



Forgive and be Forgiven.

We know – we have assurance – that we have been forgiven. We know that Jesus paid the ultimate price when God gave His Son as a living sacrifice and that by His death and resurrection, He offers us complete forgiveness for all of our sins. To accept this offer from our heavenly Father, all we need to do is acknowledge our sins, repent (truly repent) and ask for His forgiveness and acknowledge Jesus as our Savior.

Then – as it says in **Psalm 103: 9-12**

He will not always accuse,
nor will he harbour His anger forever;
He does not treat us as our sins deserve
or repay us according to our iniquities.
For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is His love for those who fear Him;
as far as the east is from the west,
so far has He removed our transgressions from us.

Psalm 103: 9-12

But this demands more – it demands that we do likewise.

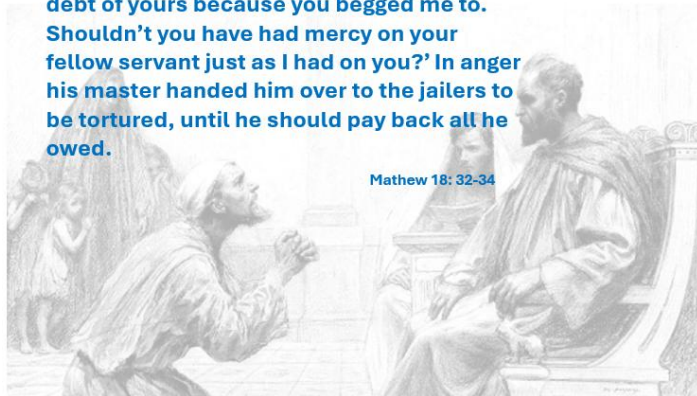
Remember the parable of the Unmerciful Servant in **Mathew 18: 23-35**.

A King was settling accounts with his servants. One, unable to pay a massive debt, begs for mercy. The King does not just give the man more time to pay – he forgives the debt entirely! Unfortunately, the servant was not so merciful when it came to a debt he was owed. When the King heard this, He withdrew His mercy – the debt was restored (with a vengeance).

Mathew 18: 32-34:

“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

Mathew 18: 32-34

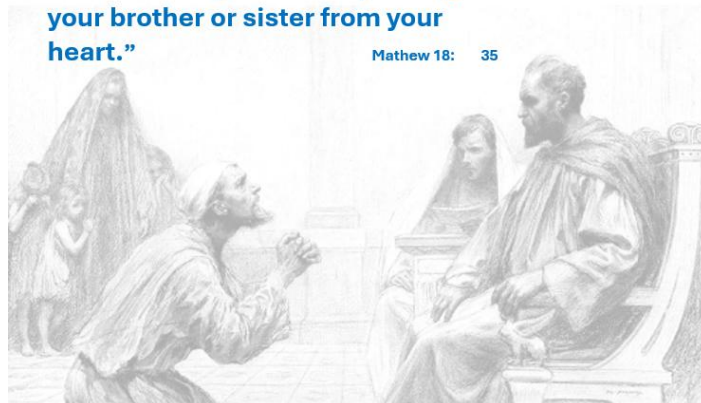


It’s a hard lesson. But do we really think God will withdraw the forgiveness He so freely gave when we accepted Jesus Christ as our Saviour if we fail to forgive others? I suggest the clue to answering that question may lie in the same parable.

Mathew 18: 35:

“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

Mathew 18: 35



The Unforgiving Servant, when he begged for mercy, was only looking for more time in which to repay the debt (even though he probably knew he never could). He was expecting to be able to make good the debt by his own efforts. When, unexpectedly the King forgave the entire debt, the Servant could not believe his good fortune. Not that he recognised the unbelievable generosity of the King – he was looking at what happened from his own selfish point of view.

Likewise, if we accept God’s forgiveness, and acknowledge the gift of Jesus’ death and resurrection, but without also, and earnestly acknowledging our sins – our debt – our guilt – and truly repenting, then, I suggest, we will not find it in our hearts to forgive others.

