

FORGIVE

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In Matthew 6:12, Jesus taught His disciples this line in the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." In other words, **"Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us"** (NLV). Jesus picked that one line from the prayer to provide further explanation because it might be the one that is hardest for us to practice. So He follows it up with verses 14-15. **"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."** Jesus was saying that forgiveness is not an option. You have to forgive others.

Forgiveness is Vertical and Horizontal

There is a connection between the forgiveness we receive from God and the forgiveness we're supposed to offer. The two dimensions of the Christian life are the vertical and the horizontal. The vertical deals with my relationship with God. And forgiveness is a part of my relationship with God; we have to be forgiven our sins. **"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). The horizontal dimension is our relationship with other people. As important as it is to be forgiven by God, we must forgive others as well. If Matthew 6:14-15 were the only statements in the Bible to speak about forgiveness, we might say it like this: We forgive others and then God forgives us; God waits in heaven to forgive our sins until we forgive. But it's not the only passage. One of them, Ephesians 1:7, says, **"In Him [Jesus] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."** When the Bible describes something coming through His blood, it's pointing us to Jesus' death on the cross to pay for our sins. We're guilty; Jesus was innocent. He took our guilt so that we could be innocent, cleansed from our sin. The Bible teaches that

forgiveness [of our sins] comes because of Jesus' death, not because we forgive other people. If a person absolutely refuses to forgive, it may be a sign that he has never received God's forgiveness. And that's why this is such a serious matter. If we have been forgiven, we must forgive other people. In Matthew 18:23-35 Jesus told the parable of the unforgiving servant. A master was owed millions of dollars by a servant and forgave that debt. However, the forgiven servant later refused to forgive a fellow servant a few thousand dollars. And the master said, "If I forgave you such a great debt, you must forgive the lesser debts." It's very simple, but not easy to live. God is generous with forgiveness. How can anybody look at the One who forgave the much greater debt, the vertical debt, and think that we should be stingy with the horizontal debt?

A High View of Forgiveness

Often we don't value the greatness of God's forgiveness because we don't understand the greatness of our sin. We live in an age, a culture, a time, where people think very little of

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sin. They have very little sense that they are sinners before God. If you think little of your sin problem, it's not going to seem so amazing that God forgives you. But if you see your sin as a great debt that you owe God, then you will think forgiveness an amazing thing. When we see how great God's forgiveness is, we will forgive other people. If we realize

how desperately we need the wonderful gift of God's forgiveness, then we realize the sin done to us is nothing like what we have done to God. The Lord has forgiven us so much that we have no right to stand in His place when we are wronged, to demand confession and repentance. We are sinners who have been forgiven, unlike God, who has never sinned. He has never had to receive forgiveness. It doesn't work that way in human relationships. Therefore, it's not our place to fold our arms and say, "If you confess your sin or repent of it well enough, I'll forgive you." We're supposed to have a great big open heart and forgive people in the name of Jesus because we have been forgiven so much.

Forgiveness vs. Reconciliation

However, there's a difference between forgiveness and reconciliation. If you hurt me, I am commanded to forgive you for the sake of Jesus and not hold bitterness in my heart toward you. Reconciliation or restoration requires both people coming together. I'm entirely comfortable with saying, "I forgive you, but I don't trust you yet. We'll see what God does in your life." Trust has to wait until there is a restoration of relationship. Forgiveness also does not mean pretending that what someone did to you was not wrong. Maybe what someone did to you was horrible; you don't have to close your eyes to that. I like what Joseph said to his brothers in Genesis chapter 50. He said, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." Joseph didn't say, "Hey, it's no big deal." Sometimes in forgiveness we're saying, "What you did to me was really bad,

but in the name of Jesus I forgive you because He's forgiven me so much more." Since we have been graciously and gloriously forgiven so much by God, how can we withhold the gift of forgiveness from anyone else? 🙌

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