

Macedonia Primitive Baptist Church

Pastor: Elder Will Martin

www.macedoniapbc.org

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FORGIVENESS

by Marty Smith

The Main Message: You can and should, for Jesus Christ's sake, forgive one who wrongs you - even if he never repents or apologizes, even if he is not nearby, even if he is dead, and no matter what he has done to you.

You are not required, however, to let that person hurt you again, or to let him hurt someone else, or to intellectually forget that he hurt you.

Some Scriptural Background: Please consider the following scriptures:

- *Matt 6:14 -15 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*
- *Matt 18:21-22, Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.*
- *Mark 11:25 And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.*
- *Col 3:13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.*

These verses seem to me to advocate a "unilateral" forgiveness - a forgiveness you can accomplish without any other human participation - conditioned not necessarily on the repentance of the offender, but on the Lord's forgiveness of us. In fact, His forgiveness of us is sometimes conditioned on our confession:

1 John 1:9, If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

His forgiveness of us is sometimes conditioned on our forgiveness of others:

Mark 11:26, But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.

We may see here that forgiveness is a blessing in addition to eternal justification. Eternal justification is conditioned only on the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, and so - like His love - is unconditional to us. His eternal justification of us provides the basis for His forgiveness to us - giving Him the ability to forgive and still be just, giving us the ability to confess our sins, and giving us the ability to forgive others.

What Is Forgiveness? Here is my understanding of the Bible teaching on how to practice forgiveness:

1. Someone has hurt me; he has taken my property or health or happiness or good name or something else I could reasonably consider my own.
2. Because he has done this, he owes me – he is in my debt. I consciously acknowledge his wrong and his indebtedness. (This may seem a bit strong to some of you, but consider, the Lord does not try to excuse or deny our transgressions against Him even as he forgives us - in fact He convicts us of our sins. Also, in His instructions, He teaches us to pray, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” How can we even have debtors if no one owes us?)
3. I make a mental choice, in obedience to the Lord, to not collect on this debt, to not seek vengeance, to not work for payback.
4. I continue to make this choice as often as the hurt arises (even daily or hourly), and enjoy the fellowship of trying to copy the Lord Jesus in this matter of forgiveness .
5. Eventually, my emotions may catch up with my decision, and I am free of the hurt. My emotions may not catch up, and then going home to the Lord will free me of the hurt.

Is the Repentance of Another Necessary? Now what about Luke 17:3?

Luke 17:3 Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.

That verse mentions the repentance of the offending brother. Someone else is involved in the forgiveness here, so the forgiveness is "bilateral" rather than "unilateral". The "if" conditional is important. Notice, however, the verse doesn't say "*if and only if*" - that is, the Lord does not forbid forgiveness if the offender does not come to you, but rather commands you to forgive him if he does. The additional aspect here in this "bilateral" case of forgiveness is that you are blessed to express that forgiveness to the offender, and so at least two people are blessed by love and grace. In the unilateral case, only one (the offended) is initially blessed. If the Lord should forbid forgiveness without repentance from the offender, then many times no one would receive the blessing, because the offender may die or move away or be an unregenerate incapable of repentance. I don't think the Lord would have His disciples held emotionally hostage to such circumstances.

Can We Forget? What about the "forget" aspect of "forgive and forget"? That is a common human expression. We cannot just go on as if nothing has happened, and try to erase our memories. It is a mistake to deny the wrong or attempt to suppress its memory. There is no need to go into regression therapy to try to surface memories, either. The point is not to suppress the wrong or to surface the wrong, the point is to overcome the wrong.

When Paul said, "*forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before...*" it is clear that Paul did not intellectually forget his deeds of persecution to the early church - but he had emotionally forgotten them; that is, they did not hinder his service to God or enjoyment of life. Although God has separated us from our sins as far as the east is from

the west, He still tells us we were in sin, and chastises us when we commit sins, so the "forgetting" cannot be a denial of the deed, but rather an overcoming of the evil with good.

Trusting the Offender: We should forgive one who wrongs us, and not seek retribution against him - but we are under no obligation to trust him. I have a hard time finding scriptural support for trusting anyone other than the Lord himself. Furthermore, if the offender is likely to do continued harm, such as in the case of a kleptomaniac or child abuser, we may (and often should) take steps to stop him from doing that harm. Thus, when Paul warns Timothy of Alexander the coppersmith, he is endeavoring to minimize the harm Alexander can do to Timothy, and his spirit of forgiveness is actually evidenced by calling on the Lord to reward Alexander according to his works - it means that Paul does not intend to try to administer the reward himself.

