



# Forgiveness

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Scriptures are printed verbatim with references noted but highlights and underlines are added. Quotes and all primary sources are footnoted.

## Introduction

**"I forgive you!"** These are beautiful words to say and to hear; but applying it in real-life situations is sometimes a different story. Forgiving someone of an offense is sometimes a painful process because when we have been wounded, it's hard to forgive the one we deem responsible. There is also the business of letting God forgive us of our sins. Some think that we can out-sin God's grace. Let's come to an understanding of God's forgiveness of us and our forgiveness of others.

## What the Bible Says about God's Forgiveness of Our Sins

### 1. God graciously forgives when we confess our sins before Him.

"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

"He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy. Blessed is the man who always fears the Lord, but he who hardens his heart falls into trouble."

Proverbs 28:13-14

### 2. God calls people to seek Him and promises them forgiveness when they repent.

"Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon."

Isaiah 55:6-7

### 3. In love, Jesus died to make us holy and without blemish.

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."

Ephesians 5:25-27

#### 4. God's forgiveness is complete and absolute!

"...as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."  
Psalm 103:12

"If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness."  
Psalm 130:3-4

#### 5. God (and only God) has the power to "forget" our sins.

"I, even I, am he who blots out your transgression, for my own sake, and remember your sins no more."  
Isaiah 43:25

"I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."  
Hebrews 8:12

"But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin."  
1 John 3:5

#### 6. It is the blood of Jesus (that was shed on the cross) that cleanses us from all sin.

"...and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies (us) from every sin."  
1 John 1:7

"Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission."  
Hebrews 9:22

#### 7. Though God is a forgiving God, He is also holy and will not compromise His holiness for anybody—anytime.

"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left."  
Hebrews 10:26

"What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!"  
Romans 6:15

#### 8. Our Lord extends to us a loving invitation.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."  
Matthew 11:28-30

### A Word about Forgiving Yourself:

If you are stuck in a thought process that says, "I don't deserve God's forgiveness", you are right. If you continue that process to say, "I will not..." or "I cannot forgive myself", please consider something. If Christ, who forgives out of the richness of His grace will forgive you and go to the Cross to pay for your sins, what right—*really*—do you have not to forgive yourself? Be careful that your "false humility" does not unintentionally insult the work of Christ. If you have some "major issue" to work through, do it. If you have a "hang-up", press on. If you doubt the work of Christ as being sufficient, please don't. He death on the cross covered all of your sin if you call Him Lord of your life! If Christ is Lord, receive His forgiveness and by all means, forgive yourself. If Christ is not Lord, accept Him into your life right now and Savior and Lord. You will never be the same.

# What the Bible Says about Forgiving Others

## 1. Forgiving others is an absolute necessity.

“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”  
Matthew 6:14-15

“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”  
Mark 11:25

## 2. We must forgive often.

“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘Lord, many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.’ “  
Matthew 18:21-22

“So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”  
Luke 17:3-4

## 3. Put away bitterness and anger; forgive as God forgives.

“Get ride of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”  
Ephesians 4:31-32

## 4. Restore with gentleness one who has fallen into sin.

“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.”  
Galatians 6:1  
[cf. 2 Corinthians 2:5-11]

## 5. Forgive a repentant person and affirm your love quickly.

“Now, instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him.”  
2 Corinthians 2:7-8

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.  
1 Peter 4:8

## A Theology of “Forgiveness”<sup>1</sup>

Forgiveness is the legal act of God whereby He removes the charges that were held against the sinner because proper satisfaction or atonement for those sins has been made—this through the work of Jesus Christ on the Cross. There are several Greek words used to describe forgiveness. One is *charizomai*, which is related to the English word “grace” and means “to forgive out of grace.”<sup>2</sup> It is used of cancellation of a debt (Colossians 2:13, NLT - <sup>13</sup> *You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins.*) The context emphasizes that our debts were nailed to the cross, with Christ’s atonement freely forgiving the sins that were charged against us.

The most common word for forgiveness is *aphiemi*, which means “to let go, release” or “send away.” The noun form is used in Ephesians 1:7, (**Eph 1.7, NIV** - <sup>7</sup> *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.*) where it stresses the believer’s sins have been forgiven or sent away because of the riches of God’s grace as revealed in the death of Christ. Forgiveness forever solves the problem of sin in the believer’s life—all sins past, present, and future (Col. 2.13, cf., above). This is distinct from the daily cleansing from sin that is necessary to maintain fellowship with God (**1 John 1:9, NIV** - <sup>9</sup> *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness*).