When we truly and completely accept Christ and His Holy Spirit into our hearts then we are changed, or more accurately, the process of change begins. It's an ongoing development – and it never really stops. This is when we need to remember that salvation is an ongoing process. Yes, past sins are forgiven and God will never un-forgive what we have confessed and asked forgiveness for. But that does not mean that subsequent sins will be forgiven by that first act of accepting Christ. Forgiveness is available by grace, but requires that we repent and keep repenting as we stumble on in faith and endeavour to grow more like Christ on this journey.

I suggest, the lesson Jesus was trying to get across to His disciples (and to us) is that failing to forgive, when we have been so gracefully forgiven, is in itself a sin.

In the prayer, Jesus taught His disciples when they asked – “Lord, teach us to pray” – He, made a point of our obligation to forgive. And he linked it directly to God's forgiveness of us: **Luke 11: 4:**

**“and forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin
against us.”**

Luke 11: 4

Put another way – in so far as we forgive others, should God forgive us.

This is reinforced by Jesus words as recorded in **Mark 11: 25:**

**“And when you stand praying, if you hold
anything against anyone, forgive them,
so that your Father in heaven may
forgive you your sins.”**

Mathew 11: 25

In other words, with God's forgiveness of us, comes an obligation to faithfully forgive others. And that, I suggest, is where it gets hard.

When we have been hurt, our pain is real. But holding on to that pain only hurts us more – and Satan uses that pain to cause us to focus more on ourselves, which is the true source of all sin – focus on me, focus on self.

I know – we all know– this, but at those times when we're hurting it's hard to refocus our attention on anything or anyone else.

Psychologists define forgiveness as the “conscious, intentional decision to release feelings of resentment, vengeance, and anger toward someone who has harmed you. Far from being a sign of weakness, it is recognized as a powerful tool for emotional healing that significantly reduces anxiety, depression, and chronic stress.”

I know this from personal experience. I was deeply hurt by the actions of several members of my family – including my mother. And for many years I allowed that bitterness to keep me separated from them. I wanted nothing to do with them – and it was eating me up inside. It wasn’t until I made the effort to reach out and forgive them that I became free and able to accept that I had a part to play in the hurt I was feeling.

We hold on to pain sometimes. It gives us justification – in our own minds – for treating others badly (after all they deserve to feel pain too, don’t they?). But really, more often than not, they feel nothing of our anger or bitterness. They too are focused only on the hurt or guilt that they feel.

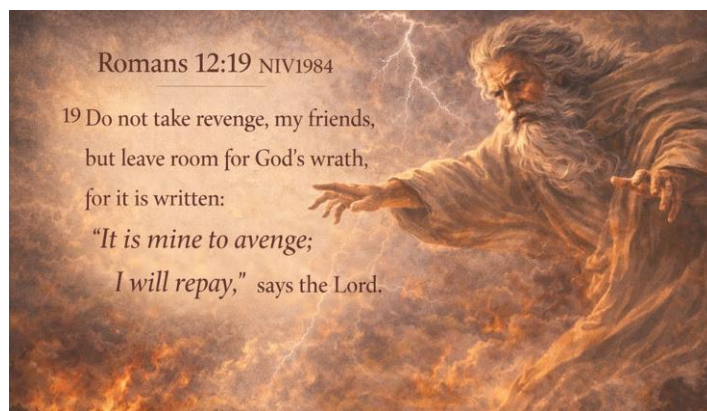
There is no room for love in this. And that plays into Satan’s plans.

I believe that Love and Hate cannot reside in the same heart at the same time. Likewise, Peace and Anger, Joy and Sadness. Focus on one, the other has to leave – or at least gets pushed into the background.

