alright. I'll be OK. It's Ok, Neil." He was a hard worker, he was utterly faithful to his church in all ways. He had gone to four years of seminary to prepare for the work. He loved the Lord and He loved the study of the Word of God. And, he got along with most of the people in the church. But his preaching was problematic. Finally, the leaders of his church evaluated him and asked him to take some preaching courses. He consented, but ultimately ended up resigning and going to another church. It was the most hurtful event of his career, and he felt misunderstood, unfairly criticized, talked about behind his back and under-appreciated for all the things he did *well* for the church and all the sacrifices he had made for them. It was years before he could even really speak with anyone from that first church.

In the prayer pattern that Jesus gave His disciples, which we have in Matthew 6, there is the haunting statement in vs.15 that, ***if you do not forgive men (other people) then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.*** I know of no other place in the New Testament where there is such a warning. There ARE plenty of warnings about the consequences of sin in the Bible. But this warning, attached to OUR reception of forgiveness from God, is especially grave. The word for forgive (ἀφῆτε) means to "let something go," cutting it loose, not holding an offense against someone any more whether they are repentant or not; not holding a grudge and not waiting for repayment.

- The Greeks had an expression using this word ***aphéte*** sometimes, "Let the pot drop."<sup>1</sup>
- It was used to mean to "waive" an extra fee.
- There are **3** ancient uses of *aphéte* which were a complaint of a son to his mother, "You abandoned me! You left me!"

That's what we're supposed to do, abandon and leave BEHIND the offenses we have suffered. We're not saying its easy, or a one-shot decision. But we are saying this is what it means to "forgive." Lay it down; release it. Don't expect repayment.

Nowhere do I find the Bible minimizing or diminishing the feelings of pain or injury we may have felt when offended or hurt or neglected by someone. I don't read Jesus telling one or another of His disciples to "suck it up, it is no big deal."

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<sup>1</sup> Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the New Testament*.

BUT WHAT HAPPENS IF I DO NOT FORGIVE? Well, I think we can say that you do not lose your salvation. If that were possible, then I am not sure if I think anyone would ultimately be saved because every Christian sometimes struggles with forgiving people for wrongs suffered. Sometimes we *don't* forgive for a long time.

Jesus states in very direct terms that WHAT we are to pray, is the way things are. There is actually incredibly good news here. There is no one who has done as much damage to me as I have done to the kingdom of God—or *would do* if given enough time for my self-centered attitudes and actions to propagate. So if I come before the Father bearing no grudges for anything done to me, then I can ask Him to bear no grudge against me. Jesus' prayer assumes that I have forgiven others before coming before the Father.<sup>2</sup>

The issue of forgiving others comes down to two things.

1. The first is gratitude. We have been forgiven an enormous debt. Even the smallest and most petty of our self-centered mischief does real damage to the kingdom of heaven. We need only to look at the fallout from Adam and Eve's simple disobedience to know that the debt that we owe is our lives. Our forgiveness cost the Father the life of His Son in exchange. Our forgiving others is simple gratitude. How dare we not!
2. The second is that by forgiving, we emulate the character of the Father. By this, we honor His name. Our Father is known for His mercy and forgiveness. When we show mercy and forgiveness, we strive to be like Him. In this way, we give honor to His name.

We do not want to live unforgiving lives. It would be like drinking poison and then saying to our offender, "There! Take that!"<sup>3</sup>

But don't get too comfortable with hanging on to grudges. There IS a cost to not forgiving—a high cost.

**The Cost of Not Forgiving** There are four injured or defrauded parties when we refuse to forgive. First, there are consequences...

#### **To God:**

How we respond to offense affects God? That may sound preposterous until you remember that God is personal. He is not human, but He is personal—

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Deffinbaugh (<http://bible.org/seriespage/jesus-prayer-matthew-65-15>) See also Matthew 18:23-35 where Jesus raises the ante, by saying that we must forgive from the heart; and Luke 7:36-50 which shows that the degree to which we love the Lord can depend on the degree to which we have been forgiven.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

He is the original “person.” He feels things. And He has chosen to be affected by the actions and choices of His creatures. He does so in holiness but He still feels. I think it saddens Him and even angers Him when we sin. To NOT forgive, is to break God’s law.

### **To You:**

You hurt yourself. Carrying poison around inside of you is one of the saddest things that can happen to a Christian. It makes you a walking contradiction. An unforgiving heart ruins the joy of the Lord which He intends for us to have. There is nothing sadder than a person who *says* they are a genuine born-again Christian but have bitterness in his or her heart still. In fact, my counseling professor in seminary (Dr. Paul Meier) used to say that 90% of clinical depression us caused ultimately by the holding of grudges.

It is unhealthy. It is distracting. It robs you and others of the joy of walking with Christ. It confuses you.

### **To the Person or Persons**

To refuse to forgive someone—even when they haven’t asked for it—is essentially to extract your own payment from them. And if the other person is a Christian, it is even more strange. Even if you can’t have a conversation with them, you are in essence evening up the scales. They may have hurt you. They may have hurt someone you love, but as long as you can hold back forgiveness THIS is something you sense you can control.

Forgiveness given is a great gift to yourself AND to the offender. They may not even learn that you have forgiven them but the Lord knows. Is that an important thing? If God knows, little else matters. If you DO forgive someone—I mean really forgive them, the person benefits. It would be the first step on the road to restoration and reconciliation. It might be the beginning of a new blessing in both person’s lives.

### **To Others**

We have a pretty high theology—the highest in the world. We say things like this:

- I know God--personally. I am authorized to call out “Abba, Father.”
- I have the Holy Spirit and He wants to use me in a Great Purpose.
- I know the future.
- I have all my sins forgiven.
- I’m going to get a new body, a resurrection body.
- I’m going to live forever.

Perhaps we should lower our theology if we’re going to refuse to forgive. Maybe we should discard some of the doctrines we say we hold to, if we’re not

going to take the Lord Jesus seriously with all that He has said about forgiveness...

Jesus told His disciples that people around will “know you are My disciples if you have love for one another.” On the other hand, if we DON’T have love for one another, and the world gets wind of it, whose disciples will they think we are? And are they not defrauded of seeing the thing they NEED to see—real followers of Jesus Christ? Others are impacted so sadly when WE do not forgive. You may say, “How would they know what is in my heart?” They will NOT see a joyful Christian, or not AS joyful as they might. And there will be some things you will refuse to talk about because bitterness still lies inside of you.

### **To the Kingdom and the Gospel**

Ultimately God’s plan of redemption will not AND CANNOT be frustrated by us. God is sovereign and anyone the Lord intends to rescue WILL be rescued. We cannot thwart His plan—it is a powerful plan! But in the short run, isn’t it sad if someone who might have been ministered to my me, ISN’T, because I am so distracted and I look so unlovely by the bitterness and refusal to forgive that I harbor in my heart because I was hurt?

If all the Christians in just one town came to commit themselves to working on forgiveness, what might be the effect on that town? Does such a prospect not excite you? I think this is a far bigger thing than we imagine...

The inescapable conclusion of this message is that we MUST FORGIVE. I know it isn’t easy.

But no one has said that living the Christian life would be easy. But in the power of the Holy Spirit we can DO the things He has told us to do... If you find it utterly impossible to forgive, I wonder if you have really tasted the Lord’s forgiveness for yourself yet? You can—simply ask Him for it. He is a God who delights to exercise mercy. He knows all about you and STILL He is willing to forgive. That’s how highly He values the sacrifice that His Son, the Lamb, provided.