Forgiveness is *man-ward*; man had sinned and needed to have his sins dealt with and removed. He/she is then in a position to forgive others—realizing what Christ has done in them receiving forgiving.

## A Biblical Index on “Forgiveness”<sup>3</sup>

### 1. Christ set an example of for forgiveness:

**Luke 23:34** Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” And they divided His garments and cast lots.

### 2. Forgiveness is Commanded by God:

**Mark 11:25** “And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.

**Rom 12:19** Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, “*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,*” says the Lord.

**1 Pet 4:8** And above all things have fervent love for one another, for “*love will cover a multitude of sins.*”

### 3. Forgiveness is to be unlimited:

**Matt 18:22** Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

**Luke 17:4** And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him.”

### 4. Forgiveness is a characteristic of believers:

**Ps 7:4** If I have repaid evil to him who was at peace with me, Or have plundered my enemy without cause,

**Prov 19:11** The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, And his glory *is* to overlook a transgression.

<sup>1</sup>Adapted from Enns, Paul P.: *The Moody Handbook of Theology*. Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1997, c1989, S. 325

<sup>2</sup> Rienecker, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, p. 574.

<sup>3</sup>Adapted from MacArthur, John: *The MacArthur Topical Bible: New King James Version*. Nashville, Tenn.: Word Pub., 1999, S. 450.

## 5. Motives to Forgiveness:

*The mercy of God:*

**Luke 6:36** Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

*Our need of it:*

**Mark 11:25** “And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.

*God’s forgiveness of us:*

**Eph 4:32** And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

*Christ’s forgiveness of us:*

**Col 3:13** bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*.

Should be accompanied by

*Forbearance:*

**Col 3:13** bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*.

*Kindness:*

**Gen 45:5–11** But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. **6** For these two years the famine *has been* in the land, and *there are* still five years in which *there will be* neither plowing nor harvesting. **7** And God sent me before you to preserve posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. **8** So now *it was* not you *who* sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. **9** “Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph: “God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not tarry. **10** You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near to me, you and your children, your children’s children, your flocks and your herds, and all that you have. **11** There I will provide for you, lest you and your household, and all that you have, come to poverty; for *there are* still five years of famine.” ’

**Rom 12:20** Therefore “*If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.*”

*Blessing and prayer:*

**Matt 5:44** But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

*Promises for:*

**Matt 6:14** “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

**Luke 6:37** “Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

*Must be extended to be received:*

**Matt 6:15** But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

**James 2:13** For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

## 6. Biblical Illustrations of Forgiveness:

**Matt 18:23–35** Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. <sup>24</sup> And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. <sup>25</sup> But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. <sup>26</sup> The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, ‘Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ <sup>27</sup> Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. <sup>28</sup> “But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took *him* by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’ <sup>29</sup> So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ <sup>30</sup> And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. <sup>31</sup> So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. <sup>32</sup> Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. <sup>33</sup> Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’ <sup>34</sup> And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. <sup>35</sup> “So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”

**2 Cor 2:5–11**, But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent—not to be too severe. <sup>6</sup> This punishment which *was inflicted* by the majority *is* sufficient for such a man, **7** so that, on the contrary, you *ought* rather to forgive and comfort *him*, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. <sup>8</sup> Therefore I urge you to reaffirm *your* love to him. <sup>9</sup> For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. <sup>10</sup> Now whom you forgive anything, I also *forgive*. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, <sup>11</sup> lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.

## 7. Forgiveness was demonstrated by:

*Joseph.*

**Gen 50:20–21** But as for you, you meant evil against me; *but* God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as *it is* this day, to save many people alive. **21** Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.” And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

*David.*

**1 Sam 24:7** So David restrained his servants with *these* words, and did not allow them to rise against Saul. And Saul got up from the cave and went on *his* way.

**2 Sam 18:5** Now the king had commanded Joab, Abishai, and Ittai, saying, “*Deal* gently for my sake with the young man Absalom.” And all the people heard when the king gave all the captains orders concerning Absalom.

*Solomon.*

**1 Kin 1:53** So King Solomon sent them to bring him down from the altar. And he came and fell down before King Solomon; and Solomon said to him, “Go to your house.”

*Stephen.*

**Acts 7:60** Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

*Paul.*

**2 Tim 4:16** At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them.

## Stories and Quotes on “Forgiveness” <sup>4</sup>

One day, as I was caught in bumper-to-bumper traffic, my mind inhaled a dense cloud of “spiritual smog.” Feelings of guilt filtered through my heart like toxic fumes, choking it with regret and raw memories. I was en route to an early morning breakfast, and I hadn’t slept well. Too much on my mind. Too busy. My defenses were low, and the poisonous vapors seeped in.