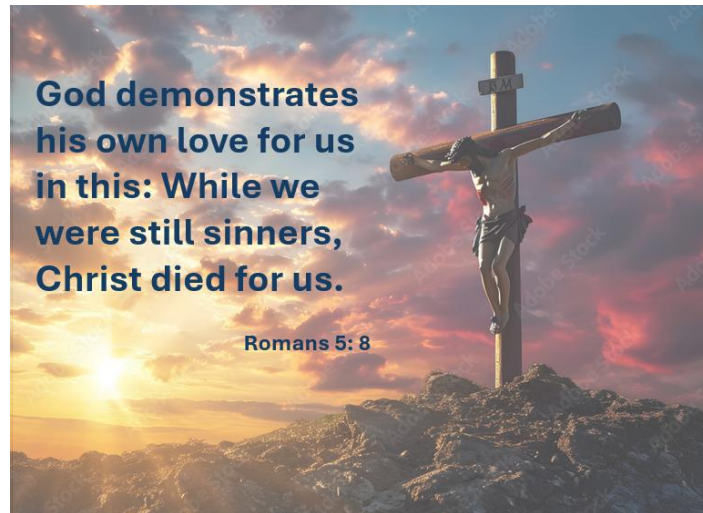
Sometime, when we have anger or hatred in our hearts, we start to take it out on the ones closest to us. The ones we love the most – with disastrous consequences for relationships.

Likewise, holding onto our pain leaves no room for us to trust that God will have the last word

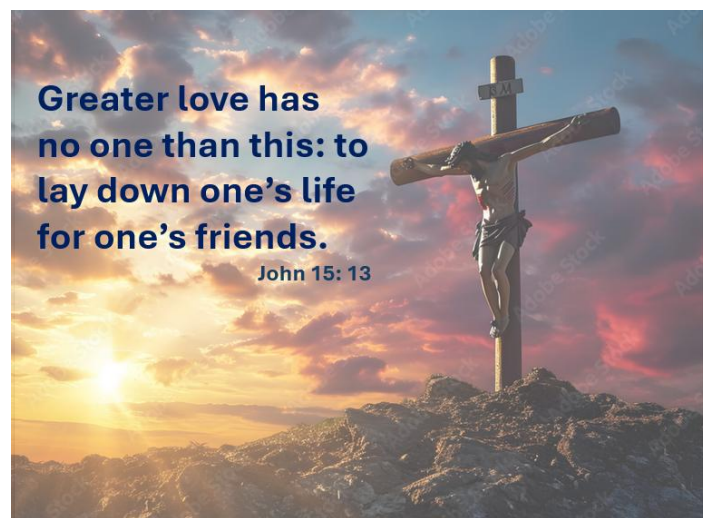
Romans 12:19



I’m not suggesting that God will stop loving us if we refuse to forgive those who have hurt us – that’s just not possible for we know that: **Romans 5:8:**



And again, in **John 15: 13**:



But we are called to have the same heart as Christ for those around us. As it says in Ephesians: **Ephesians 4:32 - 5:2**:

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you. Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

Ephesians 4: 32 to 5: 2

And this is even more so when a brother or sister in Christ does something – either knowingly or not – that causes us pain or grief. Again, Jesus words as recorded in **Mark 11: 25** are important:

“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.”

Mark 11: 25

Forgiveness doesn't mean we justify, condone, or even forget the harmful behaviour or hurt. It may not even result in reconciliation – you can forgive without returning to a relationship or necessarily welcoming that person back into your life. Sometimes to do so would only open the door to more pain.

But it will enable us to let go of the anger, bitterness, and, in time, the pain.

It may lead to reconciliation – and when the person who has hurt us is a brother or sister in Christ, then hopefully there will be reconciliation and a renewing of friendship.

We are also called to seek forgiveness, where we may have caused hurt – whether intentionally or not. It may even be that, in our mind, we have done nothing that should have caused hurt or upset – yet we are aware that someone is angry towards us.

Jesus – in that incredible Sermon on the Mount – made it clear:

Mathew 5: 23-24:

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.”