II Timothy 4:14-15 Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words.

The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write this. Alexander had done Paul wrong, and thus was in Paul's debt. Paul was not going to try to get even – he was leaving that in God's hands. But Paul was not going to trust Alexander, and Paul was not going to let Timothy encounter Alexander without a warning. Paul had it just right.

Between Church Members: There is a process that should be observed between church members. Notice in Matthew 18 that if a brother in the church offends you, you are to initiate actions for reconciliation and go to him alone. If this doesn't "work", take 2-3 witnesses. If this doesn't work, bring it before the church. If that final action doesn't work, let him be "unto you" as a heathen man and a publican. Notice it doesn't say let him be "unto the church" as a heathen man and a publican.

Matthew 18:15-17, Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

At the point it comes before the church, the church may decide that your brother is in the wrong and labor with him and exclude him if he doesn't repent. Or the church may decide that neither of you are acting rightly, and ask you both to seek membership in other sister churches. Or the church may decide something else, but if you have tried all of the Lord's instruction in the matter and the brother does not repent, you should certainly forgive him unilaterally. It is obvious, however, that your fellowship is broken, and you will be as circumspect of him as you would be with a non-believer, or with an unjust tax collector. As much as possible, you will not let him take any more from you, until such time as he may truly repent, or you yourself change.

What if You Don't Forgive? The Lord Jesus Christ teaches a powerful lesson about not forgiving:

Matthew 18:23-35, Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

The child of God risks terrible captivity and internal torment while living on earth if he does not forgive. Someone has said that resentment is like taking poison and hoping the other person dies. A careful look into the lives of those who have grown bitter shows this – they harm themselves far more, and over a longer period of time, than any lengthy torture they would be able to administer to their offender.

Forgiveness is a commandment; not merely a suggestion from the Lord. “But what if I can’t forgive?” the poor, mistreated child of God objects. It may be true that you cannot stop hurting. It may be true that you cannot forget the terrible wrong done to you. It may be true that the other person has not changed, has not apologized, and has not repented. But you are not commanded to stop hurting, or forget, or change the other person – that is too much to ask. You are only bidden to forgive. Perhaps the enemy is keeping you from forgiving by making it complicated, when in fact it is a tough but straightforward series of deeds. Forgiveness is merely a conscious choice to acknowledge a wrong done to you, and then to keep acknowledging that you choose not to get even for that wrong. And perhaps you won’t forgive – but you can forgive, by the grace God has given you.

I need forgiveness, and so hope to practice it. And I have a perfect example to imitate while practicing – Jesus, the Lord.

Brother Marty does an excellent job presenting a biblical view on the subject of forgiveness. I pray that it will be a blessing to all.

In His Love,



Elder Will Martin

Macedonia Church Announcements:

1. Sunday May 3rd: Following morning worship, we will have lunch and reconvene for Communion around 1:30-2:00. Elder Randall Cagle has agreed to come and preach the communion service for us.
2. Saturday May 9th: Dinner and fellowship at Macedonia around 5:00. We are thankful that there are 3 couples connected to Macedonia Church who are to be married in the coming months. We look forward to the time of fellowship so we can offer encouragement and celebrate with these couples and their families.

Announcements from Sister Churches:

1. Elder Walter Todd, pastor of Prosperity, Providence and Chipley Chapel Churches located in Southwest Georgia and Northwest Florida, invites gulf coast vacationers to worship with them while they are in route to the beach or on vacation. If you wish to attend, please contact Brother Walter at (229) 776-0567 or (850) 638-9683 as their weekend meeting schedule varies.
2. Shoal Creek Primitive Baptist Church in Canton, GA will have their spring meeting on Friday, May 8th and Saturday May 9th. Elder Charles Kitchens will be their guest minister. Please contact Elder Randall Cagle for more details (770) 630-7150.

Church Photos:



We were blessed to have a Spirit-filled Union meeting of the Marietta Old School Primitive Baptist Association. Pictured above were the ministers in attendance:
Bottom Row (L to R): Brother Kelly Smith, Elder Dan Bryant, Elder Ronnie Loudermilk, Elder Roger Campbell, Elder Wayne Peters
Top Row (L to R): Elder Edward Cagle, Elder Joe Hayes, Elder Will Martin, Elder Ray Wagner
We were thankful for all in attendance and for the privilege to worship together.