I recalled a cruel word that I had written about a woman who was now dead. I saw the face of a man, name forgotten, whom I had struck in a moment’s passion. I remembered my failure to witness to a neighbor who later committed suicide. Acts, thoughts, and habits, some only recently confessed to God, came to mind. I felt sick.

Christians are often seized by guilt for sins that are already confessed and forgiven. Like many other believers, I have felt sadness, shame, lingering regret, wafting depression—smog in my soul. It’s one thing to confess sin; it’s another thing to accept forgiveness.

The Psalmist David said, “My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear. My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly.” David too lived with regret.

But as I gripped my steering wheel, another of David’s psalms came to mind—Psalm 103:12: “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

The distance between east and west is infinity. The two never meet. Charles Spurgeon wrote, “If sin be removed so far, then we may be sure that the scent, the trace, the very memory of it, must be entirely gone.”

I pondered this. When God forgives sin, He forgives it completely—as though it had never occurred.

But when I continue to brood over sin that God has already forgiven, I underestimate His love, doubt His grace, and discount the scope of His pardon. It is as though I fear that the death of Jesus Christ is not adequate, that His blood is too weak to justify me.

Accepting God’s forgiveness, on the other hand, aligns my thinking to God’s Word. It separates my sin from my forgiveness by the distance of infinity.

Psalm 103:12 dispersed my noxious thoughts. As my mind cleared, so did the traffic and I traveled on with joy.

- *It is indeed amazing that in as fundamentally irreligious a culture as ours, the sense of guilt should be so widespread and deeply-rooted as it is.*—Erich Fromm, psychologist
- *When I bring my sins to the Lord Jesus He casts them into the depths of the sea—forgiven and forgotten. He also puts up a sign, “No Fishing Allowed!”*—Corrie ten Boom<sup>\*</sup>
- *The word “grace” is a kind of shorthand for the whole sum of unmerited blessings which come to men through Jesus Christ.*—Alexander Maclaren<sup>5</sup>

**The fire of Anger, if not quenched by loving forgiveness, will spread and defile and destroy the word of God in you.**

—Warren Wiersbe <sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *More Real Stories for the Soul.* electronic ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000, S. 9. Originally appeared in *Decision Magazine*, March 1998.

<sup>\*</sup> Corrie ten Boom, *Not Good if Detached* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1957), 19.

<sup>5</sup> Morgan, Robert J.: *Nelson’s Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations, and Quotes.* electronic ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000, S. 363.



## *What God Does With Our Sins*<sup>7</sup>

Rosalind Goforth was a well-known missionary to China who, along with her husband Jonathan, enjoyed an illustrious career and ministry. But for many years, even having labored for the Lord in China, Rosalind often felt oppressed by a burden of sin. She felt guilty and dirty, nursing an inward sense of spiritual failure. Finally one evening when all was quiet, she settled at her desk with Bible and concordance, determined to find out God's attitude toward the failures, the faults, the sins of his children. She put these words at the top of the page: *What God Does With Our Sins*. Then as she searched through the Scriptures, she compiled this list of seventeen truths:

1. He lays them on his Son—Jesus Christ. Isaiah 53:6
2. Christ takes them away. John 1:29
3. They are removed an immeasurable distance—as far as East is from West. Psalm 123:12
4. When sought for, they are not found. Jeremiah 50:20
5. The Lord forgives them. Ephesians 1:7
6. He cleanses them ALL away by the blood of his son. 1 John 1:7
7. He cleanses them as white as snow or wool. Isaiah 1:18; Psalm 51:7
8. He *abundantly* pardons them. Isaiah 55:7
9. He tramples them under foot. Micah 7:19 (RV)
10. He remembers them no more. Hebrews 10:17
11. He casts them behind his back. Isaiah 38:17
12. He casts them into the *depths* of the sea. Micah 7:19
13. He will not impute us with sins. Romans 4:8
14. He covers them. Romans 4:7
15. He blots them out. Isaiah 43:25
16. He blots them out as a thick cloud. Isaiah 44:22
17. He blots out even the proof against us, nailing it to His Son's Cross. Colossians 2:14\*

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<sup>6</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Vol. 2., p. 41.

<sup>7</sup> Morgan, Robert J.: *Nelson's Complete Book of Stories, Illustrations, and Quotes*. electronic ed. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000, S. 364.

# Church Discipline Table and Flow Chart—When Forgiveness is not enough!

Adapted by Dr. Joe K. Taylor from various resources and personal study.