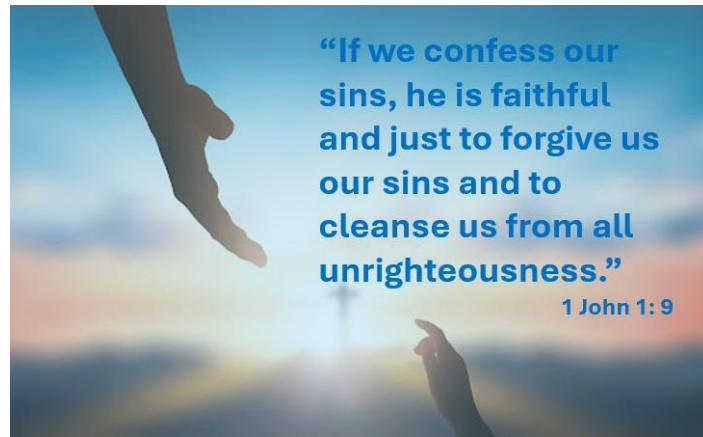
Mathew 5: 23-24

By so doing, we can offer that person the opportunity to forgive and be released from the hurt and anger they feel – and thereby open the door for them to experience peace and the freedom of letting go.

And this leads me to another aspect of forgiveness I want to talk about today – forgiving oneself.

I don't know about you, but I admit this can be hard. When you know you have hurt someone else – especially someone you love – it can be hard to let go of the guilt, the shame, and the self-recrimination.

You know you have asked for and received forgiveness – both from the one you have hurt and God. And you know in your heart – as it says in **1 John 1: 9**:

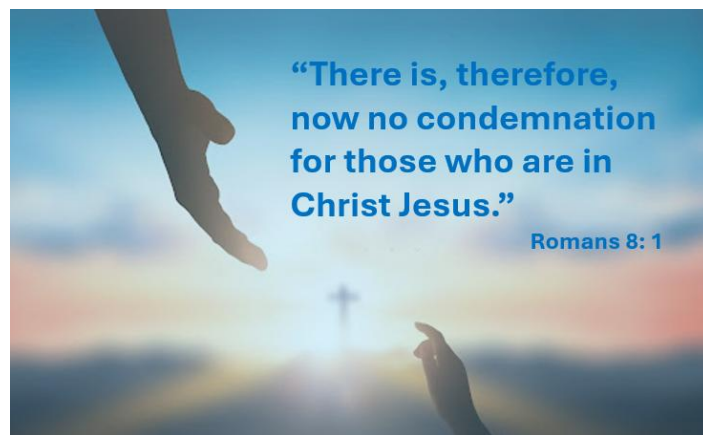


And again, in **Jeremiah 31:34**, God says:



He completely wipes the slate clean.

And further in **Romans 8: 1**:



Guilt and Shame – two sides of the same coin. One healthy, the other not so much. A sense of guilt helps us to see that our actions are not worthy of a child of God, a brother or sister in Christ and can lead us to seek forgiveness. Shame can make us believe that we are not worthy to be a child of God and that God cannot possibly love us. This becomes a barrier in our relationship with Him. It is not true, and Satan uses shame to cause us to doubt our salvation. We are forgiven when we repent and ask for forgiveness – and God will never stop loving us, even when we do wrong.

So, know that if God no longer condemns you, you should not continue to condemn yourself.

If we hold onto the guilt and shame, if we cannot forgive ourselves, it's almost as if we are rejecting God's finished work in us – as if it's not enough.

Forgiving yourself means:

- accepting that **God's grace is greater than the guilt you feel in your heart** and then
- embracing the freedom He provides.

Dwelling on past failures hinders the life God wants you to live – today.



Yes – God forgave us first, and we have an obligation now to do the same and keep on doing it. Not only forgiving others who have hurt or wronged us, or seeking forgiveness for any hurt we may have caused – but also forgiving ourselves – for the decisions or actions, we wish, in hindsight, we could have done differently or not done at all.

Therefore, go easy on yourself and on others and be at peace with God.

And may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.