**Please note:** This is called a church “discipline” table and flow chart. “Punishment” is designed to execute *retribution* for a wrong done (ie. to avenge a wrong and assert justice). “Discipline” is to encourage the *restoration* of one involved in wrongdoing (ie. as corrective counsel given for the “sake of unity in the Body” for the one who has failed to live according to the standards of the church as directed in Holy Scripture.) I have developed this so that everyone involved can have a better understanding of what the Bible says in this matter.

Passage	Problem	Procedure	Purpose
Matthew 18:15-18	• The sin of a “brother” (with the sin being undefined)	1. Private reproof 2. Private conference 3. Public announcement 4. Public exclusion	Restoration (to “win your brother over.”)
Acts 6:1	• “General murmuring”	1. Taken care of by church leaders 2. Delegated to “faithful men” 3. All are to be treated fairly	Unity of the body
1 Corinthians 5	• Sexual Immorality • Greed • Idolatry Drunkenness • Swindling	1. Corporate grief 2. Removal from midst 3. No association	Restoration (cf. 5:5) Purification (cf. 5:7)
2 Corinthians 2:5-11	• One who causes an unnamed “sorrow” and/or “grief”	If there is “sorrow,” 1. Forgive them 2. Comfort him 3. Love him	Restoration (cf. 2:7) Protection (cf. 2.11)
Galatians 2:4	• “False Christians”	1. Be discerning 2. Be aware 3. Don’t give in to them and let them not prosper in the body	Protection (cf. 5ff)
Galatians 6:1	• “A sin”	The spiritual people should restore him... 1. As spiritual persons 2. With meekness 3. With reflection	Restoration (cf. 2:11)
2 Thessalonians 3:6-15	• Laziness, gossip (“busy-bodies”)	1. Take note of him 2. Keep aloof from him 3. Admonish him (as a brother not an enemy)	Restoration (cf., “He may feel ashamed.)
1 Timothy 5:19-20	• An accusation against an elder entertained without witnesses	1. Don’t listen without 2-3 witnesses. 2. If sin (ie. accusations) continues, then rebuke before all.	Purification (so “others may take warning”)
2 Timothy 2:14; 2:23ff	• Doctrinal Errors	1. Be aware 2. Stay away from “stupid” arguments 3. Let “God’s servant” take care of it	Repentance, leading to the truth.
Titus 3:9-11	• Divisiveness	1. Give 2 warnings. 2. Reject him (as warped, sinful, self-condemned)	Protection (against division)

## Suggested “Safest” Discipline flowchart in light of all the New Testament

We must keep in mind that each of the above scriptures were written to specific people in regards to specific situations. The question is, how can we apply good biblical interpretation, based on each of them, to our lives in almost any situation? As I understand scripture, here is the “safest” action I can suggest when dealing with difficult situations, sins, troubles, or issues. Bottom line, we deal with that person directly before involving others.

If you have something against somebody:	If you know somebody has something against you:
<b>Matthew 18:15 (NCV)</b> - <i>“If your fellow believer sins against you, go and tell him in private what he did wrong. If he listens to you, you have helped that person to be your brother or sister again.</i>	<b>Matthew 5:23-24 (NCV)</b> - <sup>23</sup> <i>“So when ... you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, <sup>24</sup> ... Go and make peace with that person, and then come and offer your gift.</i>
<b>Scriptural “flow chart” detailed:</b> 1. Deal with it quickly 2. Deal with it “with grace” 3. Deal with it privately 4. Deal with it with witnesses, if necessary 5. Let the “body” deal with it.*	<b>Scriptural “flow chart” detailed:</b> 1. Deal with it quickly 2. Deal with it “with grace” 3. Deal with it “seeking reconciliation” 4. Deal with it with witnesses, if necessary 5. Let the “body” deal with it.*
* <b>1 Corinthians 6:1-5 (NCV)</b> - <sup>1</sup> <i>When you have something against another Christian, how can you bring yourself to go before judges who are not right with God? Why do you not let God’s people decide who is right?</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>Surely you know that God’s people will judge the world. So if you are to judge the world, are you not able to judge small cases as well?</i> <sup>3</sup> <i>You know that in the future we will judge angels, so surely we can judge the ordinary things of this life.</i> <sup>4</sup> <i>If you have ordinary cases that must be judged, are you going to appoint people as judges who mean nothing to the church?</i> <sup>5</sup> <i>I say this to shame you. Surely there is someone among you wise enough to judge a complaint between believers.</i>	

\* Rosalind Goforth, *Climbing* (Wheaton, IL: Sword Book Club, 1940), 90.